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# RIDE

TELLS IT LIKE IT IS

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Exploring the best roads in Wales on the hottest new adventure bikes

### FEATURING

- BMW R1200GS
- Ducati Multistrada 1260S
- **Triumph Tiger 1200**
- KTM 1290 Super Adventure S



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## THE *RiDE* ROAD TEST

# Royal Enfield Himalayan

Light, simple and affordable, isn't this what adventure bikes should really be?

Words Martin Fitz-Gibbons Pictures Gareth Harford and Mark Manning

### BRITAIN'S TOUGHEST ROAD TEST

#### ► B-ROADS

A four-hour loop of brilliant roads

#### ► MOTORWAYS

A solid two hours of multi-lane mile-eating

#### ► IN TOWN

How it copes with filtering in traffic

#### ► ECONOMY

What mpg and tank range you can expect

**A**DVENTURE BIKES HAVE become big business: big investment, big popularity and big pricetags. And yet while engine and sales volumes soar, so too does the volume of disapproving voices. The bikes have become too heavy, too complicated and too precious to perform as proper adventure bikes, the naysayers reckon. Where are the smaller, simpler dual-purpose overlanders rugged enough to deal with some proper rough and tumble?

Well, here's one prospect: Royal Enfield's Himalayan. First launched in its native India in 2016, the UK now welcomes the cleaner, leaner, Euro4-compliant version for 2018. At its heart is a long-stroke, air-cooled, 411cc single that shares nothing with any other engine in Enfield's range. Its long-travel suspension and large-diameter wheels promise proper off-road ability. There's no ride-by-wire, no engine modes or traction control – to some a lack of mod-cons; for others, less to go wrong.

And a lot less to pay for. A brand-new Himalayan costs just £4199 on the road, roughly a quarter of any bike in this month's Group Ride (p14). So, is it a quarter of the bike? Or does it bring a fresh perspective? The *RiDE* Road Test will reveal all... →

### SUSPENSION

Right-way-up forks offer more travel than an R1200GS's front end. At the back is Royal Enfield's first monoshock (rather than the normal twin shocks). No damping adjustment but standard settings are impressively plush

Is the Himalayan a genuinely practical alternative on the adventure bike scene?







#### HEIGHT

The Himalayan has Tardis-like dimensions. Seat height is lower than a Triumph Street Triple, yet its ground clearance is the same as KTM's 1290 Adventure S. That means it'll roll over rough ground without bottoming out and without you needing to have a huge inside leg to manage it

#### ENGINE

Air-cooled 411cc single with two valves and an overhead camshaft. Rare under-square design – its 78mm bore is smaller than its 86mm stroke – gives a low-revving character, with maximum torque at just 4000rpm. Peak power is a modest 24bhp



# On the road

The Himalayan gives a nice, easy ride and a good way to appreciate the scenery



## B-ROADS

The Himalayan doesn't like to be hurried. Its lolloping single-cylinder engine pulls from 2000rpm, builds enthusiasm at 4000rpm, then stops at just 6500rpm. Packing a pleasingly equal 24bhp and 24lb-ft of torque it builds speed in its own time, slowly and steadily, yet the power delivery is nicely proportioned. It grunts politely, gently and willingly – unlike some small-cc bikes (especially those with multi-cylinder engines) the Himalayan is never hard work or demanding. Out on open B-roads, most of the miles are spent at high revs in top (fifth) gear, yet it isn't laboured or buzzy.

Standard-fitment Pirelli MT60 tyres are semi-knobbly but behave well on the road. There's no excessive noise or vibration from their deep tread blocks, and they grip well on the cold and sometimes wet roads of the RiDE test route. The Himalayan's dual-purpose compromises have no negative effect on the steering – the wide bars feel solid and stable in quick direction changes and there's no clumsiness from the 21in front wheel. It rolls easily through the countryside's twists and turns, happily

soaking up the scenery at its own relaxed pace.

