

Mud, but no sweat or tears

Yamaha's Tenere Experience is a fun, no-hassle introduction to off-road riding

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Like a lot of people I've started to find that bombing around on sportsbikes isn't as much

fun as it used to be – there's a speed trap around every corner and the roads are overloaded with abysmal drivers. So, even though my few off-road experiences have shown that I'm short on talent, I find myself increasingly drawn to naked and adventure bikes.

There are countless enterprises springing up to cater for the British biking public's new appetite for biking adventures of various sorts. The more adventurous can book trips to Spain or even further afield, but in the UK there are two major players – the BMW Off Road Skills course or the Yamaha Off-Road Experience, both of which are located in Wales.

To promote their Super Tenere, Yamaha have now expanded the Off-Road Experience to include a new option, the Tenere Experience.

Run by the Jones family from their farm in mid-Wales, the Tenere Experience is aimed at people who want a relaxed off-road day, or who want to test either a Super Tenere or a Tenere in an off-road environment. Where the Off-Road experience is on more dirt-biased WR machinery, the Tenere Experience is predominantly on the on-road Tenere, which limits how extreme the riding can get.

The day starts with a safety briefing and our first glimpse of the Super Tenere. Having not ridden one before, something soon becomes apparent: it's a beast. It tips the scales at 261kg fully fuelled, leaving me a little concerned

“Although in no way converted to off-roading, I thoroughly enjoyed it”



After a safety briefing the day's riding can begin in earnest



Lifting up a 261kg bike is all about the right technique



Stunning scenery adds to the experience

return to the farm and take a quick blast down some narrow tarmac roads before heading into the forest.

The morning's riding involves a pleasant mixture of fairly gentle trails, that are basically gravel or slightly muddy tracks, as well as a few road miles. Every now and then we approach a slightly trickier section that may involve deeper mud, a bit of water or a slightly more extreme gradient, but nothing appears too fierce. There isn't a feeling of 'ride here, learn something'; it's more a journey on varying surfaces that is as much a tour as it is an off-road skills day.

The afternoon follows a similar pattern and, with my initial anxiety about off-road riding beginning to wear off, I find myself enjoying the trickier sections.

I've not used a bike with traction control off-road before and for a novice it's letting me find grip and allowing me to keep the power on and worry about where the bike is going, rather than if it's going to stall.

And on the gravel paths the traction control is good enough to allow me to experiment with sliding the rear end by gassing it up out of corners. Even the ABS, which you can't actually turn off on the Super Tenere, doesn't cause any problems and like the traction control it proves to be a help rather than a hindrance.

Although I'm in no way converted to a life of off-road riding, I thoroughly enjoyed the Tenere Experience as it offered me exactly what I had hoped it would – a hassle-free day that felt like a ride out with your mates. Yes, all the instructors are vastly experienced off-road riders, but none of them felt the need to push their expertise on us – the day wasn't about that. Should you get stuck they were more than happy to give a helping hand, but I didn't come on the day to become an off-road riding legend, I just wanted to have a laugh on some bikes – which is exactly what I did.

The Super Tenere is a road bike that,



It's amazing what you can find in the panniers



Thankfully the local pubs don't have a dress code

in the right hands, has some level of off-road ability. However, for most riders most of the time it's far more suited to gentle trails with the occasional tricky bit if you're feeling brave. I liked the combination of fire tracks, slightly testing off-road and road riding that the Tenere Experience offered as it felt more like an adventure than a day at school. To be honest I would have loved to have just ridden around the area on the roads all day as the scenery was so stunning, however, by taking to the tracks we got a view that no road rider ever could, which was an added bonus.

about the prospect of taking it off road. But it comes with ABS and traction control, and the Metzeler Karoo tyres look like they mean business.

Heading through one of the farm gates, we start on a fairly gentle trail that is little more than a farm track. It's more a jaunt to get accustomed to the bike than a proper test and, even though the more experienced riders make light work of it, I instantly tense up and approach every bump at walking pace.

The Tenere doesn't feel that cumbersome, but I'm still not comfortable with the sensation of the wheels moving around on the loose surface, a feeling that isn't helped by the panniers acting like huge sails in the gale force wind, making the bike crab sideways. But having survived we

▶ ESSENTIAL INFO

What you get for your money

Cost of course: £250 a day, £450 two days inclusive of bike hire, fuel, lunch, insurance and instruction

Extras: £20 kit hire, accommodation at a local B&B

Contact: www.yamaha-offroad-experience.co.uk

How to find it

The course is based around Hafren Forest in Mid-Wales. The nearest town or village is Llanidloes on the A470.

