

SINGLES SPOT

you want something really rare and exotic, a Formula 3 175cc racer; or, of course, one of the Desmo roadsters.

Mick Walker, a veritable walking encyclopedia of information about Ducatis, names the Mach 1 as his favorite. 'That is the Ducati--it says everything that the singles are all about.' Its incredibly potent motor is the definitive form of the Ducati single, he reckons, although it isn't the most practical of road bikes. You'll be lucky to lay your hands on one, though. Mick reckons that there can only be a handful left in pristine condition.

Myself, I go for the Desmos, since that is probably the ultimate expression of Taglioni's engineering genius. But it could be said that I'm biased, since I own one. Later-type Desmos are certainly easier to find than Mach 1s or Formula 3s but even so they are still at a premium and command surprisingly high prices. For example, a three-year-old 450 Desmo which cost \$670 new could quite easily cost more than that now. Some dealers undoubtedly cash in on the demand that exists for any good Ducati single and ask very high prices. And make sure that you get a bike that's in good condition; I've seen some appallingly neglected examples for sale. The best advice is to shop around and look very carefully before you part with large sums of money.

If you can't afford the Desmos, you might still find one of the fairly common older singles like the Sebring, or less glamorous 250s such as the Daytona, GT, within your reach. The spares position, apart from some cycle parts for older bikes, is still fairly good because continuity of model means that the same parts can fit machines of differing ages, and Mick Walker holds an extensive stock. Having said that, there are just a couple of models to be wary of, because of spares difficulties and unreliability. They are the Spanish built 24 Horas and the 250 and 350 Street Scramblers, which used some Spanish-made parts.

When buying, things to look out for are fairly obvious--like strange mechanical noises. In good condition Ducati motors are mechanically quiet thanks to the shaft driven cam and helical primary gears. Beware of any lack of compression; you should be able to stand on a Ducati's kick start almost all day if you aren't Bill Bunter. Avoid engines that smoke, or have dirty oil in the sump; frequent oil changes are essential for the good health of a Ducati. Engine repairs can be very expensive, particularly on a Desmo.

One weak point is swinging arm pivot lubrication, so watch for sloppy bushes here. A cure is to drill and tap the swinging arm from underneath to take a second grease nipple on the offside pivot point for a better distribution of lubricant. And the most famous Ducati failing of all is the dismal performance of the electrical system. Here the simplest cure is to completely rewire the bike with heavier gauge cable, and to replace the switchgear with something a little more efficient. With a Cibie six-volt headlamp, illumination might be just about acceptable. Otherwise, I recommend that you don't ride in the dark!

Of course, you could wait until Ducati launch their new generation of four-stroke singles. Prototypes of a completely new Taglioni-designed engine are already undergoing extensive testing and could be in production before long. Inevitably though, this new engine has had to compromise high quality engineering with the need for reasonably low production costs. Because of this, the shaft and bevel gear drive for the overhead cam has made way for a rather less neat, but cheaper, rubber toothed belt. It seems likely that the motor will be produced in conventional and desmo forms, with capacities of 250 and 350cc. They may not have the distinguished looks and proud heritage of the old singles, but anything that Taglioni has a hand in designing has got to be a little bit out of the ordinary.

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