

Vertical limit

Royal Enfield make a purpose built motorcycle for the land they so love

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This is the motorcycle formula India has always needed! A simple, affordable adventure tourer that can take you almost anywhere in comfort. The Royal Enfield Himalayan is the bike a lot of people have been waiting for even riders who would normally never associate with the brand. Easily one of the biggest and

most eagerly anticipated motorcycles of 2016 in this, the Himalayan. Royal Enfield ensured we rode the bike in the most fitting environment and brought us to a snowy and biting cold Shimla. We experienced the bike over two days on a series of riding routes curated by Vijay Parmar of the Road de Himalaya himself. Basically the very environment the bike was created for. So let's get to it!

DESIGN, STYLE AND QUALITY Call it what you will but the Royal Enfield Himalayan is easily the most purposeful looking motorcycle to ever come out of India. Many wished for more design flair but I actually like the way the Himalayan looks a lot. It's plain, no nonsense and you know exactly what it was designed for with just one look.

There's literally just a headlamp, fuel tank, fenders (three) and wheels surrounding that brand new engine. Is it classically good looking? Not really, and I will concede that the high-set headlamp and strangely shaped litre fuel tank looks a little quirky. But the fact that form follows function and the simple, yet clean approach to the design massively appeals to me. It's a

bike that you immediately want to ride the moment you set eyes on it. The details on the Himalayan are fairly good. The black chassis seems well finished but there are a couple of rough looking edges like on the end of the fuel tank or on the triple tree. Royal Enfield tells us that these are still in the last stages of pre-production and the bikes that go on

sale will have better finish. The instrument cluster has a timeless design but it isn't very easy to read. It offers a lot of information including two trips with average speed, a clock, digital compass, thermometer and gear indicator. There's also a hazard light button but it's a small one on the cluster that isn't effortless to access. The headlamp runs a powerful 12V



The 411cc single-cylinder engine is brand new but you wouldn't know it from the basic spec sheet that mentions a two valve head and carburettors. 22Power isn't fantastic but vibration is almost completely ironed out. Dials offer comprehensive information including time, ambient temperature, two trips and a compass but are not that easy to read. Metal frame around the tank holds two optional jerry cans



66/5W bulb while the slim tail gets an LED lamp. There's no 12V power outlet or USB port on board, which would have been a welcome feature on a motorcycle like this. But that's an easy addition with plenty of solutions available. The rubber mounts on the footpegs are removable to expose steel toothed pegs beneath. I never considered removing it because the rubber is very grippy, even with wet and muddy boots. The riding position is welcoming. On the main stand, the Himalayan looks intimidatingly tall but the actual seat height is just 800mm, identical to a KTM 390 Duke. Speaking of the stand, the Himalayan's is the hardest one to use that I've ever encountered. The Himalayan feels slim between the legs and the wide handlebars offer great leverage. The fuel tank will accommodate most riders but I found my knees coming in contact with the end of the recesses. But if you're less than six feet tall this should not be a problem. Standing on the pegs feels quite natural but the tank's finish is slippery, something that can be easily remedied with StompGrip pads. It was a cold and wet ride all through and we even hit some snowfall around Shimla. We weren't able to go fast enough to experience high speed wind protection from the tall windscreen but it was definitely effective at deflecting some of the chilly wind off our chests. The screen is clear and vision through it is good. Another nice point is that when standing on the pegs you have a clear view of the front wheel which is a confidence booster in the dirt.

ENGINE AND PERFORMANCE The LS 410 is a brand new engine, with LS standing for long stroke—78mm bore and 86mm stroke. It's built from scratch but the LS 410 is no high tech unit compared with some of the stuff available on the market. The single cylinder engine is still air-cooled, but benefits from a small oil cooler that we're told keeps the temperature stable under hard running. The engine runs a relaxed 9.5:1 compression and uses a simple two valve, SOHC head, a decision that we're told was taken to boost bottom end performance. Fueling is provided by a carburetor that has been jetted to perform from sea level to 12,000 feet. Royal Enfield tells us that

