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2014 Royal Enfield Continental GT Review

Matt Hubbard reviews the 2014 Royal Enfield Continental GT



The Royal Enfield Continental GT looks a lot like its 60s forebear (produced from 1965 to 1967) in terms of its wire wheels, humped seat, the shape of the tank, colour scheme, clip on handlebars and colour scheme. The 1960s bike was powered by a 21bhp 250cc single-cylinder engine whilst the modern one's engine is a 29bhp, 535cc single-cylinder.

The bike is a cafe racer in the classic style with high-ish foot pegs and clip-on handlebars but as it's been designed for older buyers the pegs aren't too high and the handlebars aren't too low.

The frame was designed by Harris Performance, famed for producing bikes for racers in Grand Prix, World Endurance and the Isle of Man TT. The engine is a mildly tuned version of the pushrod single found in the Royal Enfield Bullet.

Cock a leg over the bike and everything feels pretty comfortable. The handlebars aren't too much of a reach and the seat is easier on your backside than it looks. The twin dials show revs and speed but also come with modern accoutrements such as a digital fuel gauge, odometer and engine management lights.

Fire up the engine and the dials disappear in a blur. The bike shakes at idle, as unbalanced singles are wont to do. Give it some revs and it evens out a little until the upper reaches of the rev range (a heady 5200rpm) when matters get really bone-shaking.

In a straight line the Royal Enfield feels slow compared to most modern bikes. 29bhp is not a lot to haul 180kg of bike and 80kg of rider around. Happily the 5-speed gearbox is slick. I was able to change gear, up and down, without using the clutch, by matching the revs to ratios.



On the open road and the Continental GT is a stable bike which gives the rider confidence to give it the beans and fling it round corners with abandon. With such little power momentum is the name of the game. You find yourself with the throttle on the stop and trying to lose as few revs as possible when changing gears.

Overtaking is possible, just. Given most cars can easily outperform the Continental GT you need to be happy that the car in front won't do anything silly, to be able to see quite far down the road and to not stray too far into the opposing lane just in case something does come the other way.

Stopping also requires some anticipation. The single front disc isn't up to much. For the first time in years I found myself using the rear brake in order to add some much needed friction to proceedings.

Through town and the bike is well mannered with a light clutch and predictable steering and handling. It's easy to stall but the engine but restarts on the button if you fluff it.

Aside from the riding experience the Continental GT is meant to be an authentic, old school cafe racer which trades as much on its image as its performance, and in this regard it works.

I rode it as part of the 2014 recreation of the 1964 [Top to Tip Challenge](#) where five bikes were riding from John O'Groats to Lands End with six riders on each bike taking a leg each. The trip took 21 hours and covered 1,000 miles.

My leg was from Silverstone to Shepton Mallet which took in some gorgeous Cotswold towns and villages and wended its way down through Gloucester and Bath to a service station on the A37.

Through the town and villages, and flying down fast but winding A-roads, I felt like TE Lawrence. On the faster sections my chin was virtually on the tank in order to coax more speed out of the bike and round the corners I got my knee closer to the tarmac than on my own, modern, bike.

It is possible to buy something faster and more modern but the Royal Enfield Continental GT has character in spades. It's a great little motorcycle. It costs £5,199 and you can find a UK dealer on the [Royal Enfield website here](#).





By Matt Hubbard