

PLAN LAUNCHES IN MID-WEIGHT SEGMENT

Two-wheeler Cos Rev Up to Take on Royal Enfield

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New Delhi: Leading domestic two-wheeler makers like Hero MotoCorp, Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India and Bajaj Auto are set to launch nearly a dozen mid-weight bikes over the next few months, challenging the dominance of Eicher Motors' Royal Enfield Classic and Bullet which have been long-time favourites on Indian roads. In July, Hero MotoCorp will introduce its first motorcycle developed in collaboration with Harley Davidson. It is slated to be among the most affordable products from the stable of the cult American bike maker.

Also on the cards are the next generation KTM 390 Duke from the house of Bajaj, Aprilia RS 440, Yamaha MT-03 and YZF-R3.

While demand for entry bikes has remained subdued amid weak consumer sentiment in rural markets, that for premium bikes has witnessed strong recovery among the young after the pandemic, with aspirational buyers looking at purchasing two-wheelers not just for daily commute but the whole experience of motorcycling, which includes rides, community, merchandise, accessories and connected technologies. This is prompting two-wheeler makers into action in this category, said industry stakeholders.

Eicher Motors MDr Siddharth Lal told ET the market for mid-weight motorcycles in India is growing at a brisk pace, with the country accounting for half of the 2 million mid-size motorcycles sold annually the world over.

"If you look at the mid-weight category, 250cc to 750cc category globally, half of it is India... If we weren't around, it wouldn't have sort of come around because we have 90% of that market," Lal said. "And we've created that market from scratch pretty much."

Overseas, Royal Enfield has a 10% market share. But Lal said the company "can not only become a leader in the middleweight

segment globally which of course is our ambition, but that we can grow the market also from a million to much more, as we've done in India".

To this end, Royal Enfield plans to launch four new products, including the RE Himalayan 450 Roadster and RE Shotgun 650, in the ongoing financial year, said industry sources.

ON THE CARDS

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Hero MotoCorp chief executive officer Niranjana Gupta said, "Premium is growing much faster than the commuter. You can already see that one part of India (has) started growing and started spending and being more confident about it." The Harley Davidson X440, to be manufactured in India by Hero MotoCorp, is the first of a range of products the duo plan to co-develop to expand footprint in the performance bike segment. Gupta declined to share the specifics of products the company is planning in the premium segment, but said, "There will be big launches that will then ensure that we can build the right premium portfolio and get our market share on that." Vimal Sumbly, head business (premium) at TVS Motor Company, said premiumisation is a "key pillar" for growth at TVS Motor.

"As affluence grows, latent aspiration drives the need to stand out while being part of a like-minded community," Sumbly said, adding, the company is working on continuous product interventions.

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