

Royal Enfield Himalayan



First impressions – Paddy Tyson

It seems you can't leave your house without seeing one of Royal Enfield's Himalayans, their adventure offering, but is it just because they retail at under £4k? We've only recently collected our long-term test bike but in just under 1,000 miles it's clear that there is much more to this little machine than the spec sheets suggest.

411cc and 24.5hp? As a full licence holder who would entertain such a thing? Well swallow your prejudices and throw a leg over the 800mm high seat. Put your feet on the low and well positioned footrests, turn that ignition switch and pull the choke lever to start. I can't remember the last time I saw one of those for



cold starts and this is a fully Euro4 compliant injected bike. But the charm starts right there. Having only collected this white bike at the end of July (the not so bright colour options include graphite (black), sleet (grey pattern) and snow (white)) I've had no reason to use the choke as the single cylinder engine fires up immediately and settles into a happy burble.

Engine
Gears are engaged without even the merest jolt, the clutch is smooth and light to operate and the 194kg weight (wet) feels a lot less as you pootle off. Strange to note the clutch cable has no adjustment at the handlebar end. On a country lane this bike is in its element. There is barely a sense there's an engine beneath you as you whip through the gears because everything is so smooth. The crankcase looks disproportionately large so there must be a host of balance weights or shafts in there. The motor has a long stroke and a single overhead camshaft operating the valves, something that historically signified low revving but high torque characteristics. At 32Nm it's certainly grunty, but only moderately so. The valves

do apparently need adjusting every 3,000 miles, but they are simple screw-and-locknut so that's no real issue. Whether you'd bother checking that often after the initial bedding-in period is another thing.

Vibration only begins to appear through the seat and 'bars when the revs approach the 6,500rpm redline. Join an A road and you are initially amazed at the free-revving nature of the bike until you realise just how slowly you are actually going and try to select the non-existent sixth gear. 5,000rpm sees the speedometer needle nudging 65mph. To cross 70 things become uncomfortable.

So don't do it. There's no need.



Equipment

Relax and enjoy the beautiful array of instruments behind the little screen, or take a different route. Think about the big journey ahead because in most of the world you won't be crossing 55mph anyway and this bike is so sweet at that speed. The pleasing instrument cluster contains a large and easy-to-read speedo, a smaller and not so clear rev counter, both of which are electronic but with sweeping needles, and a cluster of warning lights. There's an LCD panel which has a clock, odometer and two trip meters (very handy) a reminder of service intervals, gear indicator, and you can even check on your average speed should you wish to. Then the fun begins.

There's an air temperature readout that bears no relation to what your body tells you, because the sensor is located above and behind the engine. One early morning I went for my thicker gloves yet apparently it was 34°C when I arrived in town 15 minutes later.

And then there's the compass, which looks great, but is purely decoration. It's common to ride on a straight piece of road and watch the direction of travel repeatedly change. Not perhaps flickering between S and SE, but pointing anywhere; N, S, E or W. When it is stable, like during today's ride from Hereford to Swindon, it told me my direction of travel was NE. Funniest of all is that it doesn't know East from West, so it says one thing while pointing a different way. Use a map.

Ergonomics and Economy
Whatever direction you are headed you'll find the seat isn't terribly comfortable. It's narrow at the front, slopes gently forward and with the pillion seat stepped up behind there is limited fore and aft movement. The footpegs as I mentioned, are low and perfectly positioned whether sitting or standing and the 'bars fall comfortably to hand leaving your back straight. If you can bare the squidgy seat the fuel range is terrific at over 240 miles. The metal tank

“that glitch-free fuelling means you can trickle along over rocks and through undergrowth leaving the clutch home”



is slim yet holds 15 litres as it sits above the tall spine of the frame. Its shape is pleasing, but filling it is a slow process due to that high tunnel. Thankfully you won't do that very often. On test our overall average has been 78.6mpg and you could definitely better that as we have had to use fast roads on occasion. Ignore the fuel gauge though. With the needle well into the red zone there's often only room for nine litres.

Off road

I was enjoying the way the Himalayan was suited to country lanes and to the cut and thrust of urban life, with crisp clean fuelling, superb steering lock and light flickable suspension, until I took it off road at the Trailquest training school, where this little bike excels. It's simply superb on trails. Trailquest have been training riders in bike control and expedition preparation for over 15 years and are now Enfield's official UK training school so it made sense to head there and find out how they find the bikes.

