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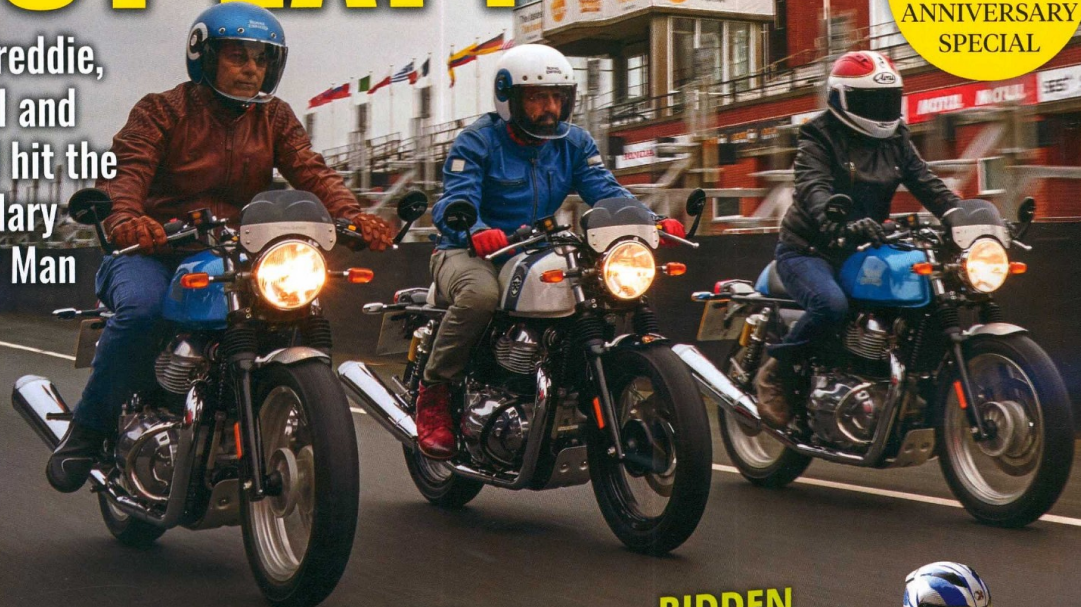
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## HOT LAP!

Fast Freddie,  
Sid Lal and  
the Ed hit the  
legendary  
Isle of Man

**14<sup>th</sup>**  
ANNIVERSARY  
SPECIAL



### FIRST RIDE

BMW S 1000 RR M Sport

### TESTED

Hero Xpulse 200

### RIDDEN

H-D LiveWire



### SHOOTOUT

BMW R 1250 GS  
Adventure v  
Triumph Tiger  
1200 XCx

### FIRST RIDES

KTM RC 125





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# Feature



ROYAL ENFIELD CONTINENTAL GT 650 AT THE ISLE OF MAN

# Riding with the Legends

Siddhartha Lal, “Fast Freddie” Spencer, and Aspi Bhatena spend a day following the hallowed route ridden by IOM TT competitors and return with an extraordinary tale of a singularly splendid ride



Story: Aspi Bhatena & Sarmad Kadiri  
Photography: Nigel Harniman

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## ROYAL ENFIELD CONTINENTAL GT 650 AT THE ISLE OF MAN

*There is no perfectly shaped part of the motorcycle and never will be, but when you come as close as these instruments take you, remarkable things happen, and you go flying across the countryside under a power that would be called magic if it were not so completely rational in every way.*

— Robert M Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry Into Values*

This thought sits perfectly on us as the team at *Bike India* decide to rustle up something special and magical for our 14th anniversary special issue.

Picture this: A meet-up on a tiny island between England and Ireland. A legendary place which for over 100 years has been a sacred land for motorcyclists — a land of heroes — driven by the independent spirit of the island.

The Isle of Man (IOM) is known as the Mecca of motorcycling and has its own captivating story to tell. It boasts of a rich history of trailblazers astride their mechanical beasts that grant them a place far above lesser mortals. To honour the greats like Mike Hailwood, Giacomo Agostini, Joey Dunlop, John McGuinness, and others, we bring three motorcycling legends together on these iconic roads.

