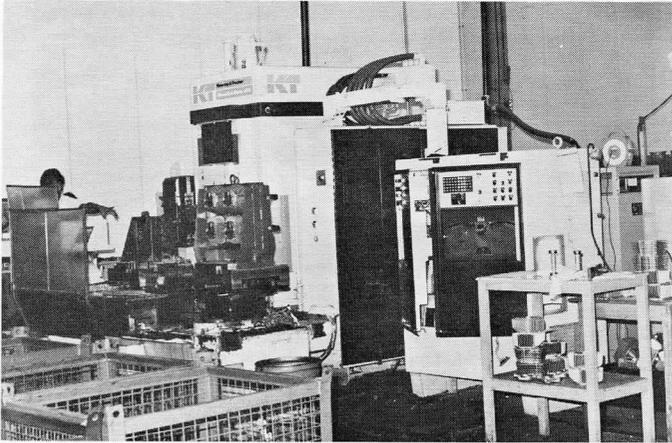


features



This computerized machines is busy machining four cylinder barrels. It is fully automatic and needs no human intervention.

In another room some more sub-assembly groups are busy putting together the Desmodromic heads, parts of the engine, crankcases, transmissions, these components are all assembled by hand. Slowly but surely the engine is completed and it moves along to the break-in room where it also put on a dyno for further testing. Then it moves along to be installed into the frame.

Ducati utilizes various component manufacturers to complete their bikes. Manufacturers like Bosh for the electrics, Nippondenso for the Instruments, Marzocchi for suspension units, Campagnolo for wheels, Verlicchi for frames, Pirelli, Michelin, and Metzler for tires, CEV for switches etc. Since the supply of parts is never continuous Ducati must assemble all these parts to complete a machine before they begin its production. Once all the components necessary to complete the bike are there, the work begins. Engines will be brought into the assembly line when all the components to create that particular batch of bikes are all within the factory store house. Then and only then will work begin.

When the engines are within the frames they go into a room where the bike is "dressed", that is the gas tank, seat, side covers and fairing are installed, but before they are dressed they are taken outside and used components are installed to test the bike and the engine. During this session, the bike is tuned up and whatever adjustments are needed are made at trackside shops. With this completed the bike is washed and sent into the dressing room and then off to be packed to await shipping to the world Ducati dealers and finally into some lucky buyers hands.

During our tour we visited the research and development room. At the time of our visit they were testing a 650 cc Pantah engine. This displacement of 650cc's is the maximum allowable bore for the 500cc Pantah. For the present time Ducati has no immediate plans of turning out any 650cc Pantah engines. The tests we were told were strictly for improvements of the present engine and to make it more and more reliable.

One of the unexpected treats of visiting the factory was the chance to ride one of the factory prototype Pantahs. It was a moment I had hoped for and for me it was a very enjoyable and memorable experience. I got a chance to ride a machine that had become somewhat of a Superstar amongst motorcycles ever since its first showing at the Milano Show. We considered it a real privilege to ride a machine that was to be a classic even before it was put on the market.

I remember the first Pantah which appeared in early 1977. This first model was created in order to contest the Italian Junior Championship races. The new Pantah carried over many of the design innovations and characteristics from this first version of the small 500 V-Twin. Amongst the most notable carry-overs are the racy fairing, seat and tail

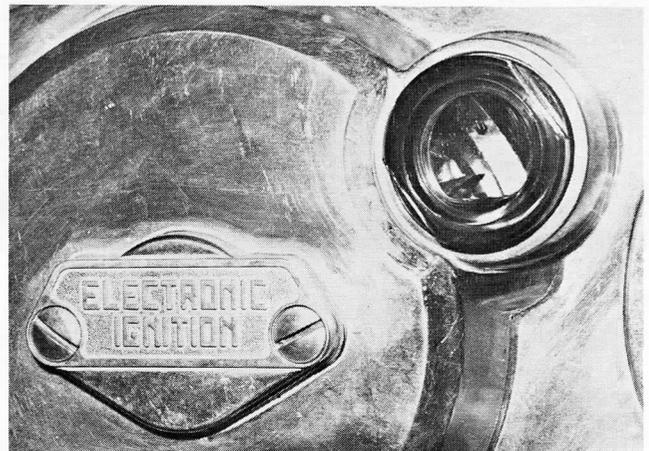
section combo and the ample but comfortable gas tank with its knee indentations. Only the Italian with their flare for eye catching designs and their ample use of smooth clean flowing lines could create such a machine. The Pantah creates such a visual feel of movement that it appears to be in motion when it is standing still. It is a motorcycle art form, something that one rarely sees emerge from the Land of the Rising Sun.

The fairing on the Pantah was of fiberglass as were the seat and tail combination. These units were of good quality. The windshield affords good protection for the rider. If you like to share your rides with a friend, then the seat can easily be changed over to a dual unit. Gas tank capacity is more than ample. Quartz lights make driving at night a lot safer than standard seal beams. For the instruments Ducati went to those that make them well, and for a good price; the Japanese. The switches are of good quality and work well. In fact the entire instrument and switch package is right off the Darmah.

As many of you already know the engine is belt driven by Gilmer Tooth belts instead of the tradition bevel shafts. Ignition is by Bosh and it is also electronic. An electric starter brings the V-Twin to life. Ducati has a lot of faith in this unit because they have chosen to leave out the kick starter. This is a real shame, because if anything should go wrong with the electrical system, and Ducatis are famous for that, one has no resource but to push start the bike. I really hope they reconsider and install a kick starter on their production models I am sure that the buyers will gladly pay for this unit.

New on this model Ducati are the use of Nickel Chrome plating for the cylinders as well as the rings. According to Dr. Taglioni, Ducati chief designer engineer, this process affords better heat dissipation and longer life for the cylinder walls and rings. The oil is cleaned off the liners much more efficiently therefore reducing oil consumption. Dr T. also explained that with this advanced technique of plating one does not have to spend long hours of driving to break the engine in. In fact the Pantah engine can be broken in within ten minutes. More than likely each Pantah that hits the showroom floors of dealers is ready to be run at normal speeds since they are already broken in during test trials at the Factory race track.

In an effort to ease the maintenance of the new Pantah, Ducati has incorporated several items for this purpose. A couple of the most important ones are the oil visual window for checking the oil level and the timing window, to which you aim your strobe light and set your timing with the aid of a pointer and a timing dot.



With the Pantah a new era begins at Ducati that could signal the future changes that we will see in newer models. The use of Chrome liners for the cylinder walls, the use of cheaper and more quiet Gilmer tooth belts, machines built for the select few who can appreciate the innovative engine designs, the fine pin-point handling and the accent on sportiness of their fine breed of bikes. I think that the days-of building bikes for the common biker are limited. The accent seems to be on flashy, unconventional, exciting racy machines.