

WHEN KTM ENTERED THE LION'S DEN

With a new 1290cc Super Duke expected next year, will KTM dare remake the most notorious video ever...

By Martin Fitz-Gibbons Photography by Gary Freeman / Redeye

GUITARS GROWL DISTORTED power chords. A cage fighter stands strong as he elbows his rival in the face. Fluorescent orange lines of an alien bike burst from the screen, its rider standing vertically as he wheelies past monochrome traffic.

The scene's set for two minutes of public-road mayhem: slides, smoking tyres, wheelies, swerving through traffic, sparking sliders and a jump replayed in slow motion from a dozen different camera angles. The film said everything about the manufacturer and everything about the bike. This is how KTM introduced the world to their first pure road bike, the no-holds-barred Super Duke.

In doing so they found themselves on the end of a backlash of criticism and complaint from more traditional, conservative corners, who didn't want motorcycling portrayed as anything other than clean, bright, wholesome family fun. So two years later, with the Super Duke's updated successor to promote, KTM decided to do the only logical thing: go even further. Just as with the beginning to their original film, they wanted to square up to their rivals face to face.

The Story

Joachim Sauer: The first Super Duke video was shot in France, in Nice I think. It was actually organised by a French crew. They used to work for a magazine, they were crazy guys. They offered to organise photography, riding and filming on their own. We just supplied them with bikes and a small crew from Kiska, our agency.

Gary Freeman: Everybody was talking about that first video. When I saw it, it was


THE WITNESSES



Joachim Sauer
KTM product manager and former European enduro champion.



Gary Freeman
Freelance photographer, the video shoot's official snapper.



Oliver Ronzheimer
Trials-turned-stunt rider, the video's anonymous star.

obviously a shock. What sticks in my mind the most is the jump over a blind crest and landing over a pedestrian crossing. The videos from other company were slick and glossy productions. They dealt with safety, responsible riding and having a lovely wonderful time while violins played in the background. The Super Duke film was just a vomiting orgasm of adrenaline.

Oliver Ronzheimer: It was like a Ghost Rider video, but with a KTM. The first time I saw it I was impressed by the rider.

JS: There were so many reactions. Most said how crazy, funny and great the video was.

There were some people asking if we really stood behind it because of the risk, but the positive reaction was so overwhelming that we said we should do another. So we thought, let's do the next one in the lion's den. Let's do it in Japan. Everybody told us we'd end up in prison.

OR: I'd been performing stunt shows for KTM, so I was well-known at their headquarters. One day Joachim, who was head of special projects, said to me, 'Hey Olly, we're planning something with the new Super Duke. Are you interested?' I said, 'Okay, sounds fun. When and where?' I was excited as I got information about our little trip. It was really ambitious to face the Japanese motorcycle manufacturers in their own country.

GF: I got a phone call with about a week's notice. I think they'd decided if they were shooting a video they might as well have a photographer too. I don't remember being told what it was about, just that it was in Japan. I must have joined the dots myself. They were taking a Super Duke to Japan to make a statement.

JS: We sent two bikes out some weeks before via air freight. As it was still early in the bike's development I carried two sets of plastics with the latest graphics in my luggage when I flew to Tokyo. I got the bikes ready, loaded them into a hired Sprinter van and drove to Kyoto. Our agency Kiska had built up a storyboard and involved another German agency to find locations and extras.

GF: We stayed in Kyoto but shot in Osaka, not too far away. When I arrived KTM and the video crew were already there. It was





Stills from the finished video, still up on KTM's YouTube channel at <http://bit.ly/KTMjapan>



No set-up here. 'The bicycle rider had to look at me and then lost his balance,' recalls Jochi Sauer

tremendously well-organised. They had translators, they found the extras like the geisha girls and the old man tending a bonsai tree. They weren't actors, they were people who lived in the area.

OR: The team was small but professional, well organised and focused. Every morning and evening the crew drove into Osaka and back to Kyoto. I was sick, I had a cold and almost everyone but me was sitting in a warm minivan. I was on the Super Duke for up to ten hours a day.

GF: The way we shot on the Osaka ring road was just so, so dangerous. We had a 990 Adventure camera bike and I was sitting on the back of it. I was also facing backwards and strapped to the rider with a harness. I had no way of holding onto the bike because I was holding and controlling my camera with both hands.

OR: We raced Osaka's highway like hell, braking, accelerating, passing cars left and right. You cannot ever do that in real life unless you want to be sent to prison for a very long time. It was just like being part of a video game.

GF: We went as fast and as hard as we could through the traffic. I couldn't see what was coming but I just had to go with it – in reverse, no matter what was happening and whatever way the bike was leaning. Accelerating really hard to get through traffic, then braking equally hard.

One time we were coming off a slip road and my rider came over the radio and said, 'We haven't got any brakes.' The only protection I was wearing were some kneepads over my jeans, a flip-up helmet and no gloves because I needed to operate the camera. When he parked the bike there was smoke pouring off it.

OR: Unfortunately I had to slow a little bit because I had to wait for the bike with the cameraman on the back.

JS: We did a lot of nonsense. A lot of speeding. Most of the time in Osaka, the speed limit was 60kph and we did kind of 120-140kph. When you're filming you really have to exaggerate what is going on. But there was not one car horn, not one bit of trouble from the police. If we had done this in Europe there would have been so many complaints. The Japanese people don't dare because they're so polite. It's the culture over there.

OR: The car drivers were always so friendly. We even got the occasional thumbs up and applause, or at the very worst a mildy irritated smile. It was very easy to anticipate what they would do in their cars. Their behaviour was excellent.

GF: KTM's priority was the video and I felt like I was trying to muscle in. Shooting video and photos together never works because they're technically so different. In the end I had to tell them it wasn't working and I wasn't getting anything. I suggested separating the two shoots.

JS: I took one bike with Gary and we shot the photos while Oliver was producing the video. We had to do a lot of early morning and late night riding. One time we went to a train station and the idea was to attract attention, to make it look like the Japanese were looking at this orange bike from Austria. There were thousands of people leaving the station, I was in front of them and Gary was above me on a bridge. How would you get their attention? I tried it with a burnout on the rev limiter. The bike was howling like hell, screaming, banging and popping and of the thousands of



Despite the racket there wasn't one complaint



KTM's agency found suitably Japanese extras

'We raced Osaka's highway like hell. It was just like being part of a video game'



Osaka must have the least road rage on the planet. Imagine getting away with this in London

people not one turned their head. That was kind of disappointing.

GF: Nobody ever looked round once. Nothing. There's this weird discipline running through Japanese culture and it seems to extend to not getting involved. Whenever we did get in trouble it was always with a tiny 't'.

JS: I thought we would have to stay much more on the strict, legal side, but it was easier than I expected.

OR: It was a fascinating and unique experience. As we finished I felt a kind of satisfied emptiness. I knew we did a great, naughty job.

JS: Looking back sometimes I think the video riding is a bit exaggerated, too many stoppies and wheelies. I would have

reduced it to make it more realistic. Today our videos are more civilised. There is an agreement with ACEM [the European Motorcycle Industry body] to not do these radical videos and photos any more. With this new attitude it will be difficult for a brand to produce a video like this again.

GF: At the time this was KTM's second video, so I thought they'd carry on doing it. I didn't realise it might be their last. I hope in the future somebody says, 'Bollocks, let's do that again'. When we ride bikes there aren't violins playing, there's wind blowing and you get cold and you get wet, but it's a lot of fun. I think KTM got closer to what it's like to ride a motorbike than many other brands ever have.

JS: For our product it was the right way to present ourselves. Our bikes want to be ridden that way. **Bike**