

Pirelli Scorpion Trail II tires

By Wes Fleming #87301

I STARTED RIDING SOMETIME after Jack Riepe first threw a leg over his log-and-stone push-cycle, and when I did, I noticed that tire choices were pretty slim. There were knobby tires for dirt bikes, and for street bikes, we got bias-ply tires that required tubes and were almost guaranteed to hydroplane at the first sight of a puddle of water.

Since the 1980s, though, tire technology has come a long way. There's a motorcycle for every application, and to match that, there's a tire for every conceivable style of riding under the sun. From slick, sticky race tires to paddle-treaded tires suitable for deep sand, somebody is making a tire for what you want to do.

I ride a GS, so according to the stereotype I'm supposed to be spooning knobbies onto my wheels for my daily sojourn to Starbucks. However, what I want to do is get on down the highway, so I skip past knobs and more aggressive dual-sport tires and focus on tires meant for the street. If I could find a good deal on a 100 percent street tire for my GS, I'd take it, but I find the best combination of availability, cost and features in the 95/5 tires – tires meant to be used 95 percent of the time on the street and 5 percent of the time off it.

This is where Pirelli comes in with their commendable new Scorpion Trail II. Don't let the name fool you, this is not



an off-road tire. Pirelli calls the successor to their Scorpion Trail an “enduro street” tire and intends it for adventure and sport touring use. The Trail II's profile is derived from Pirelli's popular Angel GT sport and sport touring tires, and Pirelli says the profile works together with a shorter but wider contact patch to improve grip while reducing wear—and without compromising handling.

The Scorpion Trail II comes in sizes suitable for nearly every



The decorative red scorpion on the sidewall.



modern on/off-road adventure bike, including oilhead, camhead, hexhead and liquid-cooled GS and GS Adventure motorcycles of every size and configuration from the F 650 through the R 1200, and the HP 2 Enduro/Megamoto and brand-new S 1000 XR as well. I tested the ones appropriate for my 2005 R 1200 GS, the 110/80 R 19 front and 150/70 R 17 rear. (Remember that the R in a tire size indicates radial construction.)

Pirelli constructs the Trail II with multiple compounds, something that benefits the rear tires especially. My Trail II's broke in quickly, giving me confidence in even tight S-turns after about 200 miles. I've got a little over 3,000 miles on them now, and while I can see some signs of wear on the rear tire, those signs are minor to the point that I expect to get at least 8,000 miles out of the rear tire, if not more. Other than the quarter-inch "chicken strips" on the front tire, there's negligible wear on the front so far, and I expect it to outlast the rear tire by at least 2,000 miles, maybe more.

Besides the wear, the thing I'm most impressed with about the Trail II tires is their handling on wet roads. I live near Washington, D.C., and our weather from late spring through early fall can be volatile. We get temperatures over 90 degrees and humidity above 80 percent, which means long periods of hot, sticky riding punctuated by hours of late afternoon thunderstorms, but don't worry, the storms usually hold off until it's time to ride home from work.

Whether I've ridden on the interstate or on secondary roads in the pouring rain, the Trail II's haven't let me down. While I always try to take it a little easy when cornering in the rain or on wet roads, the Trail II tires have proven to be steadfast and reliable in less than ideal road conditions. It pays to be smart about when you ride in the rain (give a storm at least 20-30 minutes to wash the goo off the road), and if you ask

me, part of being smart about riding in a summer storm is doing so with Scorpion Trail II tires on your bike.

Compared to my other preferred 95/5 tire, the Continental Road Attack 2 EVO, the Scorpion Trail II is slightly better. I run my tires at 38 psi front/42 psi rear, and at those pressures, the Trail II turns in a little better and feels a tiny bit more stable in a straight line at high (legal) speeds. These tire models are both prize fighters though, so any comparison is splitting hairs. The differences are minute, and though I prefer the Trail II for straight road use by a slight margin, I still think the Road Attack 2 EVO is an excellent tire.

The Trail II tires have a visually appealing aggressive-looking tread pattern, and I wasn't disappointed when I decided to test out the 5% off-road aspect of the tires. Thanks to a bit of advice from Shawn Thomas of RawHyde, I dropped the air pressure in each tire to 25 psi and turn off the beaten path. Graded gravel and hard-packed dirt roads were no problem at all, and even zipping along a well-used trail through light woods at 25-30 mph didn't bring about more than a minor rear-end wiggle here and there when I got on the gas in a curve. In these light off-road conditions, I definitely preferred the Trail II to the Road Attack 2 EVO.

The only critique I have of the Trail II tires is that they were a bit noisy for the first 100 miles or so. As they wore in, the noise decreased quickly to what I consider normal tire-on-road sounds.

Because they're both such excellent tires, it pays to look at the details. If I can get Trail II's for a price that's within \$15-20 of the Road Attack 2 EVOs, I'm going to choose the Pirellis every time. With MSRPs from \$165.95 to \$308.95, I found prices at dealers and online between \$150-160 for the front and \$175-190 for the rear. I encourage riders to buy their tires from local dealers rather than online whenever possible – the \$10 difference between brick and mortar and virtual may not seem like a lot, but it's critical that we support our shops on the ground and keep them in business. ☺

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