

MODERN-DAY CLASSIC

The Continental GT ranks amongst the most important Royal Enfield bikes ever, says Rishad Cooper. Read on to find out why.

PHOTOGRAPHY K2 SHOOTER & RISHAD COOPER

There's something special in every Royal Enfield motorcycle. Other than building the single oldest surviving production bike on the planet, this South Indian company commands the most steadfastly loyal fan following any bike-maker could hope for. If you ever meet prospective Royal Enfield buyers, you'll know this special breed. Not the type to look for flashy or fast wheels, these more sober bikers know exactly what they want, and couldn't be bothered with other motorcycles. They know Royal Enfield hasn't historically produced the most reliable motorcycles, that aren't the most powerful, cutting edge or best handling bikes money can buy, and still, all other options are simply off the table. Under a magical age-old spell, these buyers only ever end up happily owning Royal Enfield motorcycles, and this exclusive club is growing.

Classic, yes, but the Continental GT steers

clear of the beaten path, veering a touch towards sporty, more exhilarating motorcycles. It's a bold move, Royal Enfield admitting this is treading the unknown. As with most brilliant game plans, however, it's a calculated risk, with crystal clear vision working behind the scenes.

An extensive test-ride on the classic looking GT around the London region, where it fits in and looks at home proves this is a motorcycle with soul. A café racer painstakingly re-created by Royal Enfield to match similar, sporty looking British bikes of the 1960s, the GT is built with a keen eye for attention-to-detail.

The GT's classic round headlight sits surrounded by alloy steering braces and clip-on bars that house Royal Enfield-typical switchgear, including a pass-light flasher and engine-kill switch. Other rider controls include good palm grips, as well as comfortable, buffed alloy clutch and brake levers. The GT instruments include a legible, analogue

Twin downtube frame Continental GT leans into corners with planted feel, the best handling Royal Enfield sold today.





'Overall quality a perceptible notch up on the standout looking Continental GT.'

speedometer and tachometer set in chrome, twin-pod units, plus a digital fuel level display with odometer and trip counters. Twin horns are standard fitment, and Royal Enfield will offer superbly crafted aftermarket bar-end mounted mirrors for the GT, which we recommend for their solid construction and functional value, despite their petite size.

The GT comes with a slim, 13.5-litre fuel-tank, tastefully adorned with a classic font company logo, and equipped with a beautifully sculpted, flip-to-open filler cap. There's a single saddle (dual seat to be optional), with smart red stitching and a humped tail section. Those with a keen eye will admire the GT's alloy wheel rims with spokes, golden disc brake rotor carriers, exposed frame sections bordering the flank panels and dual-colour metal mudguards. The GT comes with a flowing, chromed exhaust, and exposed drive chain.

Overall quality, a long standing Royal Enfield bike bugbear moves up a perceptible notch on the dashing looking GT, a motorcycle with standout styling.

The Continental GT deploys a 535cc, four-stroke, single-cylinder Royal Enfield powerplant. It's a button or kick-started engine, the air-cooled, long-stroke unit beating out a soft, yet evocative and crisp bark that will have riders blip the throttle more than usual, to extract little extra soundtrack. The GT outputs 29.1bhp at 5100rpm of peak power, making for a low specific output of 54.4bhp per litre for this large



300mm front disc brake rotor is float-mounted.



Instruments bay framed in chrome twin-pods.



Bar-end mounted mirrors are very functional.

capacity an engine, while making 4.49kgm of torque at 4000rpm. Clutch action isn't as positive as we'd like, although the GT does provide a smooth shifting, five-speed gearbox, that operates in the universal, one-down and four-up pattern, shift lever located to the left of the engine.

Seat of the pants, the GT feels quick enough for the sporty classic it is, capable of cruising at 100kph comfortably, tachometer hovering at 3500rpm, the big-single firing away at a steady rhythm. Pushed harder, the bike achieved an indicated 140kph on a flat road in fifth, even racing to 150kph down a slight gradient with the throttle pinned open, surprising us to hold such high speeds over prolonged durations without protest, other than some vibes. The Continental GT powerplant feels unmistakably Royal Enfield, with tangible improvements, a relatively rev happy nature and improved top-end performance, thanks to lightened engine internals. On the downside, fuelling could be better, especially at the bottom end of the powerband, where power delivery is a touch snatchy, a nuisance that calls for extra throttle input in stop-and-go situations.

The Continental GT seat is supportive, roomy and wide enough. It's a reasonably comfortable bike, only not quite as relaxed as more traditional Royal Enfield models like the Electra and Bullet. The footrests aren't placed overly far behind, and the light lean into its clip-on bars isn't so pronounced as to make riders



'The GT will tempt, then charm new bikers into the traditional RE world.'



Flip to open fuel-tank lid is a neat touch.



535cc engine comes with lighter internals.



Comfy GT seat offers exposed red stitching.

uncomfortable. This is clearly the sportiest riding position on offer with any present day Royal Enfield, although the GT still is quite useable over long distances. The GT comes with a twin downtube steel frame, perfected by Harris Engineering, with Royal Enfield having kept weight down to 184kg, while providing top class, adjustable gas charged suspension at rear by Paioli.

Ride quality is firm, especially from the front telescopic forks, and the GT handles with Enfield trademark stability, the new frame helping the bike lean into corners with a planted, sure-footed feel. Ample grip is offered by Pirelli tyres front (100/90) and rear (130/70 section) shod on 18-inch rims front and rear.

The GT comes with an elliptical section steel swingarm, and single disc brakes front (300mm, float-mounted, dual-piston caliper) and rear (240mm). There's enough stopping power, with a nice progressive feel at the lever, undoubtedly helped by steel braided brake hoses. The GT is easily the best handling Royal Enfield we've ridden to date. Fuel economy should range somewhere between 25-30kpl.

The Continental GT reaches India this November, and we estimate pricing should hover in the region of Rs 2.25 lakh.

In conclusion, the Continental GT is a character-rich motorcycle. Built today, it still recreates an undiluted, rich and flamboyant feel from the past. The most important Royal Enfield bike built today?

Yes, and here's why? Royal Enfield understands its firm grip on classic bike buyers, but do need to step up to the next level, after decades sticking with one formula. With big risk, comes big gain, as riding the Continental GT proves. A true Royal Enfield from the word go, the GT will tempt, then charm, a whole new set of bikers into the traditional world of Royal Enfield. If you believed classic couldn't get sporty, the Continental GT proves it sure can.

Take our word for this; the GT is positive to cement Royal Enfield's position as a true classic motorcycle maker around the globe.

ROYAL ENFIELD CONTINENTAL GT

Price	Rs 2.25 lakh (estimated)
On Sale	November 2013
L/W/H	2060/760/1070mm
Wheelbase	1360mm
Ground clearance	140mm
Fuel tank capacity	13.5litres
Kerb weight	184kg
Engine layout	Single-cylinder, air-cooled, four-stroke
Displacement	535cc
Power	29.1bhp at 5100rpm
Torque	4.49kgm at 4000rpm
Specific output	54.4bhp per litre
Power to weight	158.2bhp per tonne
Gearbox	5-speed, 1-down, 4-up
Front suspension	Telescopic forks
Rear suspension	Gas charged shocks, elliptical steel swingarm
Front brake	300mm disc
Rear brake	240mm disc
Wheels	Alloy rims, with spokes
Rim size (f-r)	18 inches
Tyre size (f-r)	100/90 x 18-130/70 x 18 inches