

Motorcycles

Royal Enfield's Interceptor 650 draws the right kind of attention

Classic looks, traditional lines and a brilliant soundtrack make for a bike you won't be able to take anywhere without drawing a crowd

BY RICH TAYLOR

1 day ago



CREDIT: ROYAL ENFIELD



was wasting my time watching motorbikes tear up the hill all day, when the best bike in the world was sat here all along!", remarked a spectator at Shelsley Walsh, before going on to ask a dozen questions about Royal Enfield's new Interceptor 650. You see, you just can't go anywhere without the Interceptor drawing a crowd. Petrol stations, cafés, local shops, even

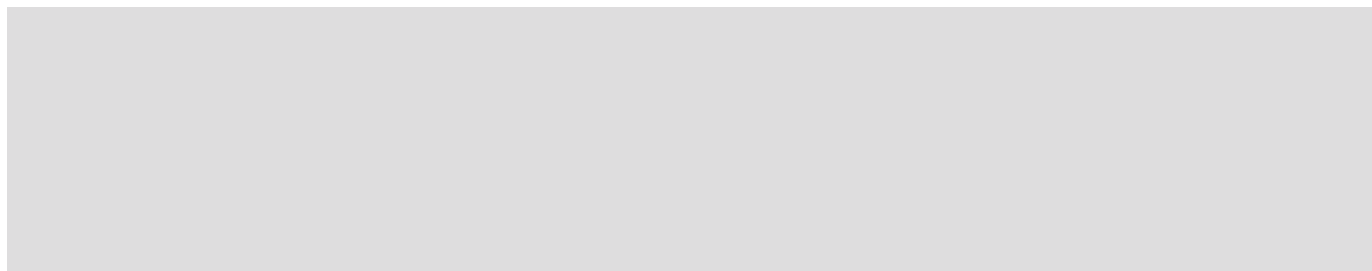
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stopped at traffic lights, it'll be charming anyone who so much as even glances at it. It seems the world and his dog has a soft spot for the Indian factory's all-new twin cylinder, traditionally styled bike. And it's not hard to see why.

