

News monitored for: Royal Enfield

A cruiser motorcycle that munches the miles

Royal Enfield's new Super Meteor 650 is easy and comfortable to ride both on highways and country roads

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The last time I was in Jaisalmer, I was astride a Harley-Davidson, its oodles of chrome reflecting the winter sun. This time, I am here to ride Royal Enfield's new Super Meteor 650, which was showcased at EICMA in Italy and unveiled at the Rider Mania in Goa. It was let loose in Jaisalmer on 9 January to media from all over the world and I was fortunate enough to swing a leg over its saddle.

My first ride on the Super Meteor 650 was out on a straight open road bordered by the Thar desert on the outskirts of Jaisalmer. As I put the Super Meteor through its paces on that cold winter morning I found myself inadvertently smiling. First, the seat was generous both in surface area and sponginess. Secondly, the ergonomics seemed fine tuned for me. I have large hands that stretch out even 2XL size gloves, and the designers of the Super Meteor seem to have taken into consideration the fact that even Hagrid is an avid motorcyclist and so the handlebar grips and the brake and clutch levers are not delicate but rather meaty and nicely kernalled like the pommel of a sword. The switchgear on both sides feels uncluttered.

The chrome is restricted to the twin exhaust pipes, and even the clutch and the gearbox cover of the engine are finished in a matt black as opposed to the buffed aluminium on the Continental GT and the Interceptor that have the same engine. Ask anybody who owns an Interceptor or a Continental GT and they will tell you that Royal Enfield's 650cc twin cylinder engine is a work of art. Fitted into the frame of the Super Meteor that has been designed by the company's UK technology centre in association with Harris Performance, this engine makes this motorcycle a delight to ride. Deliveries for this motorcycle—available in three variants, Astral, Interstellar and Celestial (between ₹3,48,900 and ₹3,78,900 ex-showroom)—begin in February.

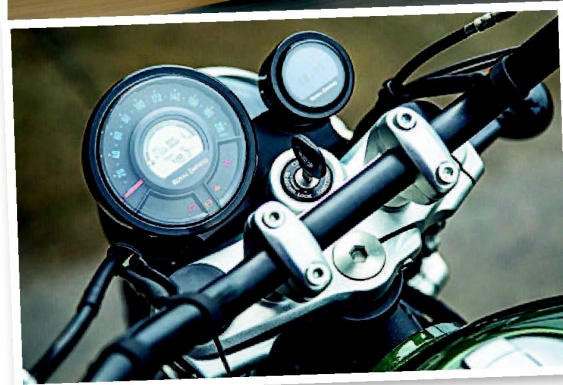
Once the engine had warmed up sufficiently and I was on an arrow straight road with great visibility to warn me in advance of a darting dog or a crossing cow, I twisted open the throttle and the motorcycle accelerated all the way to 120kph without a shudder and with supreme smoothness devoid of vibrations. The vibrations were a characteristic of Royal Enfields of the past but have been done away with. The acid test is the fact that the reflection in my rear-view mirrors was pin-sharp even at 130kph.

But cruising is not about whacking open the throttle to three-digit speeds. It's about enjoying the ride. So I throttled down to 90kph and this is where the Super Meteor becomes sheer poetry in motion. The exhaust note is a rhythmic rumble and the suspension feels confidently planted. Best of all, when I had to feather the brakes to shave off some speed to give a cow its personal space as it sauntered across the state highway, I did not feel the need to shift down from the sixth gear. There was heaps of torque even at 60kph in the sixth gear for me to quickly accelerate back up to 100kph.

Later that morning I headed back into Jaisalmer to potter around its magnificent fort. I was worried that the motorcycle might be a bit



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riding position caused my hips to cramp. But as the seat is ample, a slight change in position was possible, and that would melt away the cramp.

Unlike the previous day's arrow straight road, today there were high-speed corners to go around and I could do that with confidence even managing to lean enough to scrape foot pegs at a few. A nilgai broke through the foliage and bolted across in front of me but thanks to the sharp bite of the brakes and the dual channel ABS everything stayed upright, except maybe for a spike in the heart rate for both, the nilgai and me.

There were plenty of speed breakers too and over a particularly high one, the motorcycle scraped its underbelly. That got me thinking about how this motorcycle with its 135mm ground clearance might tackle that mighty mother road for all Royal Enfield owners—the road from Manali to Leh. This motorcycle would be a blast on the road to Leh simply because it is now in great shape, unlike a decade ago. However, it might fall short when called upon to explore the other regions in Ladakh—Zaskar, for example. For that, nothing beats the Royal Enfield Himalayan whose ground clearance is 220mm.

Having said that, if I were riding to Ladakh from Bombay, I would rather ride a Super Meteor over the 2500km to Leh rather than a Himalayan. For my adventurous off-road riding in Ladakh, I would simply park my Super Meteor in Leh and hire a Himalayan. Horses for courses!

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ungainly to handle in the narrow streets but there was no reason to worry. It is balanced well to handle low speed directional changes, once again without the need of constantly changing gears. When I asked the policeman positioned at the fort's first gate if I may ride into the fort he shrugged and said, "If you can, then go ahead".

And I could. Even over slippery flagstones and up steep slopes designed all those centuries ago to slow down charging war elephants, the Super Meteor climbed sinuously, dodging pedestrians and tourists, past the honey-coloured fort walls adorned with tapes-

tries and souvenirs.

That first day was meant for me to get familiar with the Super Meteor and on the next day I had the opportunity to make it answer its true calling with a 350km ride from Jaisalmer to Khim-sar through a mix of national and state highways and little country roads.

On that seven-hour ride I realized that this motorcycle truly munches miles with consummate ease. Scores of kilometers would flash by between two glances at the trip meter. I also realized that every once in a while, I needed to shift about in the seat because the foot-forward

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