

DUCATI STORIES

"WHILE OTHERS BARK AT THE MOON"

by: Jeff Calechman

Tonight he thought I'll break my routine. Instead of attending to my usual evening affairs, I'll go for a ride on the Duke. How long, he wondered, had it been since he'd gone for a good ride at night? Two months? More? Probably more. The air was crisp and was graced with the sweet scent of some long-forgotten fragrance. Perhaps the stars would be out in force to help illuminate his way along the deserted country roads.

Sometimes, when he'd send a note to a friend, he'd sign it "_____ and the Duke." His friends humored him, not really understanding his preoccupation with that Ducati motorcycle. They shook their heads in amazement as they'd listen to his stories of mechanical woes, wondering out loud why he didn't sell the damn thing and buy something, well, more...reliable. At this remark he'd show great offense and, with an almost maniacal look coming to his eyes, would begin to detail the virtues of his wonderful machine.

There was a ritual associated with riding his Ducati which he wanted to preserve forever. He'd never let the time he spent riding his Bike become just another way to pass his life. Therefore, when he rode the Duke, he tried to make it a special occasion, to infuse it with an air of mystery and excitement which would take him, if only temporarily, away from his everyday world.

He'd ride fast but not out of control, yet quickly enough to blur all sensations, so that he'd have to concentrate absolutely on the here and now. He rode to forget about yesterday and tomorrow, to know only this one piece of road at this particular point in time.

He called a couple of his riding buddies to join him in this nocturnal escapade and found them willing and eager to join the procession. They met at a favorite coffee shop where they would ply themselves with coffee to add even more adrenalin to their systems.

They talked incessantly between gulps of coffee about Mike Hailwood's planned return to the Isle of Man TT races. Could he, they wondered, still lap the torturous mountain road circuit at over "the ton"?

As they moved noisily out of the restaurant, their spirits soaring in anticipation of the evening's ride, one of them remarked that they ought to stage their own TT that very night. The idea struck each one of them as being exactly the right thing to do that evening. As they were all battle-scarred veterans of the surrounding hill country, they quickly formulated and agreed upon the "course" for the night.

What mattered from here on was how fast one made it from point A to point B. All were talented riders with fairly equal machinery. No excuses allowed here. Each possessed an intensely competitive spirit which drove each one of them to ride very aggressively, a posture just short of reckless abandon.



They pussy-footed their way out of town least they attract any more attention than necessary from the local constabulary. Once at the start of "their" TT, all right hands as if in unison twisted their throttles to the stop. First one, then the other, would take turns leading, the others separated by no more than several bike lengths. The quartz halogen headlights each had housed inside their fairings combined with the evening stars to provide bright illumination of the road. The group roared and bellowed onward into the night, each crouched low on their machine. Their respective riding positions would have made a jockey proud.

Rear tires slid away, front tires chirped heavily as they negotiated the many fast sweepers that lie in their path. Bits of metal were left on the roadway as foot-pegs and exhaust systems were ground away in attempts to shorten the time needed to travel this route.

The end of the evening ride was fast approaching. Up to this point the Duke had been content either to lead or to stay within striking distance of the leader. Now was the time to strike and take the lead for good. The next corner was an especially ticky one. If taken with precisely the right line, it could be jetted through. Otherwise, the rippled pavement would slow one's motion. All entered the turn at almost the same time, each trying for the distance. He crossed the end of their course—several bike lengths in front of the others.

They stopped and assembled at the end of their circuit. With engines finally silenced, an almost eerie stillness filled the night. Soon, there was conversation among them all, about how so-an-so had really flew through that last series of fastsweepers, etc. Eventually, they began their drive back to town, their spirits filled to the brim with a contentment that could only come after a long, hard ride.

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