



**A** lot of ink, whether real or virtual has already been used on the Royal Enfield Continental GT, the latest bike to come out of the Chennai motorcycle super kings' stable. And not just any stable, the new spanking new one at Oragadam rather than the old one at Thiruvottiyur. If you've consumed any of that ink you already know the backstory of how RE went to Harris Engineering for a new frame, worked on the engine and Xenophya design helped them get the shape exactly right. And now, here is what the sum of all that effort is like to ride every day.

### STYLING, BUILD AND FINISH

You get used to it. People waving, cheering,

the thumbs up signs and that intense awareness that just outside of your vision, a gazillion people are craning their necks to get a better look at your motorcycle. This happens like clockwork everytime you head out on the Continental GT. I suspect the eponymous Bentley actually gets less than this level of attention.

You do have to hand it to Royal Enfield. The ContiGT does look the business. From the deeply, gloriously red paint to the contrast with the chrome bits, the motorcycle looks tremendous. You can almost come away thinking the motorcycle was a simple design because the lines are extraordinarily restrained. However, that tells you how good the designers are. They've successfully resisted the temptation, indeed the easier solu-

tion, to cruft up the bike with bits and bobs. And it is this lack of ornamentation and a superb sense of proportion that makes the ContiGT such a marvellous looking motorcycle. They really have nailed it and while we rarely delve deep into the subjective assessment of design, the ContiGT is the best looking motorcycle on sale in India right now bar none and across all classes.

However, it isn't flawless. Both the build quality and the finish levels can stand a lot of improvement. When you look closer, and you've no choice, the bike is that great to look at, you'll notice the ugly welds on the frame, the vibe dampers on the engine fins don't really sit right, the odd bit of electrical tape will work itself loose and flap about, the screws holding the rubber splashguard will

**Canon**

Images in this story were shot on a Canon EOS 6D with EF24-70L f/4 IS USM lens. We use this combination as it offers the best balance between high image quality, high ISO performance

OD Rating ★★★★★  
Price ₹2.24 Lakh\*  
OTR Mumbai

- + Styling
- + Braking
- + Feel
- Vibration
- Mirrors/exhaust not standard
- Build and finish

# Retro gold

We finally get to ride and test the new Royal Enfield Continental GT in its biggest market in the world – India

Words **Shubhabrata Marmar** Photography **Varun Anchan**

always have at least one missing... A lot of work that has gone into the motorcycle which makes it vastly superior to all of the other Royal Enfields. And yet, something small and cheap like a Suzuki Hayate has better finish and build.

What would I change on priority? First, I'd mount a heat shield where it protects the rider rather than hides an ugly catcon. The number of people walking around the office with holes in their riding pants or melted plastics on their riding boots isn't funny. Second, I'd work on the engine vibration because it loosens things and left unattended, they'll start falling off – that's where the splashguard screws keep going and as I write this the left mirror stalk has worked itself loose and rotates slowly as you ride. Third, I'd get the

frame guys to work hard at making cleaner welds or ideally eliminating them. I'd bring the bike to a point where it looks as great from three feet away as it does from thirty.

## ENGINE, GEARBOX AND PERFORMANCE

The engine is, in effect, the least changed part of the motorcycle. The engine is based on the 500cc UCE but is stroked out to hit 535cc. The extra cubes are further helped by work on the intake setup, on the ignition curves, a lighter crank and more. All of this is aimed at allowing the engine to rev quicker. The engine does make 29PS at 5100rpm and 44Nm at 4000rpm of torque in the process but the difference in feel from the engine is more about how it revs rather than how much extra per-

formance it brings.

On the move the GT feels like it moves fast but the numbers say otherwise. It takes 4.3 seconds to get to 60kmph which is a welcome 1.2 seconds quicker than the Thunderbird 500. Then the GT hits 100kmph in 12.01 seconds, which is a whopping 7 seconds quicker. Top speed again, is 131.3kmph (actual, speedo reads an optimistic 139kmph) which is again about 15kmph faster. It is a rocketship? Not really but within the Royal Enfield family, the new cafe racer creams all of its brothers.

Numbers aside, the motorcycle remains quite interesting to ride. It certainly is happier to gather momentum than any other Royal Enfield I've ridden. Getting it up to about 90kmph is easy and unless you're revving it hard, quite calm. The primary hold up actu-



ally is something I've touched upon already – vibration. There is some starting at about 3,000rpm and by 3,800rpm, there is enough to give you pause. Riding it flatout needs you to ignore fairly heavy vibes, the kind that makes hands go numb rather quickly. So despite the 130+kmph top speed, highway cruising at anything past 105kmph isn't going to be as easy as you think. Finally fuel economy figures. We managed to see 25.3kmpl in the city and 36.1kmpl on the highway which means the overall economy is 28kmpl.

I must also note at this point, that this performance is with the aftermarket RE exhaust and not the stock one. This exhaust isn't par-

ticularly well made or finished but it does release a lot more of the thump – which is nice – and should allow the engine to go a bit quicker. The gearbox isn't perfect – shifts are heavy in feel and not always positive – but it is nice enough so that the near-invisible neutral light is a bigger irritant than the actual shift quality.

