

WET ADVENTURE IN MID-DEVON



I think I tempted fate by reading a de-watering article from the excellent Australian Sidetrack magazine.

Jim Weedon and I went out "exploring" on Friday 9 August. The weather was overcast and we experienced some heavy showers as we meandered around Mid-Devon and got quite wet but nothing compared to what was to come!

We started at Longdown and went directly via the old A30 to Whiddon Down via Ford Lane. Fuelled up at Whiddon and bought lunch for later. Thence to Merryfield Lane at Venton and back via Whiddon to Beaconpark Lane which was very overgrown with an interesting boggy bit at the bottom. The overgrowth being wet meant that I couldn't see much along the lane but fortunately there were no surprises under the wheels. We headed due south to meet the northern end of the next lane at East Week where the lane heads due north.

Soon on to South Tawton where we followed the Tarka Trail signs to the next UCR running to Sticklepath – unfortunately any character this lane may have had has been lost as it now looks like a railway track without the lines and sleepers – ah well – got to keep the visitors happy! From there to Bude (no – not that Cornish one!) and due east along the UCR to Glendale – this lane was in better condition than a lot of the tarmacked back roads – it had a full width of shiny black tarmac scalplings and was very motorwayish unfortunately.

Ratcombe, Youlden, Cocktree Throat, and Sessland Lanes followed.

Onward to Judgement Cross (don't you just love some of the place and lane names?) where we ducked down the UCR to a gateway and, whilst there was an obvious continuation of the lane dead ahead to the railway line, the road we wanted to the right wasn't clear – we sussed that some largish trees in the field were probably old hedge or boundary trees (see pic overleaf) so, after a spot of lunch and a natter with the cows in the next field (nosy animals aren't they), we went

through the gate onto the route of an old Roman road to a ford (see pic below) and then onto a nice stone lane back onto the tarmac – now that felt "ancient"..



On then to Itton Moor Lane which was interesting in that a large part of it runs in what looks like a river bed – Pete Bull tells me that it serves as an overflow for the parallel-running River Yeo in the winter. See photos of Jim's back below!



It all started to go wrong from here. We toddled over to North Tawton and headed north to Yeo Bridge and the start of the unsurfaced UCR to Bondleigh - another section of the Tarka Trail. All went well until Bailey's Ford across the River Yeo. Where some kind soul(s) had dammed the lower end of the ford creating a bit of a pond. I decided to follow the edge of the dam and was in confident mood until the front wheel hit either a big rock or dropped in a hole – either way it stopped dead and as I put my right foot down I discovered there wasn't anything but water on that side. I ended up falling off into the rather large "pond" in the middle of the river - talk about "fill your boots" - it filled my jacket, trousers, bum bag and rucksack - not to mention the air box and the engine – and it was bloody cold! I got up real quick, as you can imagine, and feeling proper silly just wanted to get out of there quick.

I thumbed the TTR's starter button and it fired up – but only ran for a millisecond until it stopped with a bit of a "thunk". Aarrgghhhh!!! – that means water may have got in. Took it the bank and quickly got the air box cover off with a huge gush of water. I didn't realise the bike had gone that far under but the whole intake was full

of water as was the engine. With Jim's help I got the front wheel up the bank and water literally poured back out – as it did from my boots when I took them off.



After following de-watering "procedures" the bike wouldn't start. Plug out - no compression – booger. I have now discovered what the insides of a TTR cylinder head looks like....

Tips:

- a) don't panic and try to restart a bike that has been dropped in water UNTIL you have checked the air box..... no matter how embarrassed you are having taken an involuntary bath in front of your mate(s).
- b) Look again at what you carry in your bum bag or rucksack - I wish we had a tow rope between us - in the end a friendly farmer (yep – there are quite a few around) towed me up the half mile lane to tarmac with one of the biggest tractors I have seen at close quarters for a while. Despite not wanting any payment I managed to force a very soggy fiver on him for "a drink".
- c) Get the bike somewhere sensible to start de-watering – its not easy finding dropped screws and tools in muddy water...
- d) Don't expect the AA to have any sympathy about being soaked to the skin - it still took nearly 2 hours to get a pick up van to me at Bondleigh Wood Cross by which time I was nearly hypothermic....
- e) Make sure that at least one of you have a mobile phone that actually has some credit on it and is charged...
- f) Carry loadsafags coz they are useful to keep boredom at bay whilst freezing to death - not too good to warm your hands on though... some snack bars and crisps are not a bad idea either!
- g) If you haven't already done so or don't already know the drill, I recommend you read the de-watering article!

h) Best idea is not to fall off in the first place! Look for ripples that tend to indicate shallower water (so Jim advised and he got through safely). Avoid dark-looking still water if you can. Don't be over confident and gung-ho – stop and check – preferably by walking – where the best line is to cross. Jim did this and found a line such that the water hardly reached the foot pegs on his Serow.



The aftermath. I haven't touched the internals of an engine for many years, the last time being replacing the Kipps valve gubbins on a KDX, so I was a bit worried about a DIY job. However, I was desperate to know what damage I had done so decided to have a go. The TTR250 has a DOHC donk so this was going to be interesting. Having got the head off (with help from Trish – thanks darling!), there was nothing obviously wrong except that a considerable amount of fine muddy stuff and plant material (how did that get past the air filter?) had deposited itself around and under the valves.

After a good cleanup and lapping the valves in, I put it all back together with new gaskets and oil and was surprised and delighted to have good compression. The bike started first time and, after a slight delay, whilst I waited for some shims to arrive, I have adjusted the valve clearances and the TTR seems to be running better than before. I just need to check that the compression is within limits to satisfy myself that there isn't a problem still lurking and, if all OK, then its back on the lanes!

Many thanks to Jim for his patience and coming back with a tractor when I was expecting a bit of baler twine! Also to Trish for her help with the spannering and Adrian Harris for being on the end of a phone when I needed advice or a sympathetic ear whilst rebuilding the engine – its good having mates who used to lecture in motorcycle mechanics eh?

Brian Sussex