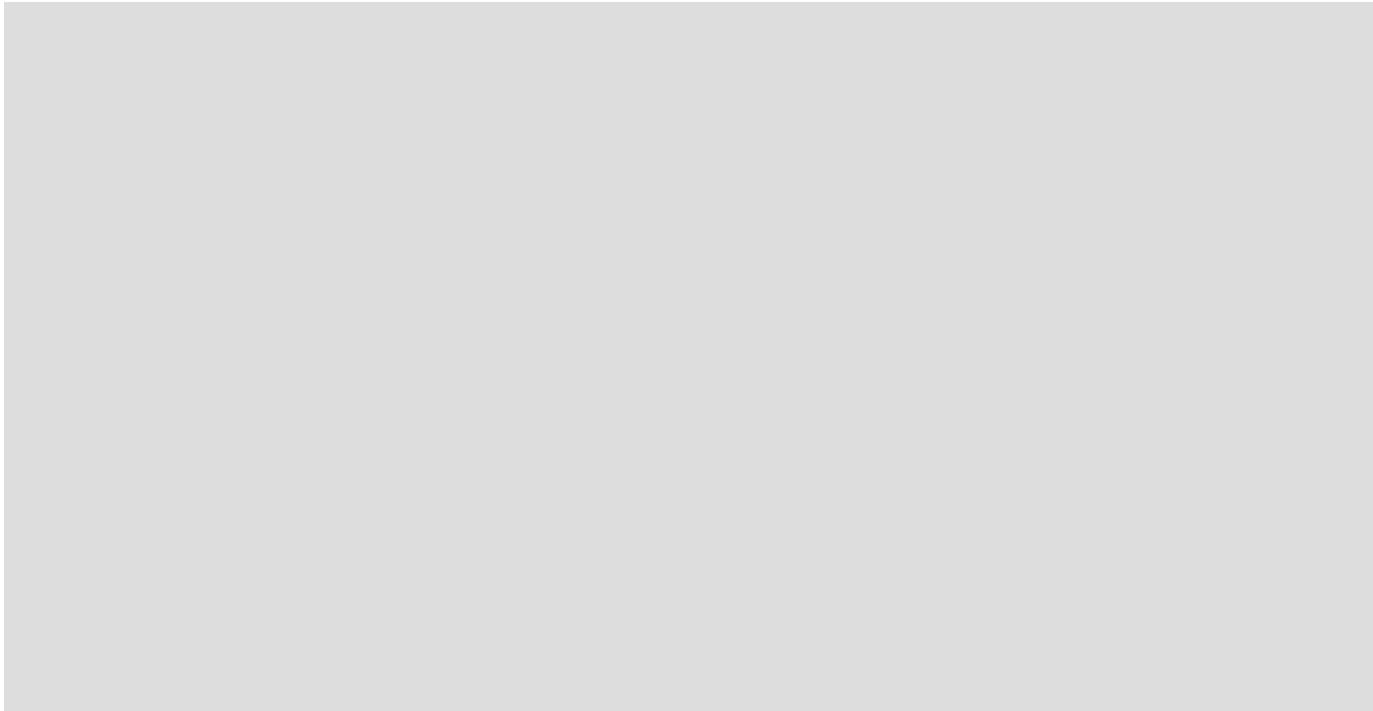


CREDIT: ROYAL ENFIELD

The engine with its big, polished casings and finned heads nestles beautifully in the frame and is canted forward slightly, which accentuates the achingly classic down-round-and-out dual exhaust profile. It has spoked rather than cast wheels, there's two gas-charged shock absorber units at the rear and the forks are right way up. It's all very much in keeping with traditional bike looks and there's just the right amount of chrome on it. The side-panels have the perfect shape, the twin dials in the cockpit are analogue, as they should be, and the fuel cap is Monza-styled. A bench seat, relaxed handlebars and single headlight seal the deal. All this will only cost you £5,299.




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CREDIT: ROYAL ENFIELD

Royal Enfield are betting the factory on it and CEO Sid Lal said it's the most important project of his career. It's the first twin-cylinder engine the factory has worked on in a very long time, so it's a landmark bike and it's put absolutely everything it's got into it, even going so far as to acquire a well-known English engineering firm Harris Performance and poaching engineers from rivals to work on the chassis and engine. So that's why, if you look really closely at things, such as the radiator and its mountings, it harbours a fair few similarities to a modern [Triumph](#). And that's fine by GQ. Triumphs are fine motorcycles too, after all.



