

STREET SMART

SA LAUNCH TEST: CAPE TOWN



HUSQVARNA SVARTPILEN 401, VITPILEN 401 & VITPILEN 701

It's been a while since Husqvarna released a 100% street focussed motorcycle but for 2018 three new models are set to be let loose on our streets.

Words: Rob Portman Pics: ZC Marketing Consulting

When you think of modern day motorcycles you think - complex, fast, high-tech. Road legal motorcycles are closer to MotoGP and World SBK bikes than ever before. Things are moving so quickly, with next week's pioneer being last week's mad man. Pushing boundaries has become the standard, and if you don't, you get left behind. Or do you?

Husqvarna has had a complete new approach with their range of new street bikes. A fresh approach that might just be what is needed. Does innovation really need to be so complex? In our chaotic modern culture, where everyone has an opinion, who decides what's wrong or right? Husqvarna chose to forget about everything they knew about contemporary street motorcycles. They trimmed away every little thing that was not needed and began with a clean slate and bare essentials. Their goal is to change your perception of motorcycling, change your maybes into certainties. In their eyes, the street is missing something so, born from a very simple idea, comes the new range of Husqvarna street motorcycles.

Born from a very simple idea, the new range sets out to make urban motorcycling more accessible getting everyone to ride. In a recent article titled "Everything KTM Touches Turns To Gold: Reinventing Husqvarna As A High-Style Motorcycle Brand" published in Forbes magazine, Gerald Kiska, founder and CEO of Kiska GmbH, the product design firm that since the 1990s has defined the look and feel of KTM "ready to race" motorcycles and sports cars, said:

"Husqvarna is a brand that always looks forward, has always been highly innovative, a pioneering spirit. For the last few years, Kiska has been reinventing and repositioning KTM's new sister brand, Husqvarna, a company that started out as a weapons manufacturer before building the world's first combustion motorcycle engine back in 1903."





The Youngblood Arts and Cultural Development Gallery in Cape Town was the perfect place to launch these bikes which have a culture of their own.



Kiska goes on to say that he has a freer rein at Husqvarna, which allows him and his team to explore more options than they would under the KTM brand. Since being purchased by KTM from BMW back in 2013, the Swedish brand has enjoyed much success, posting record sales in each of the last 4 years. According to KTM CEO Stefan Pierer and Kiska, the plan is to place Husqvarna ahead of Ducati and Triumph and become Europe's third most popular motorcycle brand, behind KTM and BMW, and to achieve equally great heights in the global market. To achieve this, they know they cannot only rely on championship conquering off-road motorcycles, but they need to create charismatic road motorcycles with appeal beyond expert riders who buy the other brands.

Kiska and his team were handed a clean sheet of paper, and told to design a street range unrivaled by any on the market today. Street bikes with a fresh, clean approach, inviting the masses into the motorcycle game. A true modern take on motorcycling at its simplest, but with great effect.

Enter the new Svartpilen 401 (Black Arrow), Vitpilen 401 (White Arrow) and 701.

Kiska says the new range of Husqvarna road bikes are a premium product for people who are on the stylish side and very modern. Kiska's inspiration for the new range came from the dual-purpose 1955 Silverpilen, the Silver Arrow, a seminal dual-purpose

bike that performed with style on - and off-road. Kiska's interpretations of crisp, cool Scandinavian design is a perfect tribute to the wellspring of Husqvarna greatness.

LET'S HIT THE STREETS

We jettied off to Cape town for what we knew was going to be a local launch with a difference. The bikes were launched to the SA press and local public at the Youngblood Arts and Cultural Development Gallery in Cape Town's City Bowl district. Hundreds of keen admirers waited eagerly for Fred Fensham, Husqvarna SA brand manager, to take the

covers off the three new bikes. I was one of those admirers, as I had loved the look of the bikes from the first time I saw the concept pics a few years ago.