### Let's introduce you to the geniuses:

**The Champ:** "Fast Freddie" Spencer is one of the greatest motorcycle racers and the only one to win the 250-cc and 500-cc world championships in the same year. Now he's back at the MotoGP helm as the chairman of the FIM MotoGP stewards' panel.

**The Creator:** Siddhartha Lal has turned the fortunes around for Eicher Motors. He introduced several modern motorcycles that transformed Royal Enfield, making it one of the most sought-after biking brands globally. And, above all this, he is an avid motorcyclist.

**BELOW:**  
The Conti GT with the IOM TT leaderboard and map in the background





‘What I really liked about the Continental GT 650 is its agility, its character, and the fact that it’s fun’

—Freddie Spencer



**The Critic:** *Bike India* Editor Aspi Bhatena is a difficult man to impress. He has been around for a while and has tested a spectrum of motorcycles right from raw two-strokes to modern machines packed with electronics. Since he has raced at the Isle of Man TT twice, this is like a “homecoming” for him.

They are riding the retro-cool Royal Enfield Continental GT 650; a bike which we have ridden in Santa Cruz (USA), then closer to home in Goa, and now we take it a notch higher — on the most demanding and historic racetrack in the world..

As the three meet at the IOM, Aspi points out that it’s going to be a special day since they would be riding a historic motorcycle at a historic place. Freddie adds, ‘I was looking forward to riding Royal Enfield bikes as we were talking about the company’s history. Riding and developing a motorcycle is all about passion. It’s this passion and history that brings us together. So, when you bring that to the Isle of Man, then it’s a great day!’

This incredible Mountain Course is carved out of the island’s public roads. Our three heroes kit up and get ready at the start-finish line — excited and raring to get a taste of the iconic 60-kilometre track. They are the first to ride the new Royal Enfield Continental GT 650 café racers on this legendary racetrack as a tribute to motorcycling brotherhood.

Starting off at a cautious pace, the riders get familiar with the retro machines, the track, and the remarkable excitement in the air which can only be experienced on these island roads. As they quicken the pace, the three riders relish the thrill, at every corner. And there’s no shortage of it, with nearly 200 turns on the course. Every section is deeply steeped in history and the riders encounter each one of them — Bray Hill, Quarterbridge,



Ballaspur, Cronk-y-Voddy, Gooseneck and the Guthrie’s Memorial S-turn corner, named after the six-time Isle of Man TT winner, Andrew James Guthrie. They take a much-needed coffee break to soak it all in, share experiences, and get their heartbeats back under control.

Sipping a cuppa, Freddie reveals, ‘For me, coming to the Isle of Man is always special. The average racing speed here is almost 135 mph (217.3 km/h), that too with two hairpin turns!’ Siddhartha is quick to add, ‘Now that I see up close what goes on here... the condition, the road, the environment... it’s just crazy. It’s absolutely gorgeous to ride here. So far as I am ▶

**ABOVE:** At the Joey Dunlop memorial at The Bungalow on top of the mountain



## ROYAL ENFIELD CONTINENTAL GT 650 AT THE ISLE OF MAN

concerned, this is the perfect place. To think that during TT races the average speed is over 200 km/h... and I couldn't find a spot where I would have liked to do those speeds (*laughs*). It's the most hallowed space in the motorcycling world. Being here and riding a motorcycle is very exciting.'

While the banter continues, Aspi throws a question at Freddie since he has ridden many different motorcycles. 'How was your experience riding the Royal Enfield Continental GT 650?' 'I started riding my first bike when I was four years old and I've ridden many different bikes. People say that I make riding a motorcycle appear so easy and my reply is that you have no idea how hard it is to make it look that easy. It's the same while engineering a bike, as it's also an intuitive thing. Having ridden the bike today — and I don't say this lightly — what I really liked about the Continental GT 650 is its agility, its character, and the fact that it's fun. I can see the time spent on the bike's development and engineering,' he says. The three-time world champion adds, 'I have said this in my book, *Feel*, about the crew members who worked on my GP bikes... I could tell which mechanic had worked on my bike every time I got on to the bike simply by noticing the care of the assembling. It is how the bike is developed that makes the difference.'