On the rare occasions they're called for, the brakes (made by ByBre, Brembo's Indian subsidiary) bite gently and with what could be courteously described as a 'progressive' action. You need to squeeze the front brake lever hard to dig into the meat of the stopping power, though the trade-off is good feel and delicacy in dodgy conditions. The

**“The Himalayan is never hard work or demanding”**

two-channel ABS monitors each wheel separately but rarely intervenes.

The tighter and twistier the route, the happier the Himalayan is. It's not an open-road thrillseeker – instead the pleasure comes from chugging along, getting a bit lost and spontaneously exploring the odd byway. Turn off the tarmac and the Himalayan inspires

bravery. Stand up and the tank feels slim between your knees, the riding position gives good balance (though the bars are a little low) and the MT60 tyres bite into dirt better than most adventure rubber.

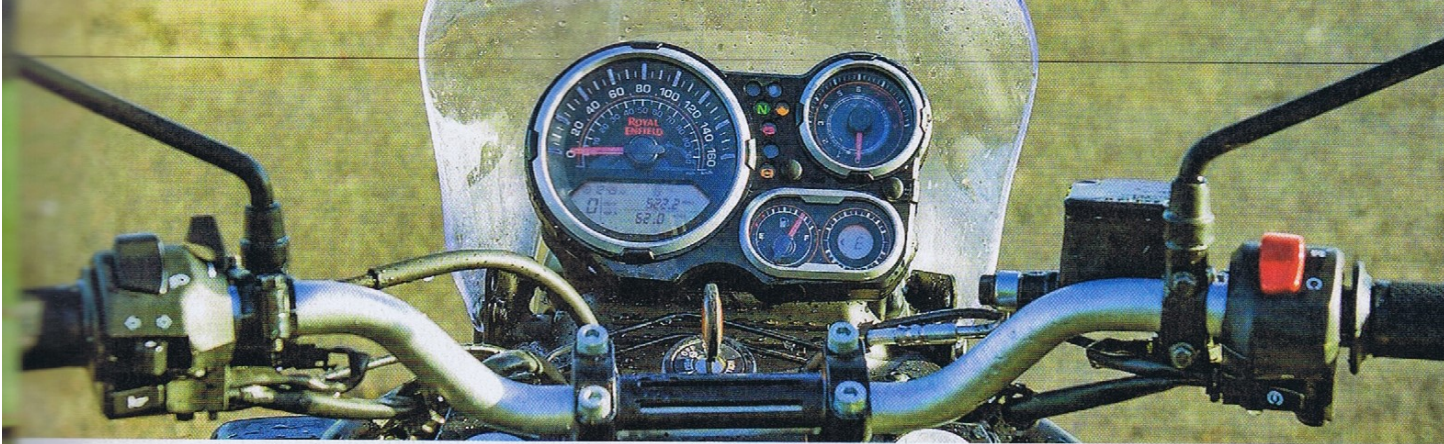
The ground clearance and suspension travel are generous enough that you can thud happily down a green lane until your internal confidence thermostat trips out, safe in the knowledge that if the bike does end up on its side, you stand a decent chance of picking it up again. At 185kg it's no featherweight but it is lighter than Suzuki's V-Strom 250. And when you eventually discover the end of the track and wonder where to head next, there's a digital compass on the dash to help you get your bearings.

## MOTORWAYS

At 70mph in top gear the rev counter needle hovers just 1000rpm shy of the redline. There's not much left in hand – top speed is a datalogged 82mph. Keeping up with the flow of traffic means holding the twistgrip wide open for long stretches, especially in the face of headwinds and gradients.

You'd think an Enfield single being held





▲ Clocks are a mix of old and new but include a gear indicator, fuel gauge and even a compass

◀ Soft, doffing single-cylinder exhaust note has a pleasing hint of old Yamaha XTs

▶ No chance of shaftdrive here but adjusting the chain is at least quick and easy



almost flat-out would rattle and shake like a brick in a tumble dryer but the Himalayan's engine remains unbelievably smooth. Thanks to an incredibly effective balance shaft, there are no intrusive tingles or thudding vibes through the bars or rubber-topped pegs.