high altitude performance will drop, but not to the point of seriously affecting the ride. Rapidly tightening emission norms means fuel injection is definitely on the cards for the future. There will be the argument that these design choices are kept within the brand's heritage but let's not forget, they also help keep costs down. Perhaps more important is the fact that this engine uses a counterbalancer and is finally rubber mounted, both helping reduce vibration significantly. Within the first few miles, it's clear that this is the smoothest engine to ever come out of Royal Enfield. Of course, there are some minor vibes but they don't distract. Interestingly, the Himalayan is only available with an electric start while a heavy duty magneto ensures push starting is possible without a battery. Having toured significantly on a variety of machines, I'm convinced that 25 horsepower is a good starting point to cover long distances in India at decent pace. The LS 410 comes very close with 24.5PS produced at 6,500rpm. But being a Royal Enfield, the riding experience is going to be all about the torque that comes with the thump. 32Nm is a very generous amount and it's just 3Nm less than what the frenetic 372cc motor from KTM produces. However, in the Himalayan, torque peaks from a low 4,000-4,500rpm which is 3,250rpm lower than in the KTM. Royal Enfield says that given the amount of low end torque, a 6-speed gearbox simply wasn't needed so this bike sticks with a 5-speed. Many of you will be wondering how the engine sounds. It's a bassy but smoother, subdued version of the typical Royal Enfield thump and the upswept exhaust makes some lovely pinging noises on a closed throat that remind of the first Triumph Tiger 800. Surely there will be some who will pump it up to tractor embarrassing, ear-drum assaulting volumes with a swapped exhaust but I think the stock bike sounds nice enough.

RIDING IMPRESSIONS The engine has plenty of low end pull although there is a slight surge at the bottom as the power comes on around 2,000rpm. The gearbox is a little notchy between first and second gear and I also experienced quite a few false neutrals through the day.

particularly when shifting between first and second gears. Second onwards, the gearbox shifts well and even responds to clutchless up shifts without much complaint. Performance is decent and the Himalayan doesn't feel painfully slow but it won't blow your socks off either. We didn't get to go beyond third gear for much of the day so more will only be revealed in the full road test. For now it's clear that the Himalayan offers unburied, unstressed performance. Basically just what you'd expect from a Royal Enfield. I do have some concerns about how fast a cruise the Himalayan can hold on an open highway, but that's an answer only the road test can provide. The earlier mentioned snow, fog and wet roads haven't allowed us to explore the performance as much as we'd have liked. But on these winding and broken roads the Himalayan chassis displays plenty of confidence. It feels a bit firm through small bumps but offers good feedback on what's happening below the big 21-inch front and 17-inch rear wheels. Larger potholes and craters are absorbed well with a plush feel. We spent most of our day on rough and broken tarmac where the Himalayan impressed with its composure and never snapped back in an unpredictable manner. I was a bit apprehensive of the blocky seat

Gripp XL tyres and while they don't offer much feedback, there's surprisingly good traction, both on dirt or tarmac. A two piston Bybre calliper bites on a 300mm disc up front and it has been set up to be easy to use on dirt. There isn't much bite at the lever but a firm pull will slow the Himalayan down without drama. The rear disc brake is effective and it's easy to lock up the rear wheel and get the bike sideways in the dirt. Maneuverability is very good. You sit high up and the turning radius is quite tight. Clutch action is light and friendly as well. I can see the Royal Enfield Himalayan being a great bike to commute on in daily traffic. Our time with the Himalayan in and around Shimla shows that it can handle the terrain it was named after well. All that torture testing in this environment has resulted in a bike that feels tough. The relative lack of vibration means things falling off the bike shouldn't be an issue either. At ₹1.78 lakh, on road Mumbai, the Himalayan is good value and to us, the best Royal Enfield you can buy. There are still some questions to be answered about touring ability and outright performance, but the Himalayan is a commendable effort by Royal Enfield. It's a moment of pride and one of the best motorcycles to have come out of India to date. **ED**



The Himalayan comes with this grab handle/luggage rack as standard to which optional hard luggage can be mounted. An oil cooler helps regulate engine temperature under hard usage. Rubber footpegs are super grippy and feature toothed metal pegs underneath. The mirrors are not very effective and could use longer stalks



ON ROUGH AND BROKEN TARMAC THE HIMALAYAN IMPRESSES WITH ITS COMPOSURE AND DOESN'T SNAP OUT IN AN UNPREDICTABLE MANNER

Royal Enfield Himalayan	
Type	SOHC 2-valve 411cc single
Max power	24.5PS@6,500rpm
Max torque	32Nm@4,000-4,500rpm
LxWxH(mm)	2,150x840x1,360mm
Kerb weight	182kg
Price	₹1.78 lakh on-road Mumbai
+	Capable chassis, smooth engine, valve
-	Looks not for all, not quick enough