

g position, which seemed to all the different shapes and of those of us on a test ride; of leg room, sensibly placed bars a broad and long saddle won se from everyone. As did the stantial windscreen, which kept worst of the weather away n us as we wound our way ng the breathtakingly scenic p of Dunloe. ight and narrow roads were the er of the day, which also allowed enty of chance to try out the bike's ility. Despite new wheels and the her additional components, the odel's suspension is unchanged om the standard 650 - telescopic oil springs on the front and a link- pe coil spring on the rear. The model looks far lardier than really is, proving more than apable of slicing its way along the ightest of bends, including uphill hairpins. The V-Strom XT is a

commendably stable package, which works well with its neutral riding position to inspire the rider to push harder without ever taking you out of your comfort zone. It rolls into bends with ease, holds a line well and responds positively when you get on the gas and drive out of corners.

At just 68bhp, the power on tap from the bike's V-twin motor is hardly unnerving. Ringing its neck on wet roads never once led to any moments of concern, while riding the bike on a remote Atlantic beach proved the ultimate test to assess the engine's linear delivery.

Riding on dual-purpose Bridgestone Battlerwing tyres, traction was surprisingly hard to break. And when the bike was sliding, the commendable connection from the throttle to the rear wheel meant that it was always easy to determine exactly what was going on beneath you.

Taking on a few river crossings and riding over rocks also proved the perfect chance to put the XT's new wheels to the test. Suzuki acknowledged the standard cast wheels on the V-Strom 650 limited its versatility. The same can't be said for the new steel-spoked items, which sit on light but strong alloy rims.

I actively went looking for potholes to hit or rocks to climb; no matter what went under the 19in front, 17in rear combination, I had no problems with durability throughout the course of the test. It most certainly proved up for whatever I could throw at it.

For typical green lane work, the XT is undoubtedly well suited. Even in the crashing department. Unfortunately, one of my colleagues came a cropper during the day, but the bike's protective crash bars meant that very little damage was done to the bike; it was picked back up and ridden away with just a few scuffs.



The new 650XT is available in four colours.



While we weren't smashing our way through hedgerows to test the durability of the handguards, I can still confirm that they did a top job of keeping the freezing cold wind and rain from reaching the core of our hands. Add to this equation the bike's three-stage heated grips and I'd go as far as to say that I felt pretty cosy out in the elements.

My only criticism of the package is the niggly challenge of adjusting the span of the front brake lever. Before the ride commenced, I spent a couple of minutes trying to move the lever inwards by turning the dial. But the inside of the covers run close to the turn dial, which meant I had to take my gloves off and fettle

around a bit more to get the set-up I was after. A small thing to note, but it's worth being aware of.

Otherwise, I really did struggle to find anything unpleasant about the XT. If you like what you've seen, you'll be glad to know that the XT's are in dealerships now. Get yourself along for a test ride.

TECH SPEC

Price: £7499 (£6899 for standard machine)
 Engine: Four-stroke, dohc, liquid-cooled 90° V-twin 645cc
 Power: 68bhp (50.5kW) @ 8800rpm
 Torque: 44lb-ft (59.7Nm) @ 6400rpm
 Wet weight: 215kg
 Seat height: 835mm
 Tank size: 20 litres

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