

features

With practice finished, color photography done and a non-gourmet trackside lunch down the hatch, we launched into the timed sessions.

It was a treat, Duff in his scuzzy black English leathers looked and sounded like a ghost from the era of Geoff Duke, recording a 10-lap average of 58.66 seconds a fastest lap of 58.30. Remarkable consistency, especially for a rider so long out of action.

Duhamel wailed the Suzuki around at 58.65 over 10 laps, with a fastest time of 58.06. He scarcely gave its first-corner wallows a second thought, but didn't care for the way the IRC tires washed out on occasion. Bashing the pipes on the ground didn't help tire adhesion, and by the end of Duhamel's 10 laps the right hand pipe was almost worn through its outer layer. The center stand had been grinding away earlier, and we removed it during practice.

When the machines were reversed, differences in speeds became more apparent. The Ducati and Suzuki had been virtually identical before, but when his turn came up, Yvon was cooking.

Duhamel ate up the half-lap between himself and Duff, passing the Suzuki on the seventh lap and pulling well into the lead. His average for the 10 laps was 56.41 seconds with a fastest time for the day of 55.99.

That would guarantee a win in any production race; best times currently are in the 56 to 57-second range. Super-bikes lap in the high 54s.

Unofficial track record for motorcycles is 52.17, set by Gary Collins last year on a Yamaha TZ750.

Duff's average time for the Suzuki was 58.99 seconds, with a fastest lap of 58.47.

Duff lapped 0.05 per cent quicker on the Ducati than he had on the Suzuki; Duhamel lapped 3.8 per cent quicker.

Winner of the first half of the test was the Ducati with a perfect score of 50 points. The Suzuki's lap times gave it a score of 48.91, rounded off to 49.

The track numbers told us much of what we wanted to know, but not all. These are street-legal motorcycles, after all. One is an undisguised production racer and the other is one of the most sublime sport-touring bikes, but they have to earn their bread and butter on the street.

Also, some sort of rider evaluation of the motorcycle's behavior is useful, as we mentioned at the start. We asked the two road racers to contribute their scores, and Cycle Canada staff added their impressions based on 2,000 km or more on the street. The average of their scores formed the second 50 percent of the test.

Appearances and rider impressions can be deceiving, as the rider ratings showed. The spread between the two bikes in this part of the test was six points, or 12 per cent, versus a mere one point, or two percent on lap times.

Still, evaluation of handling is as much a perception of behavior as it is of results of that behavior. A good rider, and we had two of the best, can wrench a piggish motorcycle around a race track in rapid order. We've watched it being done many times, and not envied the unfortunate soul doing it.

Just because it can be done doesn't mean that it should be done. The Ducati demonstrates that in this modern world there is still a more exalted way of doing it.

Overall scoring gives the Ducati 97 per-cent, versus 90 per cent for the Suzuki.

So the Ducati wins. This is, after all, a test of handling, pure and simple.

It's not a dirt test, it's not a touring test, it's not an all-around, Mr. Everyday Motorcycle test. These are the two best handling motorcycles in the world. One is better than the other and that one happens to be the Ducati 900 Super Sport Desmo by a whole seven per cent.

The Super Sport is a throwback motorcycle, a reminder of an earlier day when machines had to please fewer people and satisfy fewer legislators and fastidious cost account-

WITH BLARING Conti mufflers and 40 mm unfiltered Dell'Ortos, the 864 cc Desmo engine's acceleration is astounding. Pushing 50 kg less than the Suzuki helps.

SUZUKI'S new cosmetics are decorated in blue, white and black factory road racing colors.

DEDICATION to the craft of fast riding is the price of admission to Ducati's portable feast.

GRAUNCH. Suzuki's header pipe was nearly worn through, and muffler clamp was severed.

KICK STARTER or bump starts are Ducati's only means of arousal. Kick pedal drags.

MARZOCCHI shocks require 28 psi air pressure. Optional mufflers are quieter than Contis shown.

SUZUKI'S IRC tires are good but, aided by pipe drag, washed out on several occasions.

DUCATI'S Pirelli Phantoms are among best we've ever tested. Racers like them too.