The ergonomics are accommodating too. The seat isn't as wide or luxurious as a GS's, but the soft padding holds out well for a couple of hours without

causing any numb bum. Legroom is decent, the wide bars put no weight on the wrists and the mirrors are small but stay clear at speed. The small, fixed screen doesn't look much but does a decent job of deflecting the worst of the wind away from a peaked lid without causing any turbulence.

The clocks have a simple, traditional fuel gauge keeping an eye on the tank's titchy 15-litre capacity. At motorway

speeds the engine returns 66mpg, giving a theoretical range of more than 215 miles. In practice, a generous reserve zone on the gauge means you'll want to stop 50 miles before that. It copes with motorways commendably, rather than demolishing them effortlessly.

## IN TOWN

A light clutch action, generous steering lock and excellent low-speed balance make the Himalayan incredibly easy to ride in traffic. Its low-revving nature suits city work – open the throttle and the small single chugs forward with modest determination. U-turns are utter simplicity and the manageable seat height means no teeter-tottering at traffic lights.

In daily use a couple of quirks irritate. Despite its fuel injection the engine stalls rather than idles until it's warmed up, while the choke lever on the left-hand switchgear has no perceptible effect. The speedo is cluttered – priority is given to kph rather than mph and the fat needle obscures the markings, making it hard to read. Not much of an issue on the motorway, but potentially more of a problem in 30mph limits.

Despite seeming fairly skinny, the Himalayan's stretched-out handlebar actually makes it fractionally wider than a Suzuki V-Strom 650. It's no hardship to filter but if your regular riding involves battling with wing mirrors, there are slimmer options at this engine capacity.



## ERGONOMIC TRIANGLE

Small-capacity engine but a reasonable amount of space for the rider, with a natural stance





# Fully loaded

## WITH A PILLION

The rear seat is higher than the rider's, and this elevated position requires quite a high leg swing to get onboard. Size-wise the seat pad is small-to-medium: more generous than a 300cc sportsbike but not as spacious as a middleweight. To be a true all-rounder, it needs to be meatier. There are grab handles built into the luggage rack and the footrests didn't feel cramped to our pillion.

With only 24bhp, adding a second rider

**"The Himalayan is rated to carry 174kg - two average riders"**

noticeably hampers acceleration. The shock copes fairly well though – preload is adjustable but even left as stock the bike's nose-to-tail balance isn't dramatically upset at low speed.

One other note: the Himalayan is rated to carry just 174kg – that's barely two average-size humans in their riding kit.

## LUGGAGE AND LOAD

A small luggage rack is standard – handy for bits and bobs but not large enough to hold RiDE's Tailpack of Truth. Thankfully the pillion seat pops off easily to secure the tailpack's underseat Velcro strap, while the Himalayan's grabrails provide somewhere solid to run the bungee cords around.



Luggage rack a bit small but pillion pad helps support a tailpack



Good-sized rubber-topped footpegs help to insulate from vibrations

Pillion position is accommodating but extra weight hampers performance



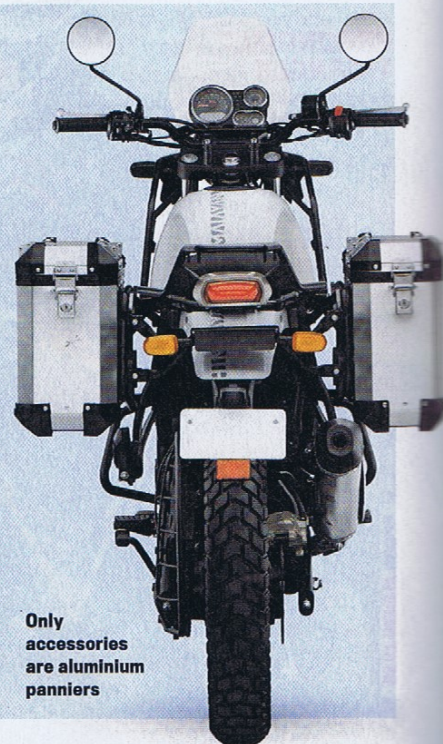
Pleasingly slim when standing up but the fuel tank holds just 15 litres

