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Hot and strong — the tea-urn boys ride again

A 21st-century Royal Enfield cafe racer will make any old rocker yearn to bomb down to Brighton, says Pat Malone

Step back in time with me to the days when YouTube was still a bend under the sink and Royal Enfield fed the hunger of the world's motorcyclists with machines made in Redditch called Meteor, Bullet and Interceptor.

A schoolboy of that era could be reprimanded in class for passing round a photograph of a bright red Royal Enfield Continental GT cafe racer because of its powers of distraction. The world has moved on and the schoolboy may be in his fifties, but Royal Enfield is alive and kicking.

Or so it claims. If your dad has warned you how his Enfield seized up on the Southend arterial after the bottle of oil he was obliged to carry leaked in his pocket and ruined his best Burton safari jacket, you may be dubious about throwing a leg over one. But this is 21st-century Royal Enfield, reincarnated from DNA preserved in amber found in the Redditch wreckage and making motorcycles in Chennai (Madras to you) using modern machinery and processes.

Oil does not pour from them. Bits do not fall off. They can be relied on to get you to work, unstained and not angry. But otherwise, they look, sound and ride like the real thing.

Royal Enfield has high expectations of the 2013 Continental GT cafe racer and shipped 50 bikes from India to — where else? — the Ace Cafe on London's North Circular for the launch last week. Many an old rocker's knees went weak as we took to the road in a thunderous gaggle, heading for Brighton in a recreation of the bank holiday mayhem of bygone days.

Visually the bike is

as authentic a copy as you will ever see, with stretched tank and flat seat, downsweped clip-ons and a couple of round clocks on top of a big circular headlight. Down below, there's a 535cc air-cooled engine with its single cylinder perched vertically on a polished crankcase, and it's even got a kick-start, although it's for show. The real job is push-button — you can only take verisimilitude so far.

The engine is quiet at tickover but as you hurry up it starts to make the noise God intended bikes to make. The bike gives a good impression of leisurely Sixties performance and you'd be sorely pushed to outrun a deftly driven police Mk 2 Jag. But hunched down, and with taps wide open, I eventually coaxed a decent speed out of it.

While it has enough torque to allow you to proceed in top gear in traffic, it takes a busy left foot to lay the lash to the bike. In the mid-range the vibrations are fairly authentic too, although the clocks remain perfectly in focus and you can still see clearly into the

teeny-weeny bar-end mirrors. The engine redlines at 5500rpm; there's no gear position indicator, but

get it in top and cruise at legal speeds and it's turning over at about one thump per lamppost.

At 184kg the bike is very light and easy to paddle through jams, and the handling is decidedly more modern than one might expect. The Harris Performance chassis would have been regarded as a thing of wonder in olden times, making the bike responsive, nimble and trustworthy in the twisties. Add to that modern brakes, modern shocks and modern seat padding and you have a cafe racer that's more rideable than cafe racers were ever intended to be.

The bike is built in an all-new factory and the finish is good; my machine had silver paint specks on some of the switchgear and the silencer was showing signs of discolouration,





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but the seat fabric was well stitched and the overall impression is one of good quality.

With this bike the Indian company is packaging the best of Swinging Sixties Britain, suitably sanitised, for consumption here and across the world. And it makes no secret of its plans to turn Royal Enfield into a global leader in mid-sized motorcycles. Now why didn't we think of that?

Royal Enfield Continental GT

ENGINE	535cc, 1 cylinder, air-cooled
POWER / TORQUE	29bhp @ 5100rpm / 32 lb ft @ 4000rpm
ACCELERATION	0-60mph: not available
TOP SPEED	85mph
FUEL	65mpg
PRICE	£5,200
RATING	★★★★☆
VERDICT	Swinging back to the Sixties
RELEASE DATE	Mid-October





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