The covers finally came off and we were not left disappointed. The bikes are stunning. Overall build quality looked exceptional and the stylish design is a perfect representation of modern-day retro. Curves and lines in unusual places, but they work with geometric elements never seen before on any motorcycles. Simple. Progressive. That's the tag line for the new street range, and it could not be better said.





The next day arrived and it was time for us to finally swing a leg over the new bikes. Up close, and with the bike off its raised pedestal from the night before, the Svartpilen and Vitplien 401 models are small and compact. Sitting on the Vitplien 401, its size is quite deceiving. The riding position is broad and high. You sit on top of the bike and the bars are low so you crouch over the front. very racy. The bikes seat height is high, 835mm in total, which is 5mm higher than the 701. I was unable to plant both feet on the ground, which I found a bit strange considering the bike looked so small. I wouldn't call it uncomfortable. Unique is the word I would use to best describe the riding position.

We set off on the scenic ride mounted on the Vitplien 401. A smile was soon plastered all over my face once I opened the throttle and felt the punch from the 375cc single-cylinder engine. The full force of the 37Nm of torque and 44HP was on hand thanks to Cape Town's clean sea level air. 80% of the motors torque is available at low down RPM, so it does pack a decent punch through all 6 silky smooth gears. Helping deliver the sharp, refined, user-friendly power is the electronic fuel injection, which is operated by a ride-by-wire system. I loved the nippy feeling of the throttle, and combined with the lightweight chassis I carved through the slow Cape Town

“It made quick, easy work of the fast-flowing bends, again highlighting how good the lightweight chassis is...”

traffic faster than any superbiker could dream of. When faced with a Taxi driver trying to carve his way through stand still traffic in a very unapologetic way, the hydraulic ByBre brakes and state-of-the-art Bosch ABS system offered controllable and confident braking to help avoid a certain collision.

We all made it safely to entrance of Signal Hill, where I was excited to thrash all three bikes through the curves leading up to the top of the mountain. I was still on the Vitplien 401, and this is where it flourish. It made quick, easy work of the fast-flowing bends, again highlighting how good the lightweight chassis is (148kg unfueled). The top-grade WP suspension is set quite stiff, which made for direct precise handling through the turns. The bike has a very racy, firm feel about it.

The aggressive riding position is perfect for short commutes, but you'll feel it on the long roads. The smallish 9.5l tank also suggests that. But that's not what the Vitplien 401 is about. In fact, that's not what any of these

bikes are about. Potential buyers won't buy a bike like this to take it touring. It was perfectly suited to the urban-styled riding we did on the day, with the more laid back, slower paced Cape Town lifestyle lending itself perfectly to this particular bike, as with its brother the Svartpilen 401 which I sampled next...



SPECS VITPILEN 401

Engine: 373.2cc 1-cylinder 4-stroke engine, water-cooled

Maximum Power: 44 Bhp

Maximum Torque: 37 Nm

Front brake: Four-piston radial fixed calliper, 320mm brake disc (ABS)

Rear brake: Single-piston floating calliper, brake disc

Seat height: 835mm

Dry weight: 148kg

Tank capacity: 9.5l (approx)

Dry weight: 148kg

Price: R89,699 inc vat





The attention to detail on both the Vitpilen and Svartpilen 401's is simply erotic. A true representation of what modern-day retro should look like.



THE SVARTPILEN 401

The Svartpilen 401's riding position feels a bit more comfortable with the raised MX styled bars. The suspension setup is soft and plush and nowhere near as aggressive as the Vitpilen 401. This bike lends itself more to the chilled rider looking to explore the urban environment with a bit more comfort and versatility. It's more prone to jumping pavements, taking those tight back alleys and even climbing a few stairs if need be.

It shares the exact same engine as the Vitpilen, so good amounts of torque and

power are available for the urban commute. Just like its brother, it's also kept very simple, with no electronic aids or confusing settings to juggle. Just a simple plug-and-play system. Put the key in, start it up and go explore the urban jungle in both style and comfort.

