



ENJOY THE RIDE



Photos: ROYAL ENFIELD

by SUTIRTHA SANAYAL

Don't be a speed freak, love motorcycling and the fine art of riding the machine



Hey Rolf, you ready. I looked up at my friend, a fellow journalist at my previous office and the sea of mediapersons all clad in black and brown jackets, admiring the red and chrome, with a tinge of yellow and grey, Continental GT at the parking lot in our hotel in Goa.

Take a small round, said another journalist, you will get used to the handling. True; the night before, as we were being told about the bike and the ride route, Royal Enfield (RE) officials told us: "The riding stance's totally different from any RE you have ridden before." Yes, I must

admit, I slipped on the rear brakes twice during that round. Didn't find the brake pedal where I thought it should be. That this was the fastest bike from RE only made me jittery.

But soon I was to find that I could throw my fears away and let the bike hug the curves, scorch the straights and kick the dust on the bad patches.

We rode out in a pack and some kilometres down the road, as we hit the highway, we were on our own. There was traffic and I could only touch 70 and, sometimes, the odd 80 with a miniscule twist of the wrist. A staple 500cc block from the RE line-up had been bored to en-

large the displacement. The power was a marginal increase from what other 500cc REs offer. Still, the bike had an un-Enfield like fast throttle response and simply vroomed to the 3,000-4,000 rpm mark. But there were vibrations in that rpm range.

Meanwhile, I found myself a bit tied up in traffic and so sped up to catch up with the group, when all of a sudden I found myself approaching a downhill curve beneath a rail viaduct with heavy traffic. All that's required to slow down a fast bike—the brakes, the chassis, the suspension and the tyres—and keep it stable, worked in perfect harmony. The Continental GT was slowly revealing itself and I was enthused to probe it further.

Thankfully, I soon left the highway and took what seemed like a state

highway to Margao. The road wasn't that wide or that smooth, but there was practically no traffic as far as the eye could see. I opened up and overtook my friend in a flash—110 kmph, the speedometer needle told me. My friend appeared as a tiny speck on the rear view mirror, small and squarish, but stylish, and fixed at the end of the clip-on handle bars.

Notice boards along the way showed me the way to Cabo De Rama Fort. Soon I left the plains dotted with paddy fields, ponds and coconut palms and found myself climbing the Western Ghats. The road was nice and curvy, interspersed with bits of straight stretches and the bike hugged the curves with confidence and vroomed through the straights with ease. Not all the time did I have to shift gears during the run on this

winding stretch. The gear box ratio has been reengineered for a quicker response, and though the gear shift cannot be said to be flawless, it's much better than on other REs.

The riding stance, as I said before, is very different. The bike sports a longish tank with knee recesses, clip-on handle bars (not exactly in the racer style, as they aren't bolted directly to the front forks), swept back footpegs to give a tucked-in position to the rider and a single seat with a stump (A double seat is optional.)

Handling-wise, this is the best RE, but it is not suitable for doing what one associates an RE with, a 3,000-km ride over 15 days, and I was soon to find that out. The road to Canacona had a bit of bad stretch, potholed with the tar visibility low enough to be counted on one's fingers. By now I had ridden more than 100 km or maybe more and, so, was confident of the bike's stability and control. I



Tail Light

CONTINENTAL GT IN NUMBERS

LxBxHxWheelbase (mm)	2,060 x 760 x 1,070 x 1,360
Ground clearance (mm)	140
Engine/Transmission	535cc / 5-speed manual
Chassis/Kerb weight (kg)	Twin downtube cradle frame/184
Max. power (bhp@rpm)	29.1@ 5,100
Max. torque (kgm@rpm)	4.49 @ 4,000 rpm
Tyres & Rims	100/90 (F), 130/70 (R); 18 inches
Brakes	300 mm Brembo floating Disc, 2- piston floating caliper (F), 240 mm disc, single piston floating caliper (R)
Price* (₹ lakh)	2.05

* On road, Delhi.



managed a decent speed in the 70-80 kmph range, but boy, my ankles hurt. The swept-back position with the ankles bent at an angle and the absence of any rubber grips on the footpegs meant that my ankles were taking the direct shocks from the jumps and the vibrations. The bike was rock steady; my ankles weren't.

Still, I was hoping for one good stretch where I would be able to squeeze every ounce of power the bike could offer. That came about on the route to Mollem, some 20 km shy of the famous Dudhsagar Falls. There was a long and wide stretch, and I could only touch 120kmph before I had to slow down. Maybe, the bike might have touched 130kmph.

In all, I did a 260-270 km run that day. Looks wise, this one's a sure head-turner, its design influenced by the 250 cc Continental GT of the 1960s, and the new version being designed by Northumberland-based

Xenophya Design. That aside, the bike comes with many firsts; for RE—clip-on handlebars, a mint new chassis designed by Hetford-based Harris Performance and an impeccable paint job. (There's one in yellow too, but racing and red always go hand-in-hand). And, probably a first for an Indian motorcycle maker—Brembo disc, Pirelli tyres and Paioli shock absorbers. True, in this price range and maybe a bit more, you will get many European and Japanese bikes that are more powerful, faster and also carry the DNA of a true racer that will effortlessly propel you across the 150kmph mark. But then, café racing is not about testing speed limits and adrenalin rush, but about the fun of motorcycling—idling at 40, or, blasting off at 120—both with equal ease and elan, without having to worry about getting your jeans and jacket dirty from oil slicks. ■