

APACHE RLX 320 SPORT

Apache's RLX 250 used to be its top-selling quad. Then the 320 came along – and killed it stone dead. But how good a quad does £2625 really get you?

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BACK IN OUR JUNE ISSUE,

we presented an exclusive first test of Apache's thrilling new RLX 450 AX Sport, a lightning-quick performance quad that offers about as much fun for your money as the human body can bear. This has since proved an instant success for the company, but despite moving them on as fast as it can get its hands on them, the UK importer's top sales performer still comes from further down the Apache range.

Not much further down, admittedly. While the 450 was in the later stages of development, Apache's long-time best-seller was the RLX 250 – but then, last year, this was killed stone dead. It's still available, but according to the company it has received 'not a sniff in four months.'

Why? Because the buyers who would previously have queued up for it are now falling over themselves for the quad which, to all intents and purposes, has replaced it as the entry-level adult unit in the Apache range. The RLX 320 Sport combines the same basic body and frame as the 450 with the drivetrain from the 320 Utility featured in our July issue. It's a pure, simple leisure quad with no pretence at being anything else. It's road-legal as standard, and it costs £2625. Can you see yet why it's the company's best-seller?

The fact that the 320 is based on the same frame as the 450 should fill you with confidence, because that means it's over-engineered in the strength department. If a chassis can cope with the extra stresses of a full-house sports drivetrain, the reasoning goes, it's fair to assume that a smaller engine driving through a CVT auto box shouldn't pose any problems for it. And while this is the sort of logic that can get you into a whole lot of trouble, Apache's general quality standards suggest that it's a safer bet here than some; Taiwan-based manufacturer Access Motor is in a whole different ball park to some of the other Far Eastern factories supplying quads to the UK market, and without pretending to be in any way qualified in the field of metallurgy, the neatness of the welds around the chassis and transmission is absolutely beautiful.

The UK importer told us that Access Motor makes the RLX 320 exclusively for the Apache brand under a licensing agreement which prevents it from being sold as anything else. The Taiwanese manufacturer even makes its own engine, a 289cc unit which, it's candid enough to admit, is a copy of a Kymco original.

As we've mentioned, the liquid-cooled four-stroke single drives through a CVT auto box whose job here is to make life as easy and uncomplicated as possible for the rider. This feeds out via a chain to a live rear axle, and thence to a set of Kenda Klaw XCRs mounted on standard-fit alloy wheels.

As is usual on a bike of this nature, the back axle rides on a single coil-over shock and is checked by an inboard rear disc located to the left of a wide longitudinally mounted trailing swing arm. This carries a broad protector plate for the disc, chain and sprocket; it's a tough, heavy-duty affair, though being plastic rather than alloy there's only a limit to what it can shrug off, so it should by no means be seen as a licence to wreak abuse upon the bike.

At the front, dual independent wishbones support the bike on progressive rate springs and standard-fit oil-filled shocks. Mounted to the lower of the two wishbones, these are upgradeable to remote-reservoir gas units for around £175. There's a disc brake at each wheel, and between them you'll spot a modest little nudge bar extending forward from the frame.

It's not this that gives the bike its looks, however, but a sharply styled body which comes as standard in what Apache rather bravely calls Ferrari Red. Diamond Black Metallic is also available as a £399 option, or for another hundred on top of that you can choose a range of special colours including a lurid green hue or even, if you're feeling really foolhardy, shocking pink. As it is, the standard red looks pretty strong, with a deep black headlamp shroud and race-inspired graphics giving it a funky two-tone effect.

There's also the seat, of course, which carries Apache's own logo – something not every UK importer bothers with. The company says it's shaped to encourage you to use your





1/ Front suspension is independent, using unequal-length double wishbones

2/ Oil-filled shocks are standard, with gas-charged bypass units an option

3/ Footbrake pedal is well out of the way, helping avoid accidental operation

4/ 289cc engine is mated to a CVT transmission with dual-range gears



knees and, er, posterior to involve your body weight in the bike's handling and, despite the pungent reek of hot air that's normally attached to such claims, we found that it actually works. It's also very, very comfortable to sit on, which is as much about the seat itself as it is the big, wide nerf bars which carry safety nets and effective foot grips.

Elsewhere on the bike's body, you'll find a 12-volt electrical socket which helps give it a modicum of practicality. A bit of stowage space would be welcome, but there's none as standard unless you fancy unclipping the seat and trying to shove a few slender items underneath it; that's not what the small space beneath it is meant for, however, and given that it's just meant to sit there and be forgotten about we wouldn't have much confidence in its longevity if you're mistreating it this way over the long term. A much better idea, if you do foresee the need to carry stuff on your 320, is to spend the sixty quid it'll cost to specify a 35kg rear carry rack from Apache's options palette.

Also on this list is twist grip for the throttle, but unless you plan to stay pretty much exclusively on the road we wouldn't recommend this – the standard thumb lever is just fine. It takes its place on the bars

alongside a digital dashboard, key-operated steering lock and lever-operated mechanical handbrake, as well of course as all the switchgear necessary to achieve road-legal status.

There's also a good, big, chunky lever by the ignition keyway which operates the CVT transmission, allowing you to select between drive, neutral and reverse. It also operates a dual-range function; like many quads, the RLX 320 might not have four-wheel drive but it does have low box.

This allows it to tackle rough ground with a decent level of composure, though as you might expect it's better at speed on rough tracks than crawling over extreme terrain. It dealt well enough with what axle twisters we could find on Apache's test track, but it stands to reason that the most serious stuff would most likely find its limits.

As we've mentioned, the seat is very comfortable, but the bike's suspension was firmer than we expected. It's adjustable, but as tested I found myself standing up more than normal. You don't want for control, though – it might be rather bumpy on uneven ground, but it doesn't pitch and can be ridden aggressively with confidence from the word go.

That goes for its steering, too, which is very nicely weighted and provides loads of lock. The bike's balance is such that chucking it into corners and sliding the back round comes completely naturally, and we'd expect the optional gas shocks to sharpen this up still further. Having said that, for a gentler form of off-roading it's still pretty docile at green laning speeds, though the idle on our tester was set rather high and this, combined with the CVT box, meant engine braking was basically absent.

The RLX 320 is by no means perfect, but at not much more than two and a half grand it represents an enormously good value purchase. So long as you don't expect it to be an extreme off-roader or workhorse, it should serve you well, providing all the fun you can handle without breaking the bank and allowing you to join the ever-growing ranks of on-road quadders. There's a good chance that buying one of these as a first quad will lead you into further purchases a year or so down the line as your needs and tastes get more specific and sophisticated; in the meantime, though, it's a solid starter machine that'll put a smile on your face and, as far as we can tell, keep it there.

IN DETAIL



DIGITAL DISPLAY is reasonably clear to read and lends an uncluttered feel



LEVER-OPERATED mechanical handbrake is easier than most to operate



REAR SWING ARM is suspended longitudinally using a single coil-over



BASIC ALLOY NERF BARS with safety nets and integral grips are standard