## Options and accessories

A core part of buying and owning a big adventure bike is the vast range of official bolt-on bits that firms are all-too keen to sell you, from heated grips and foglights to fancy electronic gadgets such as hill-hold control. However, that's not the case with the Himalayan. As it stands there's just one accessory kit: a pair of aluminium panniers.

Each box has a 32-litre capacity and they're designed to fit and remove quickly from their tubular mounting frame. The sides are constructed from 2mm-thick aluminium, with a thicker plate for the bottom. The corners are reinforced with heavy-duty nylon protectors that can be replaced as necessary. They come in black or natural silver and the complete kit costs an extra £499 including fitting.

Royal Enfield says that there will be a "wide range of accessories" for the Himalayan due soon but there are no further details.

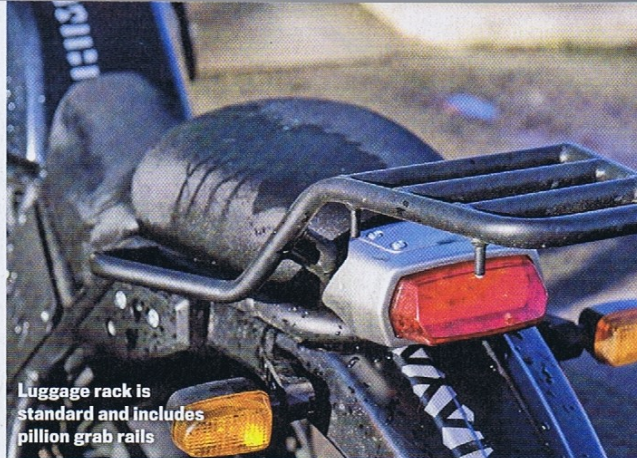


Only accessories are aluminium panniers





Luggage rack is standard and includes pillion grab rails



## What'll it cost you?

### Finance

The Himalayan costs just £4199 on the road. A PCP finance deal, arranged through MotoNovo Finance, begins with a £499 deposit, followed by 36 monthly payments of £87.04. After that, the optional final payment to buy the bike outright is £1713.38. That all adds up to £5345.82 with a steep APR of 14.3%, which doesn't entice us much – we'd rather pay cash and own it outright.

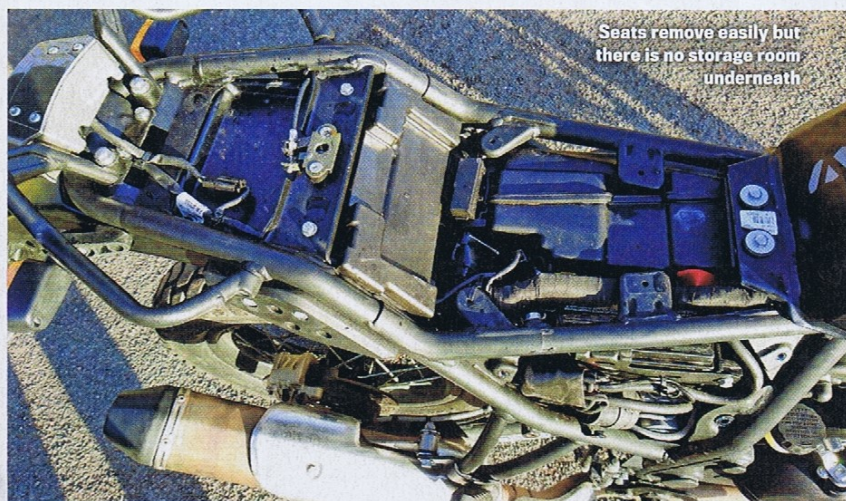
### Service intervals

- > 300 miles £130 (est)
- > 3000 miles £200 (est)
- > 6000 miles £200 (est)

