

People might sneer, wrongly, at the Honda engine but this is a gorgeously-crafted bike and a compelling ride



FIRST TEST

ARIEL ACE

‘For performance and prestige, the best British bike yet built’

By Phil West
GUEST TESTER

It seems odd to say it, but there's never been a better time to buy a British bike – and there's possibly never been a better British bike than the Ariel Ace.

While revived Triumph, Norton and Brough have been grabbing the headlines, lesser-known Ariel, revived by Simon Saunders and his small-but-impressive team in Somerset in 1999 have been quietly developing a motorcycling follow-up to the phenomenally successful Atom lightweight car.

The Ace, a performance roadster bespoke-built around Honda's VFR1200 powertrain in a range of specifications from girder-forked cruiser to Öhlins TTX-equipped sportster, is the result.

MCN first tested the prototype, in girder-forked form, last year. “It rides like a Honda road bike, sounds like a Honda MotoGP bike,” gushed tester Michael Neeves. Twelve months on, it's in production: five different examples were mid-built alongside Atoms and Ariel's new Nomad off-road car when we visited the Crewkerne factory last week; the first deliveries are ‘imminent’ and bikes will be hand-built (each by one dedicated technician, with a signed plaque to show for it) at the rate of one a week for the rest of the year, rising to two per week in 2016. When better, then, for MCN to find out exactly what its exclusive group of owners are going to get?

And to cut straight to the chase, the Ace is hugely impressive – for three reasons.

First, the Ariel operation, modest but modern in its handful of converted, semi-rural farm-buildings, is compact and impressive in its own right. This is no impersonal ‘factory’, there's around 20 highly-skilled staff, a couple of roomy, fully-equipped workshops, a few crisp meeting rooms and offices sprinkled with Ariel memorabilia – and... that's it. Buy an Ariel and you become part of the family. It has the personal touch to match the high-tech.

Second, the Ace is motorcycling art made metal. The centrepiece, of course, is the magnificent, milled-from-solid, aluminium frame which takes a full 70 man-hours to craft and hints at the signature ‘exo-skeleton’ chassis of the Atom. I simply can't think of another motorcycle trellis so striking. The girder forks, meanwhile, if you select

them, are an equal wonder intended as a ‘nod’ to historic, girder-forked Ariels, which also partially explains the choice of Honda's V4 – as a ‘nod’ to Ariel's famous square four.

But just as impressive is the build-

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quality – the fit and finish: cables and braided hoses are neatly routed; panels fit immaculately; surface finishes are perfect. On top of that componentry and ancillaries are simply as good as your budget allows: The base Ace uses mostly stock VFR cycle parts – wheels, fork, shock and so on. After that it's up to you. Girder forks with Öhlins shock are £3515 (plus VAT); the Öhlins fork here £2996 (ditto), a matching rear shock £701. Glorious BST carbon seven-spoke wheels (complete with delicious milled alloy hubs) cost £1992.50, a ‘sports’ exhaust £484 while the carbon rear hugger is £275 and radiator covers £425.50. You get the idea.

And third, as a ride there's nothing quite like the Ace either. In this specced-up ‘sports’ trim (which totals around £32K), compared to the



Superbly plush Öhlins. You can also specify the bike with Ariel's girder forks



Fully-adjustable Öhlins shock at the rear too



With just one built a week, exclusivity is guaranteed

TECH SPEC

ARIEL ACE

Price	£32,000 as tested (but start at £20,000)
Engine	Liquid-cooled dohc 1237cc 76° V4
Power	170bhp @ 10,000rpm
Torque	95ftlb @ 8750rpm
Weight	235kg
Capacity	15 litres (different capacities available)
Seat height	825mm (745mm available)
Chassis	Milled aluminium twin spar
Contact	www.arielmotor.co.uk

NEED TO KNOW

Performance

'Proper' road sports c/o meaty, riotous 170bhp V4 and classy chassis. Think Speed Triple on Grade A steroids.

Practicality

Less extreme than a pure sportster so decent but so jewel-like you wouldn't want to use every day.

Value?

With just 100 bikes built annually its £32K defies normal parameters. A quickly-filling order book suggests they've got it spot on.



Your view is framed by the oh, so distinctive blue adjusters on the Öhlins forktops

girder forked 'cruiser' variant we tried a year ago, the Ace is a proper, unfaired road sportster similar in poise to, say, Triumph's original Speed Triple.

It's no upright 'super naked', instead the sports seat and fully-adjustable (and beautifully-crafted) rear-sets cant you forward to crisp clip-ons. It's not full-on sports bike, but not far off and the view ahead, framed by blue Öhlins forktop adjusters and that race-style LCD dash, is every bit as good.

The starter on the Honda switchgear fires the V4 motor instantly, fuelling and idling perfectly but with a fierce growl from the semi-open pipe more racer than roadster. Similarly, throttle and clutch are light and crisp, and it sets off as easily as any Japanese litre-bike. That level of refinement is rare on bespoke machines like this.

But best of all, it's a buffed-up VFR in a classy British chassis. The 170bhp V4 mill is meaty and somehow given another, lusty lease of life. The chassis is at once utterly stable and solid yet has steering that's light and precise and it's all finished with the serene gloss only Öhlins et al can give. Yes, it's hefty-ish - but on the road, where the Ace has been designed for, that actually helps.

Criticisms? Hardly any. Steering lock's a tad on the minimal side; the angular frame rubbed my inner thighs slightly and the sidestand lug, under the gear lever, is slightly fiddly. That's it. Even the mirrors work. I simply can't think of a British bike so potent, effective, refined and desirable. Ring up today and you'll get one exactly how you like it, in six months time. Most are going for the girders. **MCN**

MCN VERDICT

Build quality and refinement is a revelation for a low volume machine, as a lump of metal it's exquisite while the riding experience is a real-world thrill. For performance and prestige this is the best British bike yet.



WE LIKE

- Build quality
- Performance
- Style and individuality

WE DON'T LIKE

- £20k - and that's the basic one