

XT is ready for anything

'Gale force winds and sideways rain? Bring it on'

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As the North Atlantic crashes into the dramatic, jagged rocks below, it's all too easy to forget about the Suzuki V-Strom 650XT I'm riding up the south west coast of Ireland. There's a gale blowing and the rain is coming in almost horizontally from the sea - yet, with all these distractions around me, I'm gliding along with supreme ease. The spec'd-up new XT already feels like an old, familiar sidekick.

This friendliness is perhaps the V-Strom's greatest strength; it's incredibly easy to ride, just as the standard model was when I rode it some years ago. A significant reason for that is the 645cc V-twin motor - one of the best engines of our time.

Originally starting out in the SV650,

point where it's super-smooth, free-revving and easy for anyone to use. Although it's only 645cc, it has the punch to make overtakes a breeze and the straights between corners fun and involving - it even sounds a little cheeky as you rev it at a standstill. If you're feeling lazy and leave the bike in a high gear, it'll pull cleanly from around 2000rpm. There's no V-twin lumpiness here.

When you run out of straights the brakes provide ample stopping power without being too overwhelming on the initial pull of the lever. ABS is standard and can't be switched off, but even on wet and sometimes snowy Irish roads, it takes some rather ham-fisted stops to get the ABS to intervene. When it does cut in the ABS is smooth and predictable, though if you're serious about off-road riding the non-switchable ABS could be off-putting.

Trail Wings as standard, a dual-purpose tyre that can cope with light off-road work. They cope fine with a brief ride on soft sand while on wet roads they were more than adequate - the balanced and neutral handling of the bike providing no surprises.

Ergonomics play a big part in XT's comfort. The standard seat height of 835mm feels natural for my 6ft 1in frame, the pegs nicely positioned so as not to bend my legs too much. If the stock seat isn't the right height for you, Suzuki offer higher and lower options.

Although the seat at first felt comfortable, towards the end of a day's riding it began to feel harsh and punishing. If you're serious about spending long days in the saddle, the seat will need to be changed. And you could be spending quite a bit of time in the saddle between stops. Suzuki claim it'll do 71mpg, although we only managed 47.3mpg on country roads; still enough to see

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