

Plus-sized fun

1300cc of girthy KTM round Cadwell's tight curves is a mandlebar-wrestling laugh

Photography Simon Lee

2018 KTM 1290 SUPER DUKE R CHRIS NEWBIGGING



I LIKE HOW the Super Duke ploughs its own furrow. Different looks, a different engine and chassis to every other naked gives it unique appeal. Those two massive pistons hogging up and down, and an open riding position on a quality chassis makes it a brilliant, several-laughs-a-minute road bike. And it's good on track – it holds a respectable position on the Rutter Test leaderboard, and the launch on Qatar's Grand Prix track is a great memory for me. But Cadwell, my chosen first track jaunt on my 1290 R, is not Donington or Losail, where the KTM can stretch its legs and use the width of an international-spec circuit. There are bumps, gradients, cambers and unique direction changes crammed into a strip of asphalt not even half the width in the places. The Super Duke's whopping grunt and girth might work nicely, or work against me.

The Super Duke has been rolling nicely on a pair of Michelin Road 5 sports-touring tyres, handling well and not overstepping the limits of rubber I suspected might be a bit too all-rounderish for a bike so lairy. But wet, dry, cold, hot, slow or fast, the R5s have done everything I've asked. The big tread grooves are a great conversation starter, too – everybody wants to know what those weird tyres are...

They also entitle you to a spot on the £50 Michelin trackdays – Power Days – even though they're not strictly recommended for track use. Michi's tech man Tony Charlton recommended running them at 31 front/34 rear and no less to keep them happy, but advised they'll have a very obvious limit when pushed. As I fully expect from rubber like this. But I wanted to know where that was, as they've stepped up so well.

Another perk of the KTM is the many functions of its dash – the tyre pressure monitor system comes in useful for warm-up laps. I've checked the readings against accurate gauges, and they're cock on. Bring up the readout, get out on track and keep one eye on it. You can use it to back up your feel for a warm tyre – once



THE SPECS

£14,465

As tested

170.89bhp

104.84lb.ft

Measured

215.2kg

Wet, measured

MILES SO FAR

2791

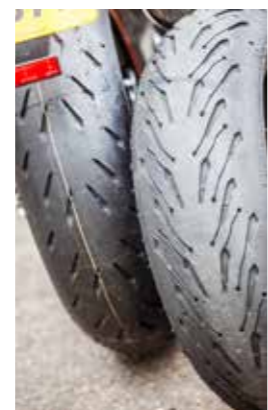
BEST MOMENT

Not getting black flagged for the KTM's monster wheelie habit. Cadwell marshalls know the score...

CONTACT

www.ktech suspension.com
www.moto.michelin.co.uk

▼ Michelin Road 5s (right) have been surprisingly adept



◀ GTC Motorcycles get busy with the fitment of Michelin Power RSs

MONTH FOUR



Third gear takes care of most of Cadwell

both have increased by around 3psi, they're good to go.

The Road 5s put up a decent performance: it takes the second session and a bit more confidence on my part to figure out where the limit is. The front gets a little vague in high-speed corners as you transition across the very open tread areas – Charlies one and two notably. But there's enough warning that you don't need to overstep the mark.

The rear is pretty good, although once it got hot it did step out suddenly twice: in fairness, I was driving very hard and early with traction control set to level two. One out-of-the-seat moment was enough: an admirable performance, but I tapped up the Michelin truck for a pair of Power RSs for later.

The focus switches from tyres to the bike again: the KTM is instantly happier with sports rubber to play on. Charlies is taken in full confidence, and it hooks up and drives with only a bit of movement. The traction control is good – even forgetting to turn the ABS off beforehand doesn't ruin the fun entirely, it just grumps at late braking once in a while.

Fast corners are the bike's limit – it laps up everything from the Gooseneck to Barn, mostly in third – only needing second briefly for the chicane. It grunts up the Mountain from low down, wheeling from before the normal point and refusing to drop until you shut the throttle fully. A gear higher than normal is the key – even when it doesn't sound like it, the most efficient drive is found going from low in the revs and using the range. Keep the revs up and you're past peak torque at 6500rpm, so better to let it seemingly chug out, but you're using the best bit of the motor's power.

It's better with more grip, but it's still a tall, wide bike, so high speed confidence isn't 100%. It's fast, but lacks a little on a few corners. A small price to pay for the versatile lunacy it offers the rest of the time. But there's more to come from the chassis: I've already dialled some K-Tech wisdom into the stock suspension, but there's the option of the WP fork/shock upgrade. It might just want a set of full-on track tyres to claw back that little bit sportsbikes pull out on corner entry and at the apex: it's there, but needs something to unlock that critical bit of front end feel. Investigation required... 🏍️



Chris had a pop at pulling forks up, but stuck with what he had

'It grunts up the Mountain from low down, refusing to drop the front until you fully shut off'