Motorcycles

Triumph's Scrambler 1200 is the most badass scrambler yet

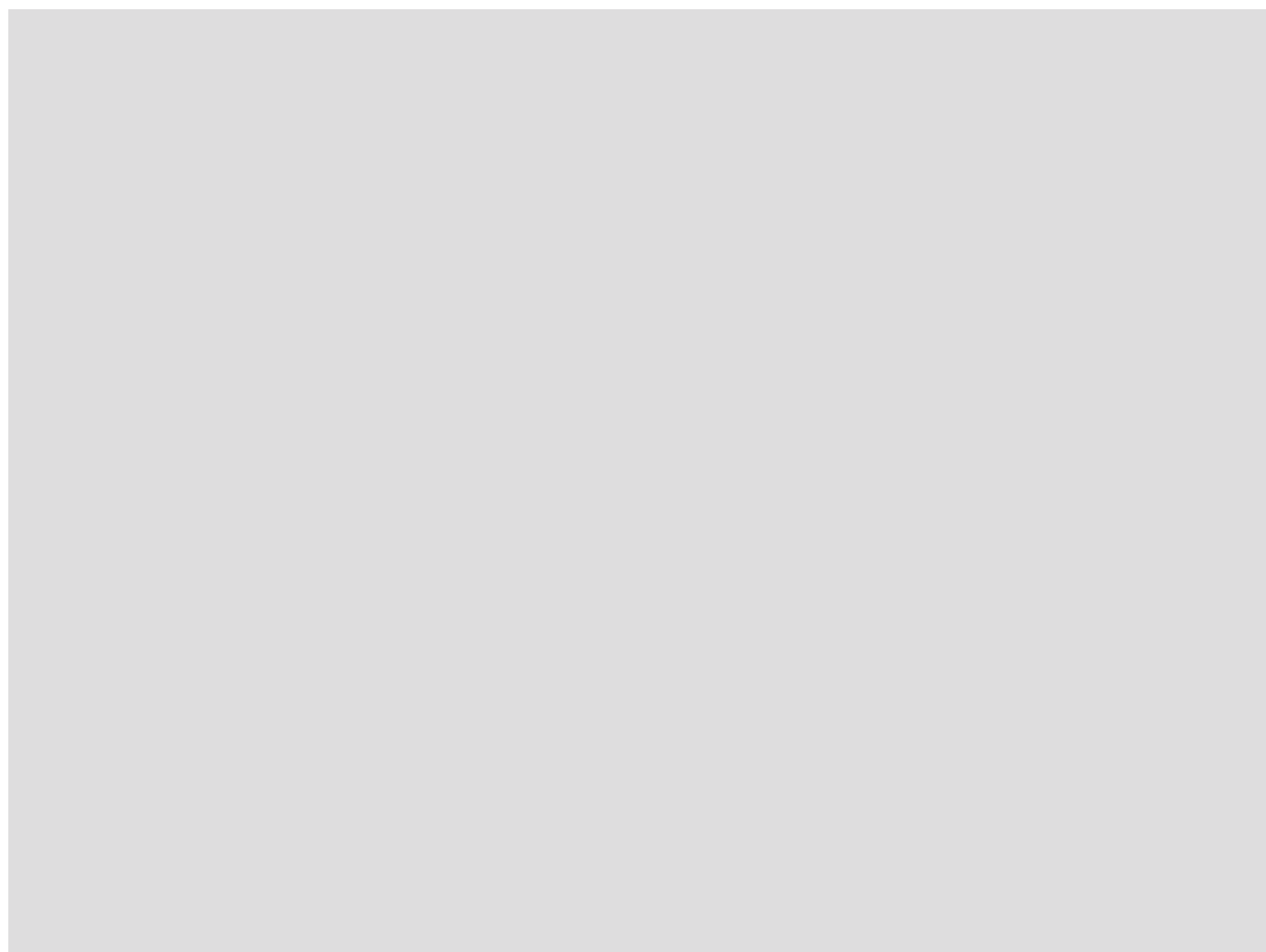
RICH TAYLOR

27 Jan 2019

You can feel how much effort has gone into the engine once you fire it into life. The fuelling's excellent and it simply does not transmit any vibration through the seat, foot pegs or handlebars, making it a happy place to spend time. It's a very well mannered bike and weighs a reasonable 200kg dry, making it a complete doddle to ride around town, where there's plenty of steering lock to squeeze past traffic

with. The 650cc, 47bhp engine gets into its stride from around 2,500rpm and pulls cleanly right to its redline of around 7,000rpm; the more you rev it the happier and better it seems to get (and sound). GQ managed around 52mpg from the 13.5l tank over around 1,000 miles and combined urban and rural riding.

