

ROLLIN' THUNDER

The Continental
GT from Royal
Enfield is
simply classic

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✓ Royal Enfield had been given a fair bit of stick in the last few years. And this has been specifically from people that owned old Bullets. I must admit that I may have been party to said stick giving because I owned one. What I realised, at about the same time as the other old-school Bulletheads, is that RE was taking the game drastically forward while us lot felt left behind.

In the last ten years alone, they've introduced horrid (read: genius) upgrades like electric start, gears on the left, fuel injection, disc brakes, LED headlamps and various other conveniences, ahem, annoyances. Revolting stuff, indeed.

• But as we said with the Thunderbird 500, all this has a point. It is to make the brand more accessible to people who just love riding and save them the infuriating histrionics.

But then, the new one. Why would they name it after a Bentley?

At a press ride in Goa, Siddhartha Lal, Chairman and Chief Bullethead at RE explained that in 1965, RE launched a bike called the Continental GT. This was the first factory-built Café Racer that money could buy. All the others were modified classics like BSAs and Nortons. Anyway, Café Racing. The idea is that, young mechanics and apprentices who'd mostly dropped out of school would buy a really cheap classic bike and go about turning it into something that would tear up city streets.

Jump to present day, and I found myself in Goa. On a brand new, candy Red, 2013 Royal Enfield Continental GT. This is one of those bikes, possibly the only bike in India that has the gravitational force of two scantily-clad Monica Belluccis. The low clip-on handlebars, the fantastic paint quality, the styling overall. It will make you sit up and beg.

Full riding gear

on, I swung my leg over and hit the starter button. I was alarmed by the sheer volume of the burst revs. At this point I must mention that the riding position is low, with the foot rests further back than RE buyers are used to. And the version I had was a single-seater where the seat was long enough for me to scootch backwards and forwards.

When I set off (gently) in first, a few things became clear. 1. The riding position is brilliant. 2. The suspension is firmer than any RE that's gone before it. 3. Manoeuvring this bike is manoeuvring your fingers. It is that intuitive and that easy. Top marks to RE there. They had help, of course, from Steve Harris of Harris Performance, UK, who's been tuning GP bikes since the Big Bang.

On to the ride. Forget everything you know about Royal Enfield because this is different. The engine is a 535cc single that makes 30bhp and 44Nm of very usable torque. And it loves to rev. It begs to be given hell all the time. But that said, you can potter around at city speeds and it won't bite. This engine also has the best vocal range seen in modern times. From a clat-a-clat-a-clat at low speeds, to a deep thrum at midrange, to a full-fat angry bellow at full throttle. In love yet? No? Try this.

When you got Goa's fantastic roads as your playground, you'll soon see the Racer in Café Racer. It feels so balanced, so sharp. The steering, braking, gearshifts and all your interactions with the bike are brilliantly tactile. Telling you that I hit 135kph is meaningless because this bike is definitely more than its numbers. It feels different from anything on sale today. Anywhere. It feels incredible.

I'm sure that like some of the journos, people will moan about the 'vibrations'. My honest recommendation to them is to buy an electric scooter and pursue a career in IT.

As for me, the bike costs ₹2.05 lakh (on-road Delhi), which is about a lakh cheaper than we all expected. And I'm damned if I don't have what is probably the coolest bike on the planet in my life. If anyone needs me, I'll be at the dealership waving a blank cheque in a rather disorderly fashion.

>>> DASHBOARD >>>>>>

Engine: 535cc | Top speed:
Output: 30bhp | 150kph
Gearbox: Manual | Price: ₹2.05 lakh