Designed for India, as this bike was, and the conditions experienced there, Royal Enfield seem to have absolutely nailed it. The standard fitment Pirelli MT60 tyres don't have the most

aggressive pattern, but that doesn't matter. They improve markedly if you let 10lbs of pressure out. It's a two-minute job to unbolt the rubber inserts from the footpegs, leaving a wider flatter serrated location for your feet, and you are off. The standing position is natural and easy and that glitch-free fuelling means you can trickle along over rocks and through undergrowth leaving the clutch home. If you feel the need to slip it, one finger is all that's required.

It's easy to steer through the 'pegs and the balance and feeling of being planted is better than many more skittish dirt bikes. Of course they might cover ground more quickly, but you'll have luggage on and be traversing great distances, hare and tortoise style. The dogged yet competent and confidence-inspiring way this Himalayan tackles loose-surface hills must be commended. It's never going to pop wheelies, but the smile it puts on your face as you push through undergrowth means that doesn't matter.

Chassis and suspension

The ground clearance is an adequate 220mm, there's a bash plate on the full loop frame so the crankcase should be fine, but the downpipe

does look exposed. Interestingly the sump guard isn't ideally shaped to enable deflection on a rock and could have a shallower angle. Suspension travel looks reasonable on paper but much of the rear monoshock's travel is taken up with static sag. It's so noticeable that using the side-stand leaves the bike almost vertical and you consciously have to find a slope or a hollow to put the stand in. Thankfully the standard equipment main-stand is a joy to use. On the road all works well at slow speed but if you do pick up the pace you'll find that the suspension weaves, and touching white lines isn't enjoyable. I don't blame the Pirellis for this as I've experienced them on many bikes over many miles.

The disc brakes at both ends are just OK, but they are progressive and have pleasant feel. At the time of writing I haven't worked out if the ABS can be switched off but it doesn't seem overly sophisticated and does permit quite a lot of skidding from the rear which is good. Trailquest say thankfully the Himalayan crashes well and the oil cooler is protected by the standard fitment upper tank guards, which double as mounting points for the accessory bags or fuel canisters.



Photo: Dave Cook

Verdict for overlanding

The UK and US are both comparatively tiny markets for Royal Enfield so concerns about the ability to maintain consistent high speeds on highways should be irrelevant. Enfield haven't failed on that front; they never planned to achieve that in the design. The Himalayan is also remarkable value for money so any minor complaints should always be in that context.

It's built at Enfield's newest and most technologically advanced factory just outside Chennai, India but some elements of finish could still be improved. My bike has some rust already showing around some welds and there are lazily routed wires for example, though that may be as a consequence of the way the UK

importers have fitted the luggage rack. The electronics in the instruments really shouldn't be provided just for amusement and there's no excuse for poor venting on the fuel tank, which causes the bike to consistently groan in hot weather, or the vertical side-stand which can cause the bike to fall over.

Yet the whole package seems to make for a great global travel bike. The technology within the air-cooled engine is very simple. The tank and frame are steel and repairable. It's frugal. The balance is good and it is so easy to ride it beggars belief, leaving you time to smell the roses and watch the world go by. It seems many people have embraced the charm. And the price.



Specs	
Miles covered on test:	940 miles
Test fuel consumption:	78.6mpg
Engine capacity:	411cc
Configuration:	Single cylinder SOHC
Max power:	24.5bhp
Max torque:	32Nm
Transmission:	5-speed
Final drive:	Chain
Fuel capacity:	15 litres
Kerb weight:	194kg
Seat height:	800mm
Ground clearance:	220mm
Front suspension travel	200mm
Rear suspension travel	180mm
Front tyre:	90/90 21"
Rear tyre:	120/90 17"
Front brakes:	300mm disc (twin piston)
Rear brakes:	240mm disc (single piston)
Price:	£3,999

Accessories
The number of companies offering after-market overlanding accessories is now vast, but RE have thought about it too, and can provide panniers with their frames for £500, engine bars for £100, handguard kit for £60, braced handlebars for £75, a different touring seat for both rider and for pillion, top box kits, bar end weights... The list goes on