

FEELING PEAKY?

Climbing the walls with too little off-road riding, Garry, Chip and Ben spend a day on fierce Peak District trails

By Ben Miller
Photography by Chippy Wood

Too much of the time, my Honda CRF450X sits in my kitchen, brooding. Under chains and covers in a garage, Chip's nearly new 250 KTM and Garry's 350 EXC do the same. *Bike's* off-road machines just aren't getting out enough – this month I realised my Honda hadn't turned a wheel in anger since August's Dawn to Dusk race. Time to put a date in the diary.

When that day dawns, unseasonably warm but overcast, it feels like Christmas – there's nothing like the prospect of a vast English breakfast followed by muddy fun to get you up and into the shower. Despite the cloud, the rugged beauty of the Peaks is undiminished – the landscape just tries harder here.

We meet guide Boyd Emmerich and his Husaberg 450 and head off. Boyd's experience means he can offer constructive criticism of our riding, as well as lead us down the best, entirely legal trails in the area. So complicated are the legalities of trail riding, exacerbated by recent legislation changes and an inexplicable lack of decent signposting, that a guide or extensive map research are the only ways to be sure the trails you're riding are okay. As well as local knowledge, Boyd's got a nice line in understatement. Late morning and we're about to make our way down the side of a hill – 'towards the bottom it's a little washed out', he says.

I find myself following the others down. 'Washed out' doesn't cover it. Torrents of rainwater have eroded two five-foot deep gullies in their haste to get down off the vast, exposed hillsides. In them, rocks the size of wheelbarrows lie at every conceivable angle. Down the middle, a raised, six-inch wide strip of tarmac – the last remnants of what was once a road – offers a smooth and tempting path, if you can stay on it.

Boyd and his Husaberg pick their way down like some kind of four-stroke mountain goat. Chip's two-stroke KTM isn't far behind, pausing only with a stall halfway down. I lose the front early on, running along the earth bank on the end of my handlebars,

before cautiously dropping off towering stone steps to the smack of rock on heavy-duty sump guard, despite 13 inches of ground clearance. But the star of the show is Garry, whose off-road hours can be counted on two hands. With just one stop, when his KTM gets wedged between two boulders, he's at the bottom: no crashes, no broken bones.

Just half an hour later, more understatement – 'it gets a bit rocky further up'. And apparently Everest gets 'a little technical' after Camp 3. Stone steps perhaps a foot in height lead off, one after another, snaking up a steep hillside. For Garry, who's getting his first taste of rock riding, it's one hell of an introduction to the art. Unperturbed he gets stuck in, Garry's tendency to open the throttle as much as possible, as often as possible, doing him favours as his light, lithe KTM bounds off, bumping its front wheel up one serious hit after another. Momentum is key and Garry's found it – let the obstacles slow you and stability and control fall away with your speed. I know the theory but the CRF and I make a meal of it, tackling the last few rocks with flailing legs and a wild front wheel.

Mountains conquered, the day continues on a huge variety of terrain, from quick sections on hard-packed tracks to river crossings; first-gear tricky bits to fast, flat-turn practice in an old quarry. Even a puncture to Chip's heavy-duty front inner tube fails to spoil things – the nearest compressed air line happens to be next to an awesome cake shop. But too soon we're forced to turn for home, the sun now low in the November sky. Climbing another ridge, a stunning winter sunset takes our collective breath away. We hit some of the most spectacular trails of the day as a blaze of warm light sets the woodland alight with fiery hues.

Over a tea back at Boyd's, the feel-good hit is tangible. When too many days run into one another, amorphous, finishing one with a well-weathered bike and a contented tiredness in your bones is special.



THE SPEC SHEET KTM 350EXC RACING



Price	£4000
Engine	250cc, 2v, sohc, single
Power	34bhp (est)
Top speed	70mph (est)
Miles this month	60
Miles total	210
Accessories	£0
Running costs	£0
Typical mpg	n/a

THE SPEC SHEET KTM 250EXC



Price	£4100
Engine	249cc, two-stroke, single
Power	35bhp (est)
Top speed	80mph (est)
Miles this month	40
Miles total	280
Accessories	£80 (KTM bash plate)
Running costs	£15
Typical mpg	n/a

THE SPEC SHEET HONDA CRF450X



Price	£3250
Engine	449cc, 4v, sohc, single
Power	38bhp (est)
Top speed	80mph (est)
Miles this month	40
Miles total	1263
Accessories	£219 (stand, handlebar and risers, clutch cover and seal, replacement Cyra brushguards)
Running costs	£230
Typical mpg	n/a

Overlander Trail Tours



With over 15 years' experience on dirt bikes, an encyclopaedic knowledge of the legal trails of the Peaks and an easygoing approach, Boyd is a great choice, whether you want to improve your riding or just ride some superb trails. OTT offer guided group rides on your own bike or one-to-one days on either a Yamaha WR250 (perfect novice bike) or CCM 604 (good for those learning to handle a bigger machine). One-to-one days on a hire bike cost £225, while a day's riding on your own bike in a group of three will cost £65 each. Visit www.overlandertrails.co.uk for more, or call 01625 668966.