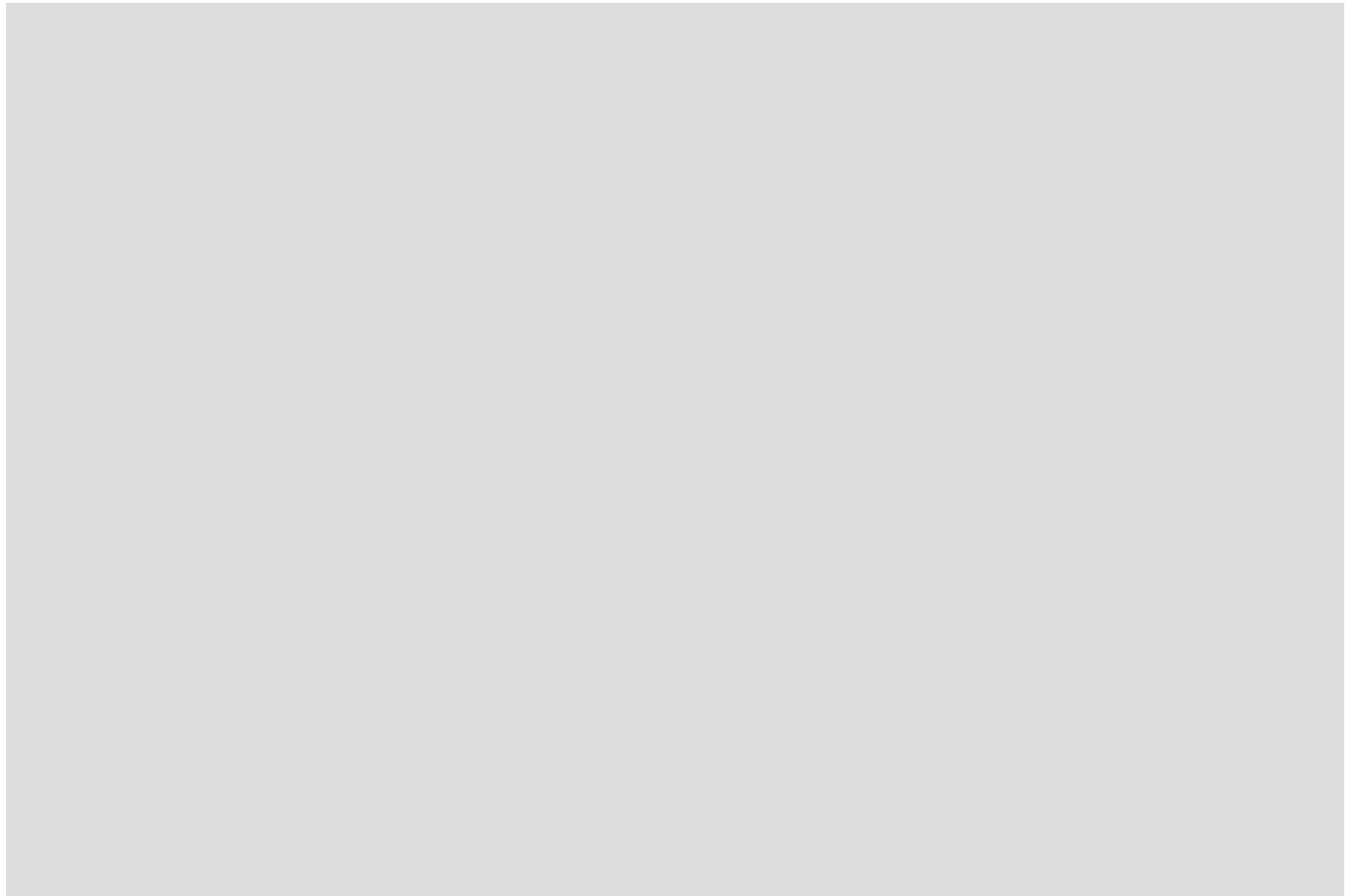
The six-speed gearbox (another first for Royal Enfield) is smooth and slick and the clutch is light. It'll even shift clutchless both up and down without any complaints whatsoever, which is always a hallmark of a quality gearbox, and it has a slipper clutch to boot. It's a well-balanced machine overall; the chassis can cash any cheque the engine writes, the Bybre brakes (Brembo's sub-brand) are more than up to the job and it even comes with decent Pirelli tyres.



CREDIT: ROYAL ENFIELD

There's some really nice touches to the Interceptor 650. The mudguards are metal, not plastic, and they've got black extenders on that seem to visually blend in, so it looks good and will keep rain and other road dirt off you fairly well. The toolkit is well stocked and thanks to the frame's construction, it's very easy to find mounting points for soft luggage ahead of a long weekend away. On that note, while every backside is different, GQ had no issues with six hours plus in the saddle. The mirrors work perfectly and the switchgear on the handlebars feels good. It's physically quite a small motorcycle, so

it's easy to wheel around, and it even has a centre stand. Top marks there, no complaints at all.



