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Arctic Challenge: KTM 990 Adventure Vs. BMW R1200GS Adventure & F800GS

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Synopsis

Three top-notch adventure bikes, the KTM 990 Adventure BMW R1200GS Adventure and BMW F800GS, spanning the higher wavelengths of adventure's spectrums, light to heavy and moderately affordable to astronomical. Still, it all comes down to this, the Dempster Highway. Seven hundred and thirty-six kilometers of dirt, clay, mud, shale and gravel, it's the only all-season road in Canada to cross the Arctic Circle and go well beyond. Calling this North America's last adventure highway seems an under sell. Here you encounter corrosive calcium chloride used to hold the road together, tire slashing shale, mud so slick the locals call it black grease, potholes that will swallow half a front tire, ruts left by tractor trailers that will pull you around, gas so infrequent that planning ahead is mandatory, grizzlies the size VWs, washboard as harsh as any suspension test, weather as fickle as a titan and scenery so gorgeously impressionistic it would set Monet's lower lip quivering. The Dempster is all the North's motorcycle challenges and romance rolled up into one easily provoked and angry package. If you're lucky you'll catch it on a good day. If you're not, you're us. So why come here? Simple, if you're testing adventure bikes, you need a proper adventure. A week of homogenous weather on California's back roads won't cut it. Riding 12,000km, 20% of that being unpaved, from Vancouver to Inuvik followed by a dash through Alaska will. It's not gnarly single-track, because these are the big adventure bikes, the ones people look to when taking on the world with the second star to the left, straight on till morning mindset. So, it's a bit of a review then.

Book Information

File Size: 1137 KB

Print Length: 26 pages

Simultaneous Device Usage: Unlimited

Publication Date: December 9, 2009

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B004WOXDHM

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #698,390 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #29 inÃ Books > Travel > Canada > Provinces > Territories #155 inÃ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Travel > Canada #156 inÃ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Engineering & Transportation > Automotive > Motorcycles

Customer Reviews

A very good comparison of the three bikes in a real world adventure. Interesting and enlightening, and many good observations. I enjoyed it so much I wished it was longer and contained more tails of the road. Two things though. Firstly, the inclusion of the 800 was unfortunate, as it is not a direct competitor to the other two, and as such does not receive a fair assessment for what it is. Secondly, the comparison was conducted on the Dempster highway, which is to say the least challenging. To the purist, that would then seem to be the ideal place to test 'adventure bikes', and it is. But many (most) buyers of adventure bikes will never do anything quite THIS adventurous, and I suspect in their toned down application, the 1200GS will be a better choice than the 990 KTM. Not a criticism at all, but just something for the reader to consider.

I heartily support this kind of motorcycle journalism, where we see extended use of equipment under trying circumstances, from several different riders' perspectives, and I think the price is fair for the content. I may not be in the market for this kind of bike, but I can see the potential for a similar comparison of sports tourers. Get on it, Neil and gang! It would be great if some future generation of Kindle Singles could include embedded videos, because I know that Neil and his partners have a great series related to this ride.

This is a nice prosaic review of three adventure motorcycle bikes by some guys who sound pretty reliable and experienced. I enjoyed it much as I would enjoy a long glossy-magazine review. But it is not a book, and you will not learn much about how to ride or how to do your own trip of a similar nature. Still, for what it is, I enjoyed it.

Enjoyed the review but they always try to please everybody. It is a tough thing to do but these guys did a better job than most.

Excellent read, I enjoyed the bike reviews, the good and the bad of the reviews. As well as the play by play of the trip. Looking forward to doing that trip myself. I am a F800gs owner as well. Thanks

Very little info, not a fare comparison with the 800. Maybe the 690r or the Triumph would have allowed the testers a chance to write more.

I already new from previous reviews that this book is more of a review but since I am trying to decide between GS and KTM I thought it would make sense to read it. And I don't regret it. I found some good information. And I now I know I'm getting a Big GS.I guess the biggest drawback is the fact that this is fairly short read and it could use much more pictures. Otherwise I recommend it.

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