After the caffeine stop, the trio get back on their steeds and race ahead to complete this iconic ride. The sight, the sound, and unknown adventure ahead make this lap one of the most interesting rides of their lives. All around the course, one spots the familiar three-legged symbol everywhere. This is a triskelion dating back to the 13th century that reflects the island's motto — *quocunq̄ue jeceris stabit* — which, roughly translated, means 'whichever way you throw me, I shall stand'. It's interesting how it weaves in so well with this ride... three very different people who have fought all odds to reach where they have and all of them coming together and bonding over a common passion — motorcycles.

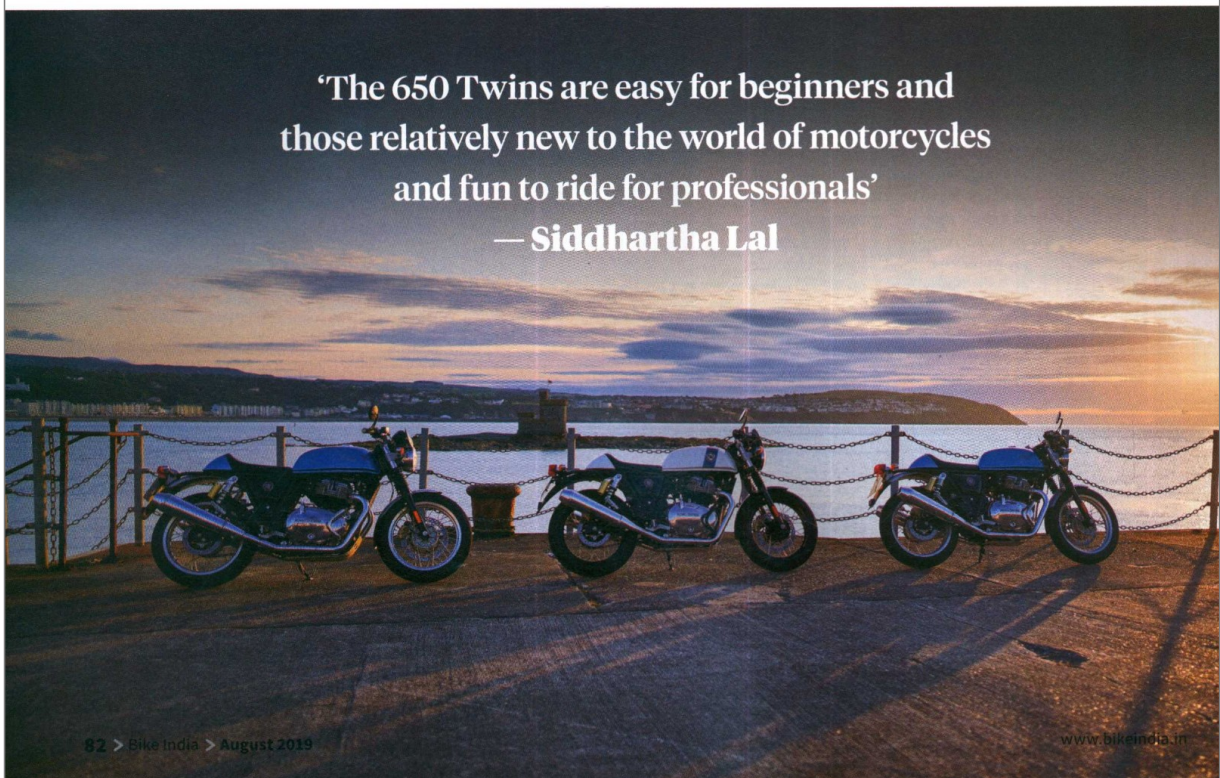
Taking their helmets and riding gear off, the three great riders take a few minutes to absorb the feat they have just achieved. Riding the Continental GT 650, made by the

