

Beyond Comparison.

Can-Am Spyder RT



Ride Review
by Geoff Wallace

What's that?"

It's not the first time I've been asked that question since taking the Can-Am Spyder RT on the road today.

At the traffic lights, around town, at the service station, the Spyder has been on the receiving end of quizzical looks, a few giggles, and pointing fingers all morning.

Bakery in Healesville, in the time it takes me to knock back a coffee and pie, I count at least half a dozen people walk up and inspect the Spyder. It certainly gets people talking. "Is it a bike?" seems to be the most common question.

It most certainly is not.

Despite sporting handlebars and the same Rotax 998cc V-twin engine as in the Aprilia RSV1000, and regardless of the fact that you need to wear a helmet and hold

a motorcycle license to ride one here in Australia, the Spyder has less similarities to a motorcycle than you might expect.

Getting into the saddle is easy. With the stability that the three wheels provide, you never have to worry about losing balance or dropping it.

At first glance, the cockpit might look a little intimidating with all of the various displays, buttons, switches, levers, lights, and speakers. It's all very Star Trek. Once you familiarise yourself with the instruments though, it all makes sense.

Sitting down in the relatively plush and wide seat is a pleasure, and the riding position is completely neutral and relaxed. It actually feels quite similar to sitting on a big touring bike. The pillion seat looks like a padded throne, raised and with a full back rest, and arm rests (which include heated hand grips and passenger controls for the integrated stereo system).



People young and old can't help but turn and stare at this unique looking machine with its twin front wheels and single rear.

I imagine that if a Goldwing had been cross-bred with a Seadoo jet ski and the offspring had been fed on a strict diet of growth hormones, and given a generous swipe of the definitely-not-ugly-but-intriguingly-interesting stick, this beast would have been the result.

Parked outside the Beechworth



The pillion also has fully adjustable foot boards to cater for the most vertically challenged or long legged among us.

It's hard not to comment on the sheer amount of luggage space on the RT. Front and rear luggage compartments as well as side panniers are integrated into the design nicely, and all together they offer over 155 litres of storage space as standard. If that is not enough, then there is an optional trailer available for the RT which offers another 622 litres of storage space.

No problems doing the weekly shopping run then.

The RT is the standard touring model designed for long distance riding and I reckon if you're going to do some serious km's across the Nullarbor, you would want to do it on this machine.

In fact, we were told that during the recent Can-Am Spyder Experience in Western Australia, they had given some

motorcycle tourers a test on the RT not long after they had ridden from the east coast across to Albany. After the test ride, they had spoken to the dealer immediately afterwards, traded their bike, and rode home comfortably on the Spyder. It's easy to understand why, and for a certain market this machine will be the perfect choice.

The operating controls are a bit different to a standard motorcycle. First, try reaching for the front brake lever, and you will soon discover that there isn't one. All Spyder models use a foot actuated

3-wheel braking system, which is operated in the same way as you would use the rear brakes on a standard motorcycle. This is tied in with the Vehicle Stability System containing traction control along with ABS and power steering. For parking, the RT model uses an electric operated brake via a switch on the console.

Starting up the Spyder is almost guaranteed to put a smile on your face. The V-twin Rotax engine is an absolute gem, and sounds a treat.



The various sports and touring models in the Spyder range offer versions in either a 5 speed manual transmission, or easy to use semi-auto with finger trigger shifting. Both versions have a true reverse gear.

Despite its' 420 kg weight, the RT goes surprisingly well. It has plenty of torque, and accelerating up through the gears the power delivery is smooth and predictable. Twisting the throttle is guaranteed to induce grins, as there is plenty on tap and fun times to be had on demand.

Visibility from the riders' seat is good, and the electric operated windscreen at full height offers complete protection from wind and buffeting. Very nice indeed for winter and wet weather conditions, but not so much for warmer months. At its lowest setting it provides some airflow over the top, but does seem to obstruct some of the vision of traffic in front.

Looking at the buttons and controls there are options to adjust the rear suspension to hard or soft,

set the cruise control, adjust the heated grips, and operate the stereo. The premium audio package includes a 4 speaker system with full iPod integration, and it actually sounds quite good. When your speed increases the volume adjusts automatically, and when you stop at the lights the volume decreases again, which is a nice touch.

On the road, taking the Spyder up and down hills, and through tight sections on wet and gravel littered roads at pace is confidence inspiring. Using the thumb and fore-finger paddles to change up and

down gears quickly is effortless, and the machine handles extremely well. Navigating tight turns can be done precisely, but the rider does need to be aware of the width of the vehicle and ride accordingly. No setting up for corners on the Spyder, you just pick a line and go for it.



Because of the twin front wheels, operating the Spyder requires less rider input but more physical effort than riding a bike. You pull on the handlebars to steer it in the direction you want to go, no counter steering, which seems strange at first, however you quickly become used to this with time in the saddle.

Leaning, or using your hips and knees in the corner won't do much for you either, because steering the Spyder is all down to the arms. After an hour of riding the Spyder through the tight stuff, you will probably be ready for a break.

Quick cornering on the Spyder can be a jerky and slightly frantic experience, and to turn and hold those two front wheels at speed requires a lot more effort than tipping a bike into a turn. I felt like the Spyder had more similarities

with a go-kart than a motorcycle in this respect.

Without trying to sound too Zen about it, on a bike you tend to feel connected with it as you move and lean, and use your body to help direct it, and there is a certain flow and harmony about it all. On the Spyder however, you simply sit on

it, somewhat disconnected, and go along for the ride.

It's difficult to avoid coming back to these comparisons, and that is probably one of the biggest challenges that Can-Am face with the Spyder and their market in general.

The Spyder is not a bike, it's not a car, and it's not trying to be either of these things. They have created a totally new category with the Spyder range, but because of the helmet and motorcycle licensing requirements, the market for Can-Am is restricted to bike riders, and what do you think riders are most likely to compare the Spyder with when they ride it?

So, because of this and some obvious visual similarities to a bike, comparisons are always going to be made between the two, despite them being the proverbial apples

and oranges.

Sure the Spyder looks, feels and handles differently from a bike, but does this mean that it loses the fun factor? Not at all, it just delivers it in different ways to a motorcycle.

Once you have spent some time on the Spyder and become familiar with the handling and its' on-road capabilities, you can have an absolute blast on it.

The Spyder is something uniquely different in the market place. It has a great engine, comfort, and practicality for touring. It has all the right ingredients in there.

Ok, so the Spyder is not likely to appeal to all riders, but to fully appreciate it and make an informed decision, you really need to spend some time in the saddle. The Spyder wants you to ride it, and you really should oblige.

It's a bit out there, like the alternative kid at school, who might look and act a bit differently, from everyone else, but once you get to know them better they usually surprise you.

For more information, or to experience the Spyder visit: <http://www.spydrexperience.com/>

