

trials engine/trail chassis theory and gave owners the option of stripping the tank cover and seat from the latest Alp 200 to give the air-cooled trailie's chassis a more trialsy feel.

However, it was Scorpa who were the first factory to follow the line drawn by the Pamp and 2008 saw the French brand produce an agile, compact, trailie using trials 'motorvation'. Okay, so the engine in question was actually Yamaha's WR250F lump, but that was what they were running in their four-stroke trials bike at the time!

Known as the T-Ride, the Scorpa was heavier and revvier than the 2T Gas Gas, and whilst it was incredibly easy to throw about, much of its easy-going nature was due to the fact that it simply didn't make that much oomph. This made negotiating wet slabs a doddle, but it ran out of mumbo on big climbs.

A little dealer-derestriction helped to free some more power, and by using a well-proven four-stroke engine the T-Ride was more civilised and versatile than the Gasser. Still, a retuned enduro motor was never going to match the old trials-derived Pamp for cliff-scaling grunt...

No, that bike would arrive at the end of 2011, when Ossa unveiled their innovative, reverse-head, fuel injected, two-stroke Explorer - a thoroughly modern take on the Pampera theme. By this point interest in trials/trail hybrids had grown exponentially, as it was around then that KTM announced they'd be building the Freeride 350, and both Scorpa and Sherco revealed compact trail bikes running trials-derived engines.

OSSA EXPLORER



The influence of extreme enduros having seeped into our riding psyche and the changing face of dirtbiking (trying to get the most from what little land we can still use, or easily exploring terrain that was previously inaccessible on conventional machinery) has brought new life to a class that could so easily have fizzled-out years ago.



SCORPA T-RIDE

GAS GAS PAMPERA

FREE... OF A KIND

take it slowly, now thanks to firmer suspension and a sportier ride you can launch the bike off the rock steps safe in the knowledge that the front won't bottom out and tuck as you land.

Not surprisingly it reminds me a lot of the final version of the old Gas Gas Pampera. Better styled, much better built and with better suspension of course, but dynamically a very similar concept. Like the Pampera the Freeride 250R is not the fastest of machines but its capabilities are pretty astounding and seriously addictive...

A Good Thumping

I must confess I wasn't looking forward to riding the new 350 Freeride - we've had a long-termer all year so I know exactly what it feels like and the 250R promised something new and different.

So it was a real revelation when I climbed on board and found myself liking it immediately. The new suspension has to take all the credit because in place of the sloppy and bouncy old feel there's suddenly an extremely well-damped and well set-up trail machine.

It rides far better than before too - waaaay better. The new suspension isolates the bumps better than before, allowing you to ride faster without fear of the bike getting out of shape. You don't immediately notice the extra eight kilos the 350 weighs over the 250, but what you do notice is that the thumper follows the contours of the ground much closer. Where the 250 allows you to be creative with your line picking up the front wheel a lot more, the four-

stroke simply sits on the lowest point of the trail and trundles along.

But I was staggered at how good it felt on the rocks too. Part of this might well be down to the new tyres, part of it is the suspension, partly it's the new lower internal gear ratios, but collectively it all adds up to a bike which is far more at home in this sort of going. And good though the old bike was, this one is a considerable improvement.

Rock steps are dispensed with ease... slippery rooty climbs it just flows up them, and though you don't have quite the same choice of line as you do on the 250R, neither do you get deflected off course quite so easily either. So this bike feels the more stable of the two, and being quieter and less raucous it's definitely more civilised as well.

When I was feeling tired just before lunchtime, I switched to the thumper and was pleasantly surprised at how easy it felt to ride after the 250R. Whereas the 250 is all point and squirt, the 350 flows over the landscape much more serenely. You barely notice the difference in ground clearance (I scraped the underside, just once all day), but you do notice how swiftly it covers the ground now.

It still feels slightly lacking in power compared with an enduro bike (especially a 350EXC), but the fluidity of its ground covering plus the fact that it could hold onto gears for longer than the 250R, actually made it easier to ride fast than the 250.

Sadly one area where I can't report real progress is



with the brakes. Or the front brake at least. You still have to give the lever a good strong pull to haul the bike up and the brake just doesn't have the initial bite of a good Brembo set up. It's okay, but it's not as good as I'd hoped. In fact I found myself using the rear brake a lot more, and because these bikes transition the gap between trials bikes and enduro machines, you tend to ride the bikes a bit more 'rear-endy', keeping your bum as far back as you can during braking and really scrubbing speed with the rear. But for those that want even more rear brake, I'm told that the larger rear disc off the impending electric Freeride E is available as an option, and that's probably worth exploring.

What Gives

So KTM have evolved the Freeride concept, making it more trialsey, but at the same time making it a much better prospect on the trail. Both bikes are different and both will have their followers. The 350 is far more capable than it was before, yet somehow still remaining civilised and easy-going.



2013 ALL TERRAIN RALLY CHALLENGE

THE UK RALLY CHALLENGE FOR ALL OFF ROAD MOTORCYCLES

***Congratulations to
all the competitors
who completed
the Touratech
Centennial Rally
2013.***

***The rally was held
to commemorate
100 years of the
ISDT/E which first
ran in 1913 from
Carlisle City Centre.***



www.allterrainrallychallenge.co.uk



RALLYMOTO

www.rallymoto.co.uk

The rally forum – join in



The 250R is the snake in the grass, it's lively, raucous and quite bonkers at times, but it brings a whole new dimension to fun trail riding. I guess if you live somewhere where the going is fast and open it's not going to have any effect on your life at all. But if you live somewhere steep and hilly, and like the idea of a low-impact trailbike but still with sporting and trialsey pretensions, then the 250R will open up a whole new world of riding to you.

It's amazingly fun, and one of those machines that can genuinely lay claim to bridging the gap between beginners and experts alike. And unlike a pure trials bike it offers the potential to cover some ground in comfort and at speed.

I loved the 250R, and I can see lots of potential for it in the UK and elsewhere. The long distance trials riders are going to snap them up, but I reckon other trail riders might just ask themselves why they've spent the last few years rushing headlong down trails on their EXCs missing out on their surroundings. Instead they might consider pulling on an open-face lid, knocking 5-10mph off their speed and broadening their smiles because the 250R is the sort of bike that makes you happy however you ride...

Further Reading

TBM 200/April 2012 - Freeride 350 launch test in Morocco

TBM 211/March 2013 - Freeride 350 v Ossa Explorer & AJP Ultrapassar

TBM 203/204/205/206/208/214 - Freeride 350 long term instalments

KTM Freeride 250R (350 in brackets)

Price: £5995 (TBA)

Engine: Reed-valve, e-start, 2T (DOHC, fuel injected, 4T)

Displacement: 249cc (349cc)

Bore & stroke: 66.4 x 72mm (88 x 57.5mm)

Gearbox: 6-speed

Frame: Perimeter steel/aluminium composite, polymer subframe

Front susp: WP 43mm USD fork, fully adj

Rear susp: WP PDS shock, fully adj

Front brake: Formula four-piston radial-mount caliper, 360mm disc

Seat height: 915mm

Ground clearance: 380mm (325mm)

Fuel capacity: 7L (5.5L)

Weight: 92.5kg (99.5kg) claimed

Contact: KTM UK on 01280

709500/www.ktm.com