

Metro Wheels

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TT Zero: Electric bikes with performance credentials are getting closer after an impressive run on the Isle of Man TT course, reports **GEOFF HILL**

A US team has set a new lap record for an electric bike on the famous Isle of Man TT course. MotoCzysz, based in Portland, Oregon, and rider Mark Miller notched a top speed of 135mph and an average of 97mph, beating the record set at last year's inaugural TT Zero Electric race by 10mph.

However, the team missed out on a £10,000 prize put up by the Isle of Man government for the first team to make a 100mph average lap. The race had to be delayed a day because of torrential rain, giving me the chance to find out more about one of the competing teams and the race to break the elusive 100mph barrier.

London-based Evolve was set up in 2008 by entrepreneur Alex Herman. Working in the construction industry and with a recession looming, Herman got out just in time with enough money to set up a courier company using electric scooters. The first batch bought from an English supplier broke down, as did a second batch from China.

Herman jumped on a plane to find out what had gone wrong and spent three months researching battery systems before returning and launching Evolve.

'Within the next year, we're hoping to break the world electric bike speed record by hitting 150mph,' says Herman.

'The existing record for distance on a single charge is 360 miles by riding from London to Brighton and back. We're aiming for 440miles.

'The technology for this has been around for 30 years, for example in milk floats and forklift trucks, just not at this speed. Apart from the problem of getting batteries to last longer, there's also the problem of getting rid of all the heat created.

'But we're getting there. We will be meeting Isle of Man treasury ministers about setting up production on the island, with the aim to start bringing out bikes in September and produce 25 a year, with the price likely to be £15,000. Like all new technology, that price will come down with time.'

Outside in a marquee is the obscure object of desire: a neat-looking machine called the Evolve Bolt based on a 125cc frame, flanked by a couple of cables and



Sparky: Mark Buckley puts the Evolve Bolt through its paces

a toolbox, rather than the oily rags, smell of petrol and detritus of a normal workshop. So if nothing else, electric bikes may well clean up the nation's garages.

I climb aboard and wind up the throttle, producing an enthusiastic whirring sound.

'Of course, in the future you'll be able to plug in your MP3 player with a soundtrack of Valentino Rossi or whatever you fancy, just so people can hear you coming,' explains chief engineer Mike Pallett as rider Mark Buckley (pictured left) wanders in.

An experienced TT hand, he was hoping for better luck with the Bolt than the two petrol bikes he'd ridden earlier in the week, adding: 'The shock absorber

exploded on one and covered the back wheel with oil coming out of a corner, and the engine caught fire on the other, so hopefully it's third time lucky with the Bolt.'

'I'm really looking forward to it after all the hard work the team has put in. Alex and the guys have listened to everything I've said in setting the bike up, and it's just like riding a normal bike, except for the noise.

'This is the hardest road circuit in the world, so you should be proud of any bike getting around it, never mind one produced by such a small team.'

The Evolve team was looking to repeat the podium finish of last year and bag the £10,000 prize but failed on both counts.

Of course, MotoCzysz took the honours, followed by defending champions Agni, a joint Indian-English venture, while local outfit ManTTx finished third.

Denied their podium finish, Herman is still in talks with the Isle of Man government about production, so watch this space.



Get set: Mark Buckley at the start of the TT Zero Electric race

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