**BOTTOM:**  
The three  
gorgeous GTs  
arrive at the IOM  
ferry terminal

**BELOW:**  
Fast Freddie  
gets airborne at  
Ballough Bridge



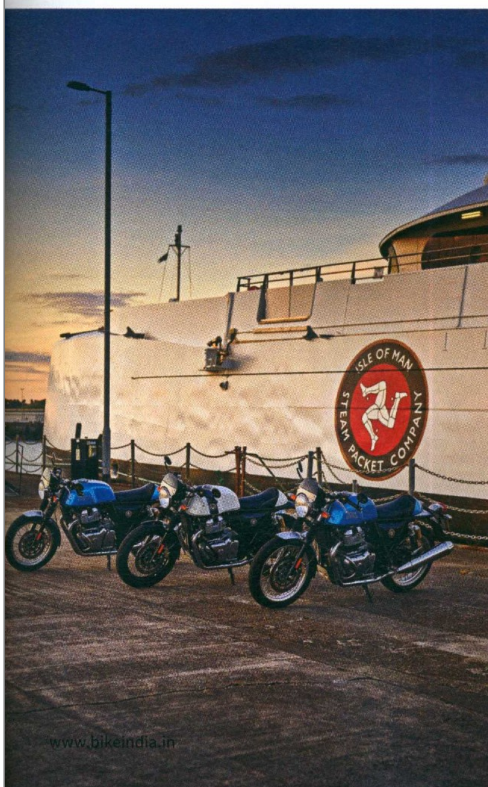
**'The 650 Twins are easy for beginners and  
those relatively new to the world of motorcycles  
and fun to ride for professionals'  
— Siddhartha Lal**







Freddie leads  
The Ed and  
Siddhartha at the  
Gooseneck



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Changing conditions:  
bright and sunny at the  
Gooseneck, this is what it's  
like a few miles down the  
road at The Bungalow

world's oldest motorcycle brand in continuous production, on the iconic Isle of Man... History has been written today!

Once they soak in the moment, the trio share their excitement about the track and the bikes. Siddhartha is the first to enthuse. 'Wow! It's my first time ever at the Isle of Man. Obviously, I had heard about it and to actually ride here has been absolutely outstanding. It's been great to ride with Aspi and Freddie — two amazing riders. I've been just following the two of them and trying to keep up (*laughs*). It's been wonderful!'

Freddie says, 'A rider of my experience...', Aspi interjects, 'Experience and calibre, might I add'. They all laugh and then Freddie continues, 'The 650 Twin doesn't get in the way of what I want to do. It allows me to make adjustments when I want to, at the percentage I want to, and at the pace I need to. Because I may not want to add lean angle, I just might want to change the radius. A less experienced rider will be equally comfortable because it is so predictable in the way it responds. The predictability and agility together create confidence — that's what riding is all about. The priceless characteristic of response and feedback makes it fun.'

Our Editor sums it up by saying, 'What I like about the motorcycle is that the ►

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## ROYAL ENFIELD CONTINENTAL GT 650 AT THE ISLE OF MAN



The Conti GT keeps the Joey Dunlop memorial statue company

### ‘What I like about the motorcycle is that the engine is very under-stressed’

— **Aspi Bhatena**

and effort spent on engineering the Continental GT 650 have paid off because this balance is the most difficult thing to reproduce. It’s the coolest thing and something very special in a motorcycle.’

An overwhelmed Siddhartha says, ‘That’s music to our ears, because in our development process that’s exactly what we wanted. The 650 Twins are easy for beginners and those relatively new to the world of motorcycles and fun to ride for professionals... and who can be more professional than Freddie to comment on these motorcycles? So, hopefully, it does what it’s supposed to do — meet the demands of the entire spectrum of riders.’

As Lily Brooks-Dalton has written in *Motorcycles I’ve Loved: A Memoir*, ‘Motorcycles are self-discovery’s favorite vehicle’. This seems to sum up all the emotions of the brilliant ride at the Isle of Man.

In addition, we may say, it’s been an equally exhilarating adventure for us at *Bike India* for the past 14 years. So, here’s to many more... **BKNS**

engine is very under-stressed. It’s in a very low state of tune with a low compression ratio. So, it’s not finicky, nor does it overheat — and does what it should do: keep running on without any fuss.’

Sharing some insight on this, Freddie reminisces about the days when he was developing race bikes. ‘I can tell you that the most difficult thing to do was to find that balance of power, response, and agility and to have the desired stability and still have the feel and feedback. I’d put a premium on that. The time

(L-R) Aspi Bhatena, Dean Coxson, Troy (behind Freddie), Freddie Spencer, Aanoor Pandey, Mark Wells, Siddhartha Lal, and Jack Fowler. The Critic and The Champ with the team who made it possible