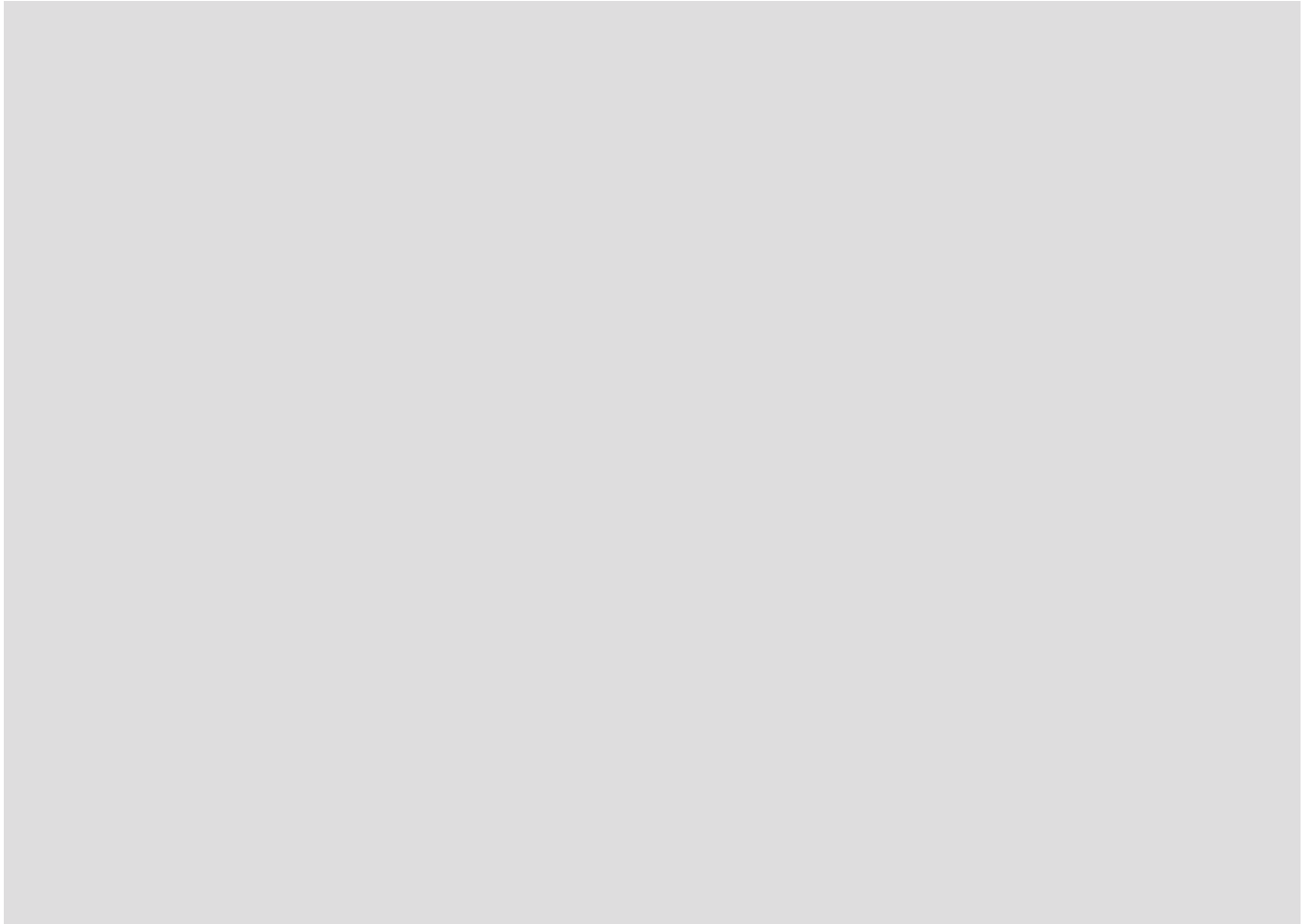
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The question is, given this is only a £5,299 motorcycle, how has Royal Enfield managed that? The chances are, if you're looking at an Interceptor 650, then you're probably wondering what the difference is between it and something like [Triumph's Street Twin](#). The answer's pretty simple: spending a few thousand more on a Triumph goes mostly towards better suspension, electronics and better ergonomics. To those points, the Interceptor's rear suspension gets a bit flustered if you ride it rather hard and fast. When carrying a pillion, you'll easily blow through all of the rear suspension travel over bumpy roads or even speed humps in town. There's no electronic throttle modes or rider aids (aside from ABS), so all of that skill and ability needs to come from your right wrist instead of the bike's brain when the weather has taken a turn for the worse. Lastly, the ergonomics occasionally leave a little to be desired – the foot pegs are set strangely wide, which creates an “interesting” foot position and the clutch arm on the right-hand engine casing has a habit of sticking itself into your right knee at a standstill when you've got your feet down on the tarmac. The top-half is just fine though, the handlebar position works just fine in every respect.