Our world is overloaded with too much of everything, so a bit of simple might just be what we need and are looking for. The Vitpilen and Svartpilen 401's simple and progressive approach is refreshing, and easy to appreciate when looked at with an open mind. It opens up a new market in the motorcycling industry.



SPECS SVARTPILEN 401

Engine: 373.2cc 1-cylinder 4-stroke engine, water-cooled

Maximum Power: 44 Bhp

Maximum Torque: 37 Nm

Front brake: Four-piston radial fixed calliper, 320mm brake disc (ABS)

Rear brake: Single-piston floating calliper, brake disc

Seat height: 835mm

Dry weight: 148kg

Tank capacity: 9.5l (approx)

Dry weight: 150kg

Price: R89,699 inc vat

THE 701

If you are a rider also looking for that simple, progressive approach, but with a little added zing, then Husqvarna has the Vitpilen 701 to offer you.

We are so familiar with Husqvarnas 701 engine. Last year, our sister publication Dirt and Trail Magazine was loaned the Supermoto 701 for a few months and much hooliganism ensued.



SPECS VITPILEN 701

Engine: 692.7cc 1-cylinder, 4-stroke engine, liquid-cooled

Maximum Power: 75 Bhp

Maximum Torque: 73 Nm

Front brake: Four-piston radial fixed calliper, 320mm brake disc (ABS)

Rear brake: Single-piston floating calliper, brake disc

Seat height: 830mm

Dry weight: 148kg

Tank capacity: 12l (approx)

Dry weight: 157kg

Price: R139,699 inc vat

The bigger, more sophisticated brother to the 401's, the 701 utilizes a 690cc liquid cooled single-cylinder pushing out a rather decent 75HP. The torque is what makes this bike so exciting, with all 73Nm of it available at 6750rpm, so it packs plenty of punch low down. Like most single cylinder motors, it does run out of steam a bit at top rpm, but the torque is so impressive, and those quick squirts between traffic where power is needed is right there - sharp, quick and responsive. Driving out of turns is fun, and shifting up-and-down through the gearbox using the standard quick-shifter and auto-blip is so effective. It's not the smoothest I have felt but still plenty good enough, the rawness adds to the appeal. Traction control is standard and helped keep me in check when the right wrist got too excited. It did hamper the wheelies a bit, but, you can turn it off and wheelie to your hearts content.

Braking power and suspension setup is a bit more refined and powerful than the 401's as you would expect. The 701 features a very responsive and sharp Brembo braking system, while the upgraded WP suspension is fully adjustable and felt well set up even in stock trim.

The riding position lent itself perfectly to the short sprint ride from Signal Hill down to Camps Bay. The chassis is narrow, light (157kg unfueled) and responsive, with a fun, aggressive side to it. Bags of thrills through the undulating curves.

CONCLUSION

Husqvarna, is (Deservedly) thriving and plenty of resources and marketing have been thrown at the new range of bikes. They deliver

everything they promise - immaculate, minimalist designed street bikes with a fresh perspective on urban motorcycling. You won't find big power figures or fancy electronics with these bikes, but rather, the bare essence of what a motorcycle should be like.

The brief was to create motorcycles with a simple yet progressive design, which opens a new gateway to motorcycle culture and makes urban motorcycling more accessible and inviting than ever before. Machines for progressive, freethinking riders who appreciate exceptional design and seek new ways to experience their urban environment. Kiska and the entire team behind the new street range have nailed the brief.

I did leave the launch with a few questions. I am keen to ride the bikes again up in JHB, where they might have a bit less power on offer thanks to altitude.

These are something a little bit unique. Go and ride one - Stand out from the chaotic crowd.

At R89,699 for the 401's and R139,699 these bikes face some stiff competition in the market. Nevertheless, I now look back after a day spent on the bikes with a smile and wanting more. This means job well done Husqvarna!

