

As seen in
BOYSTOYS
Magazine



Trails And Tribulations

BOYS TOYS GETS STUCK INTO SOME SERIOUS OFF-ROADING IN SOUTHERN SPAIN

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> I'm spitting hot, Andalucian sand from my mouth as the sweat trickles down my chest, back, face – well – everywhere. I'm stuck down a fissure, with a twenty-foot drop below me. I'm trapped underneath a purring red beast, which (I'm convinced) has been trying to kill me for the last two days.

Thing is, I've got a smile a mile wide as I wriggle free of the chugging Honda CRF450X, then grunt and swear as I lift the front wheel out of the hole that I so shouldn't have gone down.

Despite all this – or perhaps because of it – I'm grinning. I'm also giggling inanely, like a naughty schoolboy who's gotten away with making a fart noise in double maths. Judging by the size of the ravine I've just excavated myself from, 'get away with it' I most certainly have. After all, boulders, beer-bellies, bollocks and big drops don't really mix.

Welcome to Redtread Espana: a bike experience like no other, where you ride Honda's finest off-road motorcycles through some of the harshest terrain that southern Spain can throw at you. And throw it at you it does, with rockslides, landslides and holes in the ground that can – quite literally – swallow up the unwary.

For two days, I've been riding through sand, over gravel, stones, pebbles, rocks, tree-roots and even other people, when they've been foolish enough to get in the way. These are tracks where many men fear to tread – probably because after walking two paces they'd turn their ankles and say 'OW!' before hobbling off to hospital.

After all, where else would you ride the 'Gorge of Hell' – 20km or so of sand, shale, shit and the kind of un-marked pot-holes that would even shame the most rundown London Borough? But ride them you do, as you're pushed to the very

limit of endurance on two wheels.

Adventure motorcycling is in vogue at the moment thanks to McGregor and Boorman's antics on behemoth BMWs with the Long Ways Round and Down, but this is a different craic. At Redtread Espana you ride the latest Honda off-road tackle. These are lightweight, punchy single-cylinder four-strokes, compared to the bigger, beefier German manufacturer's twin-cylinder machines. And yes, they're lightweight for a reason. You're going to be picking them up quite a lot, as crashes are as certain here as cold beer and piss-takes from your friends, come each evening.

Where Charley and Ewan would carry a lot of what they needed on their bikes, you've simply got a bumbag for the essentials: water, mobile, inner tubes, and, er, more water and inner tubes. What else do you need? After all lunch is thrown in...

Ah, bikes, of course. And these ones are impeccably maintained Honda CRF450X, 250X and 230F machines. They can be ridden by newcomers to the dirt or the more experienced among you: I can vouch for this, as I tried the 450X, which – despite scaring you with its destructive acceleration and overall performance – goes easy on you, thanks to the fact that you can leave it in second or third gear and it will still pull you out of trouble. Nice.



SUPERCHARGED...



Meanwhile, the smaller machines may suit the shorter-legged amongst you, as the 450X had to be mounted via a Jackie Chan roundhouse even for a six-footer like me. Thankfully, once on the bike, the long-travel but compliant suspension squats and allows you to reach the floor.

As far as skills needed for the trip, being able to ride a bike is (quite obviously) essential, but after that the tour is within the realms of everyone, from off-road newbies like me to experienced hackers (which plenty of my fellow Redtreaders were).

If you scoot and commute in London, or taste the twist and turns of Britain's B-roads on a road motorcycle like I do, then the actual way you ride an off-roader couldn't be more different. Want to practice? OK. Stand up. Now clench a 50p piece between your buttocks. Bend your knees – they soak up some of the punishment and act as 'suspension' along with the long-travel shocks at the front and rear of the bike. Standing is preferable to sitting, but you'll soon cry enough and use the 'plank' which masquerades as a seat.

Now, hunch your mass over the front of the bike and stick your elbows out; keep your body loose, don't be stiff. And don't worry, the rear tyre will slip and slide like a greased eel in a bath of jelly, but that's fine. It'll be alien for the first few hours, but it's the front wheel that you want your weight over as that's the part of the bike that makes you go in the right direction. Sadly, I remembered this just as I hit the ravine...

And kit? All supplied. Loose fitting off-road top and pants keep you cool in summer, while heavy, solid boots protect ankles and shins in a crash. Helmets are lightweight and come with goggles. Redtread will also sort you knee and elbow pads for some very necessary protection when you inevitably eat dirt. The supplied body armour comes in handy too for deflecting stones when spat out by the rider in front's rear tyre (it's called 'roostering' if you're interested, and yes, I was, more than once).

Thankfully, given all this, there's plenty of riding expertise on hand, thanks to the likes of Redtread owner Ian Burgess, an ex-British Enduro champ, ably aided and abetted by one of

the UK's best off-road riders Mick Extance. The latter's a wiry, no-nonsense madman with the demeanour of a demented pirate, but with the innate balance of a mountain goat. He's also a Paris-Dakar veteran, but despite being a regular on the toughest two-wheel race in the world, he, like Ian, somehow manages to be helpful and patient however inexperienced or prone to cocking things up you are.

If all the aforementioned action sounds like a major challenge to you, you're right. Over my stay I was bumped, bashed, and battered. But there are also breathtaking views as you ride to over 7500ft, and a serious sense of achievement as you conquer terrain you never thought you'd be capable of. The Redtread country mansion's not bad either, perfect for plonking down your sore arse, sinking a cold lager, and taking a dip in the pool after a long day's riding.

Be a man and go do it - you may come back bloodied and bruised, but you won't come back disappointed.

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DETAILS: Redtread Espana offer two to five day riding tours from £455, with non-riders also welcome.

For further details see: www.redtread.com