Arguably, though, few riders will push the suspension hugely hard, electronic rider aids definitely aren't a necessity, so the only sticking points are when carrying a pillion and the slightly odd ergonomics. Other than that, it's totally fine and the engine and chassis are so good it's all more than made up for. It'd be nice if the tyres were tubeless rather than tubed, but perhaps that'll come with a

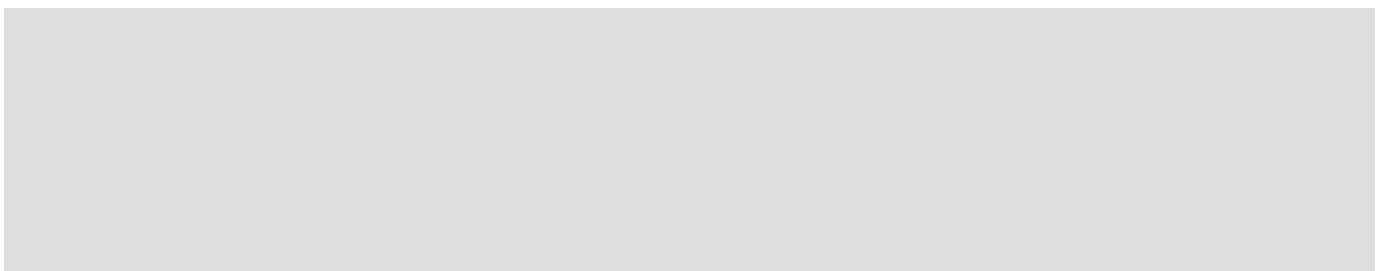
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future iteration, alongside a suspension upgrade option, perhaps for Western markets. And we suspect, looking at the size of the engine, Royal Enfield might be able to fit a couple of even bigger pistons in there.

