

MY DUCATI STORY

BY HARVEY WOIEN

After experiencing the invasion of Japanese motorcycles into this country and owning a representative sample of Mr. Honda's best--ranging from the 150 cc twin to the 750 cc four--I decided that the essence of motorcycling as I knew it had eluded me. I began riding in 1954 with a much abused, but delightful to ride, BSA C11. Two more BSA's passed through my life (an A7 Shooting Star and an A65 Royal Star) before the glitter and performance of the Jewels of the Orient caught my eye.

By the time I resolved to return to the simple life (about three years ago), the long lamented British Bangers were, with few exceptions, gone from this country. And, of course, none were available for import. I realized that Ducati was the last gasp of the traditional four-stroke single cylinder roadster. But, absolutely none were being imported into this country. None had come in since 1970, and those were very few in number. Would you believe that Southern California (Motorcycle Mecca) has only two Ducati dealers, one of whom has never sold a single-cylinder model? Sad, but true.

However, after a year of casual searching, I managed to find a 1970 Desmo 350. Actually, it was manufactured in 1969. The bike was excellent engine wise, but tatty otherwise. A little paint, and a little chrome, a few spokes, etc. And the Duke was looking good and thumping happily along the local cafe circuits.

I was now a Ducati freak. I was ready for the next step.

The April, 1974, issue of "Motorcycle Sport" contained an article on the 249 cc Ducati Mark III which not only caught my interest at the time, but held it for the next year or so. Since the magazine belonged to someone else, I photo-copied the article as well as the Ducati advertisements and thereby started what was destined to be a lengthy file on Ducati information and transactions.

What really caught my eye was the 350 cc Desmo Sports, factory equipped with clip-ons, rear-sets, Ceriani front end with disc brake, racing seat, Borani rims, etc.

I wrote to the most promising looking dealer in the English Magazine advertisements inquiring about the importing of a 350 cc Desmo Sports. His response was somewhat disappointing. It seems that the Desmo models were unavailable at the time.

The next few months were spent reading the information sent by the dealer (Mick Walker), re-reading the article, and dreaming of the day I could, once again, after a twenty year absence, ride a big thumper through the beautiful mountain roads surrounding Los Angeles.

Luck was with me; I became aware of a dealer in eastern Canada who could supply me with the exact machine I was seeking. After a horrendously complicated series of events, the bike was in my garage, meticulously prepared and coaxed into sucking its first breath of American air.

The sound and feel of the Ducati brought back two-decade old memories of the C11. Though, of course, there was a world of difference between the two. Except for a handful of local Ducati enthusiasts (and I know each one) I was in a world of my own.

A credibility gap as wide as a continent and an ocean lay between me and the motorcycling world of the United States. Difficult it is to explain to someone who has just spent \$1800 for a 750 cc Honda Four (with electric start, directional signals, etc.) why I paid \$2,000 for a 350 cc single cylinder machine that can't stay with a 350 Yamaha on the straights. But, we know why, and that's good enough.

Delightful as the Ducati is, I felt compelled to make certain modifications. But these mods were done with the intent to preserve the all-important character of the bike. The clip-ons were too much, the downward droop of the bars caused my wrists to bend at a miserable angle. Transposing the bars to the opposite fork legs completely cured the problem without resorting to an unsightly crown-mounted bar. Now the bars droop only slightly and complement the rear-set controls and racing seat perfectly.

The original equipment silencer and air cleaner limited revs to 5500 at altitudes of 2000 feet or more. Also, the gear lever hit the silencer on up-changes and the center stand, in the retracted position stopped against the silencer. All these problems were remedied by fitting a Dunstall silencer and a polyurethane foam air filter. The slim tapered section of the Dunstall silencer cleared both the gear change lever and the center stand. The improved breathing allowed the engine to rev higher and the increase in power throughout the range was dramatic.

Of course, the main jet and needle position had to be richened.

A Pirelli universal tire was supplied at the rear. This was immediately swapped for a K81. Exchanging the shift rubber and handlebar grips for items of more generous proportions completed the modifications.

The resulting machine has all of what I want: adequate power, superb handling, light weight, individuality, maintainability and (initial cost notwithstanding) economy. Would you believe 90 MPG at running-in speeds? How about 80 MPG at brisk touring speeds?

Now I know how it must have felt to have purchased the last Velocette Thruxton to leave the factory. It feels great!

the hell with Hondas and Yamahammers. This is more like it.

