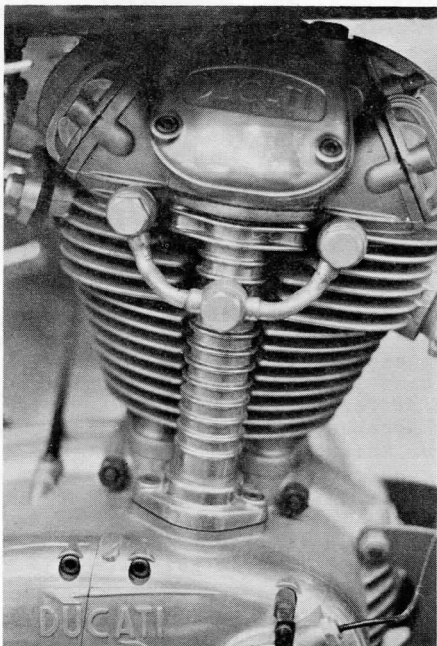


SINGLES Spot



The following article came to you courtesy of CLASSIC BIKE, my favorite bike magazine. The article was from their March 1978 issue. As the name implies the British publication deals only with classic bikes. None of that 58 valve 12 cylinder Japanese appliances in this magazine. Hard to get though. Anyway hope you all enjoy this. The whole thing was typed by Betty Appleton.

DUCATI SINGLES

by Bill Haylock

Did Ducati produce the ultimate four-stroke single? Bill Haylock thinks they did.

In those depressed years that followed WW2, when Mr. Honda started turning out his first power-assisted bicycles, the Italian engineering company of Ducai Meccanica was moving into motorcycle production in a similarly humble way. The similarity between these tow newcomers to a world still very much dominated by the big British single doesn't quite end there. Both factories were launched on the road to international fame by the dramatic success of their highly innovating racing machinery.

But from there on the approach and later fortunes of the two infant companies were as divergent as the character of the bikes they produced. While Honda followed a radical path of multiple cylinders and four-valve heads, Ducati stayed within the mainstream of European tradition with four-stroke singles--except for the significant difference of the unique use of desmodromic valvegear.

Ducati's 125 desmo racer made a brilliant debut by winning on its first world championship outing at the 1957 Swedish Grand Prix. It not only won; it also lapped every other bike in the process. And this success story does have great relevance for everyone who's ever ridden a Ducati single. For, unlike other factory racers that are far removed from the kind of bike you can actually buy, every Ducati single produced over a period of two decades was directly related to that historic racer.

It's that purity of lineage and the beautifully refined engineering built into the original design as well as the subsequent development that makes

the Ducati single the distinguished and desirable classic that it is today. I'd even go so far as to say that it is the ultimate in the development of the four-stroke single. And it owes much of its distinctive character to its creator, for Fabio Taglioni is one of the world's most gifted, individual and single minded motorcycle designers. The history of Ducati to date is really the history of his career.

Although the desmo engines, with their exotic mode of valve operation, are what Taglioni is famous for and he is still the only man to make the system work successfully in production bike engines--the Ducati single started life in a rather humbler form. When he joined Ducati in 1954 Taglioni was bursting with fresh ideas which he'd been unable to put into practice in his previous job. It's a characteristic of the man that he demands a free hand to develop his own ideas, and at Ducati he was able to do so. After only a year the company had a little 100cc four-stroke single in production which soon became a success with the buying public and in the long distance open road races which were popular in Italy at the time.

This rapid and reliable little motor was called the Gran Sport and is instantly recognisable as the progenitor of all the later singles with those clean, streamlined casings, wet sump lubrication and shaft and bevel gear driven single overhead cam. Valve operation was convention with hairpin valve springs; Taglioni had yet to put the desmodromic principle into practice.

Large numbers were sold in Italy and it started several world famous riders on their way to success notably Bruno Spaggiari and Alberto Paganì. A tuned and streamlined Gran Sport set up new 100cc class one hour, 100km and 1000km world records at Monza in 1956, at over 100mph for the shorter distances and 96mpg for the 100km marathon.

This engine was enlarged progressively from 100cc to 125, 175 and ultimately a 250cc version that

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