Two Italians at the top of the world: the racer and his clutch

Oscar Polli, World Cross-Country Rally open-class champion 2008 reports on the Surflex "slipper" clutch fitted to the KTM 690 Rally Replica which he rode during his successful championship year.

In the world of African rallies, mechanical components which have completed the usual rigorous factory testing are then subjected to the final challenge. Only this will prove whether they are good enough to endure the long stages which are typical of world-level competition. There is nothing quite like Africa, its deserts, and its temperature variations, nothing like cross-country rallies, covering thousands of kilometres at high speeds, submitting man and machine to continuous punishment. This provides the final merciless test of their preparation and toughness.

The power of a tuned single-cylinder engine is no of use if it does not translate into grip. It can be tough holding on to one of these bikes when the terrain provides so little grip and the engine has so much torque, particularly when accelerating hard or, even worse, on the overrun or when braking hard. The Surflex slipper clutch worked beautifully, making it easy to go down the box while braking with no risk of locking the rear wheel and losing the back end, and with no need to feather the clutch.

Bearing in mind the distances travelled, the slipper clutch makes riding much easier, allowing the rider to concentrate on where he is going, and making navigation a whole lot easier.

At the end of each day, the teams do their maintenance, and this is a critical and high- priority activity. Fortunately, the Surflex slipper clutch worked beautifully with the oe KTM parts, and the brilliantly simple adjustment system, which involves changing the springs on the pressure plate without stripping the clutch, meant that the clutch could quickly be adjusted to suit the varying terrain encountered on successive stages.

In conclusion, the Surflex slipper clutch did everything we wanted. Race-testing proved it to be completely reliable and predictable.