Going by the letter of the owner's manual, valve clearances need to be checked not only at the first 500km/300-mile service but also every 5000km/3000 miles – or every six months – after that. That's twice as often as the oil needs changing! Official dealer Haywards of Cambridge supplied the estimated prices above, but they're only a rough guide as the bike is so new. On paper this makes it very expensive if you want a dealer-stamped service history; we'd strongly suggest having a word with your Royal Enfield dealer about what's needed to maintain the two-year warranty. After that, this is definitely one for home mechanics.

### Fuel economy

Normally we publish fuel economy figures for 'slow', 'average' and 'fast' speeds, but the Himalayan's modest power means it's almost always ridden at the same pace. Every time we stopped for fuel it returned the same 66mpg, for a theoretical range of 217 miles.



Seats remove easily but there is no storage room underneath

### UNDER THE SEAT

Both pillion and rider seats come off quickly and easily. The two side panels are held on with a few hex-head bolts. There's no storage space under the pillion seat, while the area under the rider's seat is taken up by the airbox and battery. The battery's terminals are slightly obscured by the main wiring loom, but adding the power lead for a sat nav or heated kit is straightforward enough.



# THE *RIDE* VERDICT

**IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO** give a fair assessment of the Royal Enfield Himalayan without highlighting its price first and foremost. It's just £4199 for a brand-new bike: that's half a Suzuki V-Strom 650XT; a third of a Triumph Tiger 800 XCA; and a quarter of a BMW R1200GS Adventure TE. It's less expensive than the Honda CRF250L, Kawasaki Versys 300, BMW G310GS or Suzuki V-Strom 250. It's less than a lot of 125s.

In that context, the Himalayan gives a hugely impressive account of itself. It feels solid, the suspension has a plusher action than plenty of more-expensive bikes, and the whole bike is immediately easy to get on with. The engine is tame but punches with an admirable attempt at meatiness as the single gives its grunt willingly, rather than forcing you to go searching for drive at high revs. All in all, it's a genuine surprise that a

bike costing so little performs this well.

But there are some disappointing touches. Some frame welds look messy, unused threads sparkle orange with rust, the air temperature gauge on the dash reads 10°C high and, despite braided lines, the brakes are weak. Build quality and durability remain unknown – the bigger picture won't be revealed until owners have lived with theirs for a year or two. Our biggest concern, however, is the official service schedule valve clearance check every 3000 miles or six months. For an owner keen to keep their new bike's two-year warranty, it's both an inconvenience and a hidden cost, that eats away at the initially tempting pricetag. **R**

## LET US KNOW...

Bought a Himalayan? Tell us about your experience: email [ride@ride.co.uk](mailto:ride@ride.co.uk)



### SPEC ROYAL ENFIELD HIMALAYAN

**Price** £4199 **Engine** 411cc 2v sohc single, a/c **Power** 24bhp @ 6500rpm **Torque** 24lb·ft @ 4250rpm

**Transmission** 5-speed, chain **Chassis** steel cradle **Front suspension** 41mm forks, 200mm travel, no adjustment **Rear suspension** monoshock, 180mm travel, adjustable preload **Front brake** 300mm disc, 2-piston caliper **Rear brake** 240mm disc, 1-piston caliper **Front tyre** 90/90-21 **Rear tyre** 120/90-17 **Wheelbase** 1465mm **Rake/trail** 26°/111.4mm **Seat height** 800mm **Kerb weight** 185kg **Fuel capacity** 15 litres

**"It's a surprise that a bike costing so little performs this well"**

The Himalayan is great value though it remains to be seen how its reliability will stack up

Want off-road action on a smaller budget? Turn over for great used alternatives.