

Bikes

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BMW had a reputation not so long ago for building solid, if not stolid, motorcycles and very fast, technologically advanced cars.

Fast forward a few years and the new breed of German engineers are producing magnificent 1600cc six-cylinder sports tourers, cutting edge four-cylinder 1000cc superbikes, and they virtually own the on-off-road adventure market with their recently updated, water-cooled boxer twin 1200cc motor which serves duty in a number of models in various states of tune.

Now BMW seems to have invented a new category with a model which just failed to come out in time to qualify for South African Bike of the Year but could easily sweep the boards in next year's competition. The S 1000 XR Adventure Sport is possibly the best all-round road bike I've ever swung a leg over – and I've been doing that for nearly 50 years and have owned more than 16 motorcycles. There are

faster bikes – few; possibly better handling – even less; but none that I've ridden that combine the two so perfectly.

Although designated Adventure Sport it is shod with road tyres and has cast 17in wheels so at best it'll probably be able to cope with the odd dirt road, but otherwise it is purely a freeway weapon and urban jungle machete. The engine is based on the supremely successful S 1000 RR superbike four-cylinder motor which has been detuned slightly for a little less top end but substantially more bottom and mid-range torque.

According to what I've read, the top end is limited to 260km/h but no doubt there will be plenty of nerds with laptops doing a roaring trade of re-mapping the electronics to override this. There are four riding modes – rain, road, dynamic and dynamic pro as well as infinite

variations of the suspension from fairly plush through to race track firm.

When I rode the red XR from Ryder Motorrad in Pinetown, which aptly looks like a giant predatory wasp, it was set in dynamic mode with the suspension correspondingly "firmish" – perfect with a bit of a safety net of traction control and suspension set for a swift blast through to Camperdown.

It's only the second time I've ridden a bike with a quick-shifter – the other was the H2 turbocharged Kawasaki – and this one also works beautifully with wonderful blips on the change-downs but I must admit when things speeded up I forgot all about it and reverted to the clutch but everything still worked with machine-gun precision.

I've never been one to carve through traffic but this bike is so

effortless and responsive that I must confess that Field's Hill and Key Ridge became a bit of a game of mobile chicanes. With the unbelievably linear but ferocious response of the potent engine, ultra-slick six-speed gearbox and the fairly wide, upright bars it's almost instinctive to position the bike in the right spot as you flick through the traffic.

Some of the road tests I've read complain about vibrations but apart from a slight tingle lower down in the rev range it just got smoother the harder I revved it.

As close as it is to perfection if one is going to nitpick there are possibly a few flaws – some of which could easily be addressed while others one can't do much about.

The small screen, which can be manually set up or down, is effective and I found very little helmet

buffeting even at very high speeds but surprisingly quite a bit of air hitting my shoulders which tended to make the front end a little too light for my liking when really pressing on, but a quick check on the internet revealed many aftermarket models available already.

The saddle height was little tall for my short legs but there is an optional lower version available but the shape will be harder to change. The shovel-like contour places one in the right position so that you don't move back under fierce acceleration but on a long trip it could be a real "bummer" as any experienced biker will tell you how invaluable it can be to move the cheeks around a bit to keep blood circulating and pain at bay. The saddle might require a bit more surgery to sort out than the screen.

However, there is something that

no one can change – unless we strike a real oil gusher off the KwaZulu-Natal coast that drives that rand through the roof – and that is the rather eye-watering price of R212 450. But, if by some miracle, a large chunk of change were to thud into my bank account I would order my S 1000 XR tomorrow – red, if you please, which would match up perfectly with the Montego blue 1600 six in my garage.



NO EQUAL: The Adventure Sport BMW S 1000XR – an angry red wasp with a serious sting in the tail. PICTURE: TREVOR BRUCE

