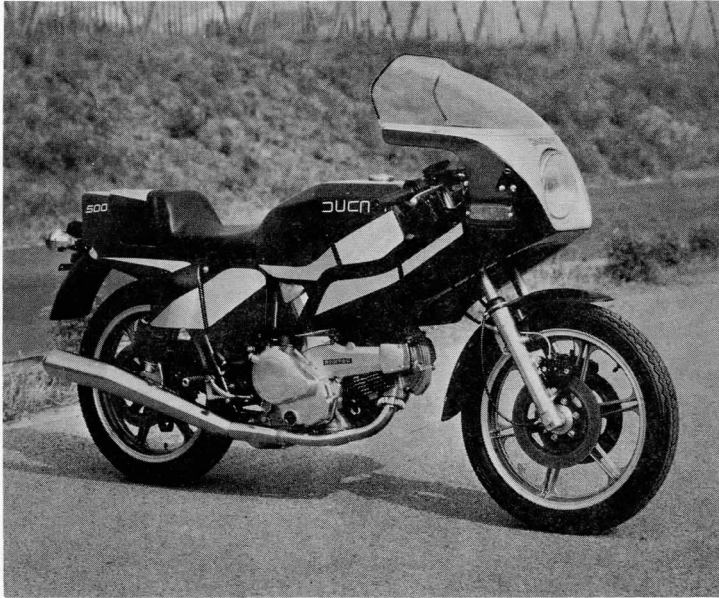


Road Test



From SUPERBIKE Magazine

"Scoop First Full Road Test, Ducati's Sensational Pantah" Two For Vee and Vee for Two

The following was sent in by Bob Cowin, of Kings Park, NY. He in turn photo-copied it from the December issue of "SUPERBIKE" magazine from England and I in turn typed it on this pizza paper and here it is. Sorry I can't print any of the photos from the article on account that the Xerox copy came out just awful and on account that the photos had this chick running around naked in the photos and this being a family magazine of sorts and all I couldn't print some of the photos. OK?

DUCATI'S SENSATIONAL PANTAH

Two for Vee and Vee for two.

By Michael Scott

Some things in life are just too good to wait for. No matter how many people tell you to wait for the correct time, for maturity, or for the right circumstances, and no matter how much you respect those people, you just can't. You have to go straight ahead and do it at the very first opportunity.

I could make a list of such things, but I'm sure you don't need it. Here is something to add to that list. Ducati's new 500cc Pantah.

I was the first British journalist to ride the Pantah. I mean really ride it - night on 1000 miles on road and track, night and day, rain and shine, good roads and bad. The bike I rode was a pre-production prototype, just one stage away from the final machine. Hell, they hadn't even started making them when I tweaked the controls.

The Pantah is expected to reach Britain in saleable quantities by early Spring. A few more pre-production bikes might just be here by the time you read this. As I write, though there are just two--the bikes that were seen at Earls Court. One a non-runner, stars in our colour pix. The other the green and red option is the bike I rode, sneaking right in among the troops guarding it from the Press and spiriting it away.

It couldn't have happened without Graham Miles.

He's the boss at Three Cross Motorcycles, the big southern Italian bike dealers and he purchased the bike for himself the second he clapped eyes on it at the show. Even he had to wait until the boffins at Coburn and Hughes and at Sports Motorcycles in Manchester had given it a thorough shakedown (and some pretty solid running-in), looking for faults that must be ironed out before production. They found a few and so did I. It's important that you remember, as you read this, that they'll likely be gone when the bike hits the showroom floor.

Graham Miles' first act was benevolent. He lent the bike to SuperBike before he'd even heard it running, giving us (and you) the first full British road test of the most exciting bike of the decade.

How was it? Couldn't ever have been anything but superb. You have only to look at it for a short time, to skim through the specifications, and to consider its pedigree. A light half-liter version of a 900cc paragon is so immediately attractive that riding it could even prove an anti-climax. Almost. Except that it's as delightful on the move as it is on paper. It sets new standards of roadholding and handling. It goes as good as it looks.

The tested top speed of 109mph and a standing quarter of 14.2 seconds simply don't tell half of the story (not least because they may be changed by the time it comes to production). Indeed, such arbitrary figures are a woefully inadequate yardstick of any motorcycle. It's true that the Pantah is not outlandishly fast, nor does it accelerate like a drag bike. More to the point, though; light weight, a sufficiency rather than a surplus of power, superb brakes and handling mean that it covers ground far better than many bikes with much more impressive performance figures.

It certainly looks the part. It's dressed in the flashiest glassfibre suiting I can think of on any production bike, and painted in a stunning two-tone scheme that will have punters everywhere rocking on their heels. Personally, I find it a little over-dressed. It seems to combine so many different themes -wedge-shapes versus soft contours; slab side versus complex curves; razor edges versus voluptuous fleshy folds. It's a tribute to Italian styling that it does hang together as a visual entity. I'd just prefer to see more of the engine.

It was with eager anticipation that I thumbed the button of the Pantah. There'd been plenty of drama attached to the whole scoop saga. Believe me, you're only reading the exclusive test by the skin of your teeth.

It goes back further - to the time I first heard of the forthcoming half-liter Duke in some seedy Italian dive, I immediately started twitching to get my hands on one.

I love vee-twins - breathes there a Man of Iron that doesn't? - and here was a new ultra-modern vee-twin. I love the way Dukes handle, and here was a new Duke, a shorter, lighter and more agile version of the bike like Mike won the TT on. And I'm learning again to love 500s. The Z500 Kawasaki rekindled the fire, the Montjuic stoked it to furnace pitch. Now the Pantah...

Like I said eager anticipation.

I was a bit disappointed at the puny whiffle that emerged from the pipes. Not your ballsy Ducati thunder at all, and the fact that it's only a 500 is only an excuse if you've never heard a Laverda Monjuic. I continued to curse the heavily muffled noise until the engine thoroughly warmed. I started to rev the bike. Then it sings, the same song as the big Dukes, but in descant. The distinction is indicative of the very different character of the new junior Duke.