

LONG
TERM

■ TEST GEOFF SEDDON ■ PHOTOGRAPHY BRENDON THORNE

APRILIA
MANA

Mind your Manas

Seddo begins to learn the ins and outs of Aprilia's quirky Mana

By nature, I'm a lazy person and theoretically well-suited to the CVT-equipped Aprilia Mana. Without clutch or gears, it's reputed to be an easy ride but our first date was a fizzer when I didn't even make it out of the car park.

Stretch eventually shared the secret of starting the 850cc V-twin engine – hold on front brake while you crank it – and gave me a five-minute rundown of the various drive options, which I promptly forgot. I had him set it to Touring as a precaution and haven't touched it since.

As the bike had previously been ridden by Sam Maclachlan, it was on reserve, so the next challenge was to find the fuel filler, there being a large glove-box situated where one would normally put one's petrol. We eventually found it under the pillion seat.

The hard work done, I settled down to enjoy my new long-term friend, and it's all been plain sailing apart from an embarrassing exhaust leak which prompted a brief while-we-waited trip to a dealer at the end of our first week together.

Getting mobile is exactly like taking off on a postie bike, except postie bikes are louder and have gears. I initially had a bit of trouble trickling through traffic, never quite sure when the centrifugal clutch was going to hook up, but I now have it sussed and it's all good.

Surprisingly, the Mana offers great engine braking, and the way the clutch automatically disengages as one approaches a stop is natural and intuitive. My clutch hand is enjoying the break on the dreaded city commute, although my left foot is occasionally tricked into attempting an up-shift on the still-present gear lever. No doubt the lever is there for a purpose but I have no idea at this point what that is.

The constantly variable transmission (CVT) generally has the engine in its sweet spot, city or country, especially on a cruising throttle. A big handful is initially met with what feels like a slipping clutch, not unlike a sophisticated drag racing gearbox that keeps the revs high while progressively feeding the power through to the back wheel.

The CVT even came up trumps on a solo fang along a well-rehearsed winding road. I've never been a big throttle-and-brakes guy in the twisty stuff, too much like hard work, and was happy to let the engine find its own revs and do most of the braking.

Of more concern was the bike's stability through bumpy corners. Matho suggested I raise the rear-shock ride height to place more weight on the front. I tested his theory by bringing my weight forward over the 'bars mid-corner, and it seems to have done the trick without recourse to time-consuming tools.

Fuel economy has averaged 5.1L/100km over three tanks. The under-seat filler could be a pain on a trip but an added bonus is that you can top it up right to the brim without damaging external paintwork. Thus filled, it runs around 250km before reserve lights up.

The Mana suits me more than I thought it would and I'm enjoying riding it. The only downside I can see is it is still fitted with a pesky chain final drive, which needs lubing and adjusting. Shaft drive would be overkill, but a belt would make life even easier. 🍆