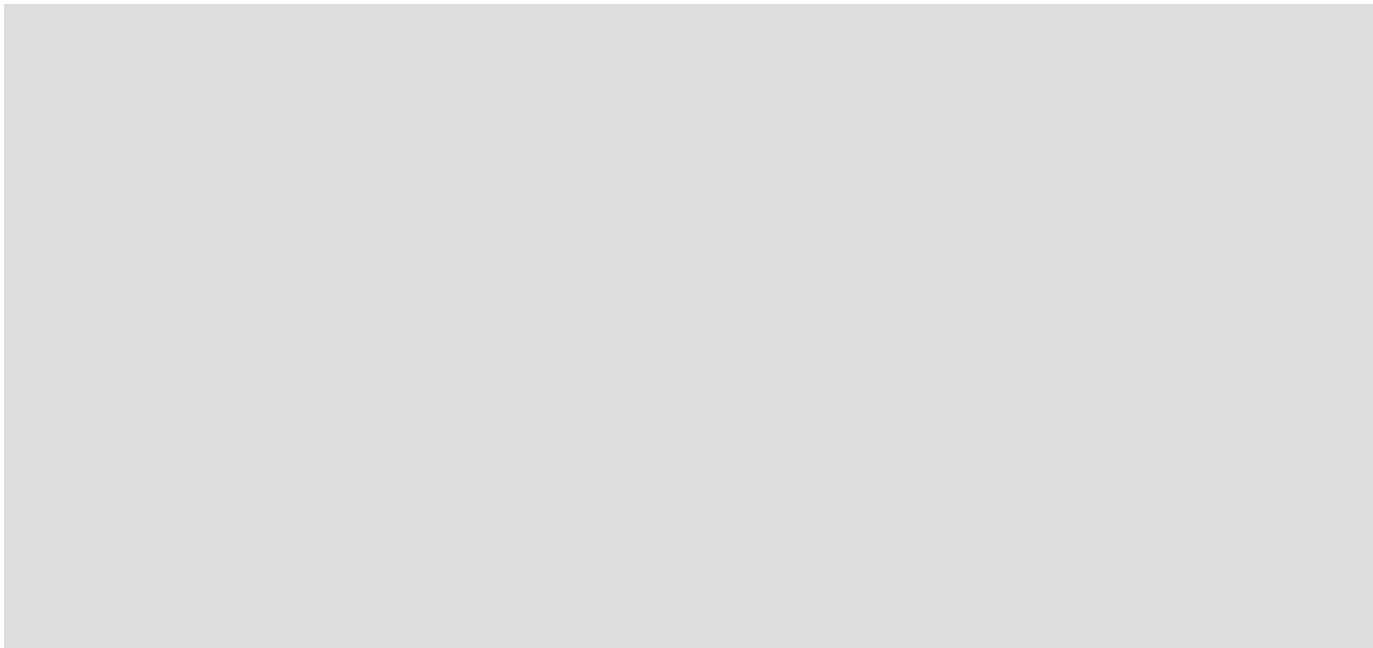


CREDIT: ROYAL ENFIELD

But here's the thing. It strikes *GQ* that the *Interceptor 650* (and its sister, the *Continental GT*) are going to make for brilliant bikes to customise the heck out of. It's a simple bike without much to work around in the way of electronics, unnecessary peripherals or awkward packaging, all of which are qualities that get custom bike builders' cogs whirring... and we're already starting to see projects popping up on *Silodrome*, *BikeExif* and other outlets across the web. London's *Malle*, a premium motorcycle clothing and luggage manufacturer, have already been showing off two customised *Interceptor 650*s, which look simply stunning.



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The Malle Rally Royale

CREDIT: MALLE LONDON

Rounding up, Royal Enfield’s bet seems to have paid off and it’s all down to a cracking engine, classic looks erring on the side of simplicity and a whole heap of nostalgic history. Take a bow Royal Enfield, you’ve no doubt ruffled some feathers in the Triumph and Harley-Davidson camps.

● Available from £5,299. royalenfield.com

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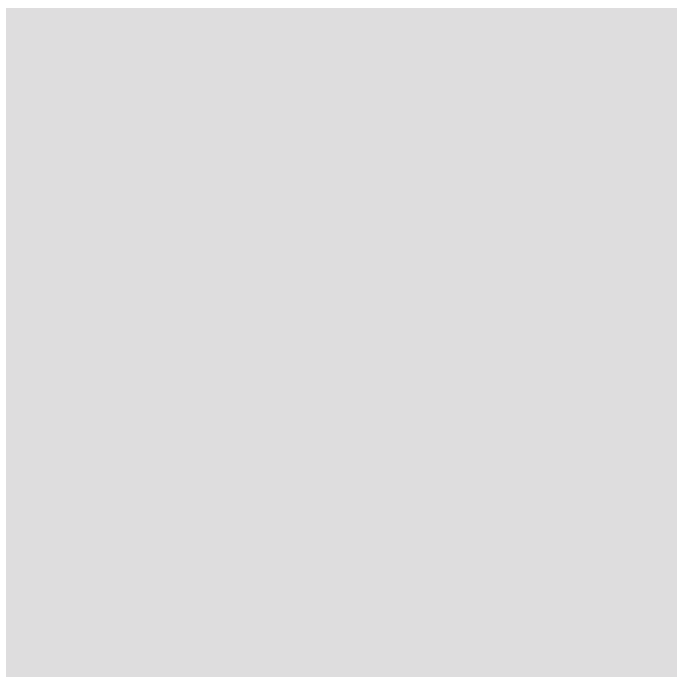
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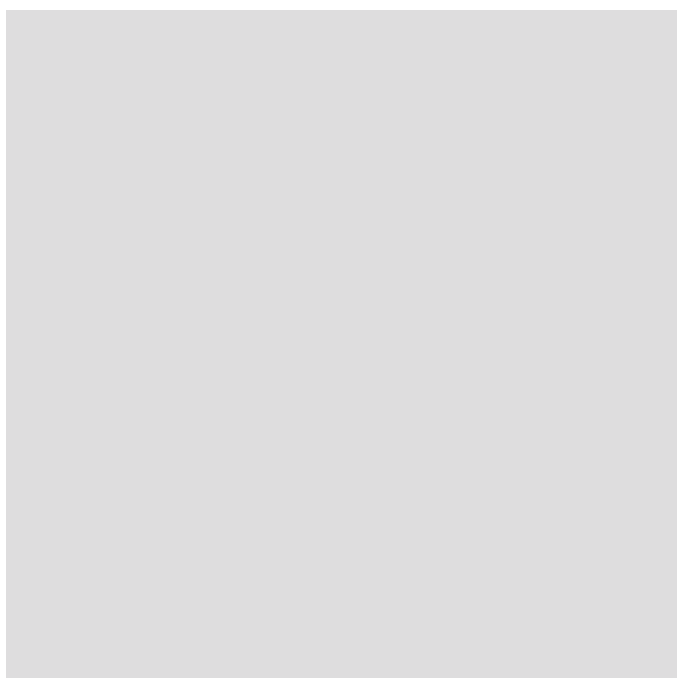


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