Honda has been mostly silent and near absent from the offroad market for too long. It’s back ... and it ain’t doing it by halves.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ASHENHURST
You don’t need me to retell the history of Honda’s Africa Twin (AT) but in the interest of being accurate for us in Australia it’s simple; there is no history. Regardless of the endless stories of epic journeys across foreign lands and in spite of the fact that the bike attained a legendary status by the time of its demise in the early 2000s, Australia never saw an official Africa Twin import so we really never fostered a deep affinity for it like the Europeans did. So right here and right now in 2016, we’re getting to know the bike for the first time, and without giving too much away, there really is no better time to do it.

Honda sold the Africa Twin from its earliest sneak-peeks on the internet as a light and thin bike that’s built for offroad but I gotta be honest, I wasn’t buying that line. Honda’s displayed interest in adventure and enduro has been severely lacking for the better part of a decade and I had settled comfortably into the fact that the days of a hardcore Honda on the dirt in any capacity other than motocross were gone and I’d tell that to anyone that asked. So fast forward to the day I picked up the Africa Twin we tested and then visualise me eating my words in large chunks.

The AT is a good looking machine with aggressive lines and not overly derivative of any other bike. Our test bike came with Pirelli MT90s which we’d never used before but it helped bolster the offroad-ready look of the bike. The Twin is indeed thin down through the line from the seat to the footpegs (not thinner than an R1200GS but thinner than a V-Strom), it then opens up to accommodate the 18.8 litre tank. The seat itself is comfortable and sits at a height that may be a little low (in relation to the footpegs) for anyone at or above the six-foot range but for anyone that’s had trouble swinging a leg over a Ténéré this is a blessing. The footpegs themselves are a joke. Way too small to be of any value to anyone and aside from being not much of a base, they get painful to stand on in no time. How they ended up on a bike that’s otherwise fitted-out nicely with excellent levers all-round, good grips and ‘bars with a great bend is beyond me. They really are shit.

The LCD screen looks brilliant but suffers a little with the sun behind you and it can be tough to see the gear selection when you’re standing up. Not the end of the world but I’m nit-picking because from here we ride and there’s not much to complain about.

Honda Africa Twin CRF1000L Tech Specs
- Engine: liquid-cooled, 8-valve, 998cc parallel twin
- Bore/stroke: 92 × 75.1mm
- Power: 69kW (93hp) @ 7500rpm
- Torque: 97Nm (72ft/lb) @ 6000rpm
- Transmission: 6-speed manual or DCT semi-auto
- Dry weight: 208kg (212kg with ABS, 222kg with Dual Clutch Transmission)
- Wet weight: 228kg (232kg with ABS, 242kg with DCT)
- Fuel capacity: 18.8L
- Length/Width/Height: 2335 × 875 × 1475mm (92.7 × 34.4 × 58in)
- STD, 2355 × 930 × 1475mm (92.7 × 36.6 × 58in) DCT
- Wheelbase: 1575mm
- Seat [standard/relaxed]: 870/850mm
- Clearance: 250mm
- Tyres: 90/90-R21; 150/70-R18
BIKE TEST: 2016 HONDA AFRICA TWIN

TURN THAT KEY

The engine sounds deep and aggressive and purposeful. This would be one of the best sounding stock pipes in the adventure market. When you’re running it’s too quiet to really enjoy but at any stop there would be few men who could resist revving it just for the sake of hearing it.

Our test model was the base offering of three Africa Twins available. Ours was built more-so for the urban adventurer given it’s without bashplate or handguards but it also comes in at the surprisingly low price of $15,499. For $16,999 you get both those items plus ABS (switchable at the rear) and traction control, LED blinkers and a centre stand — this would be the model we’d naturally gravitate towards. For $17,999 you get all that plus Honda’s Dual-Clutch Transmission (DCT) which sees you switching between ride modes instead of changing gears manually — yep, it’s an auto. From all reports this system is the duck’s nuts but we haven’t ridden it yet so we’ll stick to talking about what we got. And given what we got hasn’t got a bashplate or handguards we had to back things down slightly from time to time, but to be perfectly honest not as often as we should have, and the reason is simple; this bike is insane to ride in the bush.

The easiest way to sum-up riding the Africa Twin is by saying what Honda has done here is build a massive enduro bike. The engine itself isn’t a thunderbolt-throwing, power factory and in fact feels a lot like Suzuki’s V-Strom 1000, which can only be a good thing. It’s torquey and geared maybe a little low which makes hills and slow-paced tricky sections easier to navigate, but drop the hammer or flick the incredibly light slipper-assisted clutch and the bike will respond. It’s not slow by any means and when it takes off

THE YEAHS AND NAHS

YEAH!
• Light handling
• Exhaust sound
• Great ergos
• Good power with plenty of traction
• Honda kept the CRF moniker (CRF1000L)
• Light clutch
• 21-inch front wheel

NAH!
• Awful footpegs
• Expensive genuine accessories
• No 12-volt socket
• No heated handgrips

The AT tips-in and feels totally familiar to anyone that trailrides because it responds like a big dirtbike
The engine sounds deep and aggressive and purposeful. This would be one of the best sounding stock pipes in the adventure market.

For me personally, this is a special bike. It's what I want in an adventure bike in that it doesn't compromise the on-dirt performance.

The Africa Twin is a quick-steering bike that remains stable at speed, and gives good feedback without a heavy clunk. In fact it feels like a V-Strom 1000 that can conquer the variety of offroad terrains. Honda's own engineers has been on-dirt performance. One of the most other adventure bikes. So what sets this bike apart is when the tar gives way to a dirt biker. It's what I want in an adventure bike in every sense of the word and as an adventure bike there are few that you find the bike you're buying. For me personally, this is a special bike. It's big but doesn't feel that way. It's super impressed with its predictability and versatility. We rode the Africa Twin on everything from mud to hard dry rocky hill, with a few hills and a lot of very fast tracks that you didn't think down on, and the Pirellis were up for all of it. I'd have the point at a fast downhill on loose sand and required a tight bend to find a situation it isn't go on. But that's hardly surprising. The MT90s are pretty much anything up to wet clay or thick mud, and again, this is an on over 200-kilogram bike being ridden much of the time in a bit mental way. The tyre looks like it would give less mileage than the Rally as well which is another plus as is the fact that they make it in an 18/21-inch configuration in the first place. Nice one.

I thought Honda had forgotten about us dirt-dwellers. It may have, but it's back. It's not the new 450X so many are waiting for, but this is a dirt bike in every sense of the word and an adventure bike there are few that could keep up when shit gets rough. I want one. If you one happily (the mid-price model is the go although you could keep up when shit gets rough. I want one. If you one happily (the mid-price model is the go although you could keep up when shit gets rough. I want one. If you one happily (the mid-price model is the go although you could keep up when shit gets rough. I want one. If you one happily (the mid-price model is the go although you could keep up when shit gets rough. I want one. If you one happily (the mid-price model is the go although you could keep up when shit gets rough. I want one. If you one happily (the mid-price model is the go although you could keep up when shit gets rough. I want one.