Overall, the RECGT is the nicest Royal Enfield to ride and I cannot wait for this engine to make its way to other Royal Enfields. I suspect a big step forward would be to rubber mount the engine. Rubber mounting may have been impossible with the older frame where the engine is part of the structure but a cradle frame like the one of the GT now has should permit it.

## HANDLING, RIDE QUALITY AND BRAKING

Harris are clearly not toddlers at chassis work and this is clear as soon as you ride the motorcycle. The ContiGT is the best handling Royal Enfield there is. We even rode it at the race-track where it tracked far truer than any Enfield before it, the pegs weren't grinding away to glory like most other Enfields and it is actually possible to ride it at a fair lick without too much drama. You also have to mention the contributions of the sticky Pirelli Sport Demon tyres that work hard to make all of this handling possible. That said, it isn't an effortless motorcycle to ride fast. Steering requires effort and getting around a twisty road at an elevated pace will require some muscle.

The lighter weight and lighter wheels also give the GT better ride quality though the improvement is noticeable rather than a revelation. The heavy footed feel of the Enfield over bumps is still the primary sensation and the suspension feels sporty and stiff rather than supple. The handlebar position – a requisite for the look as well as the role of the motorcycle – makes it harder to adjust your riding position



Simple meters pack a lot of information. The well-made bar-end mirrors are not standard equipment

to relieve yourself of the bumps and their shocks. That said, if you're looking for exquisite ride quality get a Hero Impulse, not a Continental GT – that isn't what you buy the motorcycle for.

The biggest improvement in terms of dynamics for me is on the brakes. This Royal Enfield is the surest stopper of the whole range and by a considerable margin. Whether on the road or on the track, the brakes never lack for power and there is always a good amount of feel from the levers. You do notice the heft of the motorcycle when you're braking but the ContiGT stops really rather well. Me? I now want Royal Enfield to offer ABS and you can be sure that they will – it will be mandatory in Europe to offer ABS before long, so RE R&D should already be hard at work implementing it.

## VERDICT

The Royal Enfield Continental GT is, as I said at the launch in UK, without any doubt the absolute best Royal Enfield there is. At ₹ 2.14 lakh on-road (add another ₹ 8,350 for the accessories) or below in all of India, I believe it is also a spectacularly priced motorcycle given that it runs superb Paioli rear shocks, sticky Pirelli Sport Demons, aluminium rims and so forth. What isn't included in the price, of course, are the bar-end mirrors (₹ 4000 in



These are some of the best brakes and the new 535cc engine is the most powerful on an Enfield so far

Mumbai) and the exhaust in the photos (₹ 4,325 in Mumbai).

However, it is extremely important to understand why you are buying a Continental GT. Which is why we have compared it to the KTM 390 Duke – same price – in the next story. On purely objective parameters, the RE Continental GT doesn't have any standout attributes apart from its styling and its feel. There are, for its price or lower, motorcycles that will outperform it, whether in a straight line, around corners, at a racetrack or out on the highway. But there is an emotional component to owning the GT which is tangible when you ride one, but extremely hard to capture in words and that is the real draw of the motorcycle. It is for the emotional appeal that you buy a Royal Enfield Continental GT.

As an aside, that also puts Royal Enfield at

a very interesting crossroad. They've shown their willingness to look outside for help in development, something everyone else already does and it has brought them a tremendous result in the motorcycle. But at the same time, they've also shown a shrewd ability to capture the emotional aspect of a niche motorcycle like the ContiGT. The question is what comes next. When RE starts working on a completely new engine platform - that is the logical next step - will it favour feel or go for outright engineering and match the modern bike step for step? A combination of the emotional aspect with thoroughly modern performance should be, to my eyes, what it takes to make Royal Enfield the world's largest middle-weight motorcycle player. But that's a choice they have to make and we have to watch for. In the mean time, we'll be out riding the Continental GT if you don't mind. **OD**



## Specifications

### DRIVETRAIN

Type	Air-cooled single cylinder
Valvetrain	2 valves
Displacement	535cc
Max power	29.1PS@5100rpm
Max torque	44Nm@4000rpm
Fueling	Fuel injection
Power to weight	158.15Ps/ton
Gearbox	5-speed (1-down, 4-up)

### Suspension

Front/rear	41mm forks/preload adj twin coils over gas-charged dampers
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### Brakes

Front/rear	300mm disc/240mm drum
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### Wheels & Tyres

Tyre (F/R)	100/90-18 / 130/70-18
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### General data

Kerb weight	184kg
Fuel tank capacity	13.5 litres

### Performance

0-60kmph	4.33s
0-100kmph	12.01s
Top speed	131.3kmph
0-400m	17.86s@110.48kmph
40-100kmph (4th gear)	11.30s
40-100kmph (5th gear)	16.38s

### Efficiency

City/Highway/ Overall	25.3/36.1/28.0kmpl
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Price: ₹ 2.22 lakh (on-road Mumbai, with accessories)