

features

The following was borrowed from Bike magazine. We wish to thank them for this piece. We would also like to thank John Henry who typed it for us. Thank you John. We hope to be getting more stuff from John in the near future.

DUCATI HAILWOOD REPLICA ROAD TEST AND OTHER STUFF

There's good bits and bad bits about doing this job as editor of *Bike*. The good bits are usually to do with the fact that I make the decisions about what we're gonna do, the bad bits are usually based around the opposing view that most of these decisions have already been made for me by fate. Thus, a few weeks ago I was en route to the West County, normally a region I visit with great pleasure, and I ended up hammering the steering wheel of the *Bike* pick-up truck with my rolled-up fists. This was frustration taking its toll at yet another hold-up in the traffic, and it was at the tailend of yet another ulcer-inducing day when everything had gone wrong, and the phones were going berserk. 'Mazing how some people think we've nothing better to do than answer phone calls all day.

This is all leading up to an admission that, had the Gods of Destiny and Luton not decided to shine upon me one day in early Feb, I might very well have taken my typewriter, telephone, desk and calculator and thrown the lot through my office window, along with a terse note indicating 'enough'. That was when the Ducati Hailwood Replica came into my daily routine

That there's any *Bike* magazine at all this month is due to an incredible display of loyalty and hard work by the full-timers on this rag, and that Duke. 'Cos every time the chaos reached my nervous system's breaking point, I'd just kit up, ignore the resigned glances from the others in the office who knew by now full well what I was up to, march out of the office oblivious to the pleas of Sue, out long-suffering secretary, and kickstart the Duke.

For a couple of relaxing, soothing minutes I'd just listen to that booming, consistent deep bass exhaust note ticking out of the almost hollow Contis. Imagine a sensation like Tiger Balm being rubbed into an aching neck by the delicate hands of a Chinese Taiwa masseuse, that's how that echoing note affected me.

Then I'd push the bike forward off its centre stand - no sidestand is fitted because of the full fairing - and with a bit of manipulation I'd be out of the carpark and onto the road outside. In a matter of seconds, I'd be joining the slip-road to the dual carriageway by-pass, sneaking past the derestricted speed limit signs like a malevolent dog looking for a pristine bit of pavement to shit upon.

Ten or so minutes later, when I'd judged the oil to have started to warm up reasonably, I'd give the quick-action twistgrip a sharp snatch and savour the instant kick forward and tumultuous noise somewhere behind me. A roundabout would soon loom up and, with the knots in my stomach at last untying, I'd flick the Duke into the attack mode with just a slight pressure to the left 'bar. If a perfect line was possible through the roundabout - and I'm very careful not to get entangled up with other road users when I'm in this mood - I'd be okay for a couple more hours with my mind no longer beset by such rubbish as budgets, planning schedules, weather forecasts, and the other stuff which has nothing to do with bikes, journalism or a creative, positive approach to life. If the line wasn't clear then, well, I'd just have to carry on and find a roundabout or a long sweeping turn which was ... there really wasn't any other way it could be.

Now this unprecedented confession may well clarify things for a few of you who tried to ring me during February and constantly came up against the phrase: "Yes, well, Dave is in the office today but he's gone on a round-Peterborough marathon. Yes, he will be back but we're not sure in what state."

Ducati's Hailwood Replica is one of those rare bikes which

successfully achieve the two highs of owning a big bike - it poses well and it goes well. To carry off with aplomb the mere act of slinging the leg over the Replica, and making more noise than the rest of the world believes is good for the average human brain, needs a rider with a hint of an exhibitionist about him. For a start, it looks like a racer with the curvaceous fairing, long slim tank, humped seat and shorty guards. Then its colour scheme of bright red and green makes it, er, conspicuous to even the most myopic bobby.

The reason for the Hailwood Replica, in case you're new to the biking scene or have been dead for the last couple of years, comes from Mike's amazing return to the Isle of Man TT in 1978. The year before, Ducati had come very near to winning the F1 TT with Roger Nicholls on a 900SS. If the race hadn't been cut short by a lap, and Phil Read on the works Honda four had made his planned fuel stop, then... but racing is full of ifs. The following year, however, there never seemed any doubt once Hailwood was off the line. For '79, things weren't quite so rosy with the Ducati factory producing a special frame that didn't work as well as the standard 900SS chassis, and the Sports Motorcycles team of Steve Wynne and Pat Slinn, who did all the mechanicking on the Duke (as they had the year before), worked all night to get the bike back to as near as possible to the specification of the previous year's bike. It didn't win, not surprisingly really since it was a cobbled together machine, but managed a creditable second.

The Hailwood Replica is different from the standard 900SS in only a very few details apart from the obvious cosmetic changes. It has a different cast alloy wheel design with thinner spokes and less webbing, saving a small amount of weight. The brake calipers are a slightly different design and are reputed to be of a lighter alloy. They're anodised a nice trick looking gold now so they must be better! These changes are from last year's 900SS and are likely to be included on the 1980 SSs too.

Instrumentation is the console from the 1979 Darmah SS, with the Japanese Nippondenso clocks and switches etc, instead of the all-Italian Veglia bits of the 900SS. There's not much to say about these other than they do their job fairly accurately and efficiently though Ducati, in their usual bizarre fashion, have decided to have the red generator warning light glowing when it's working correctly and it only extinguishes when there's either a malfunction or the ignition is killed.

This, and an abnormally bright main beam warning light, intrude a little onto night riding; the answer's simple: stick a bit of slightly translucent tape over them to dim the effect.

As soon as you sit astride the Replica, it's easy to imagine the racer role since it has that same cobbled together feel - not that it's a bitsa but every component gives the impression that it's only present to fulfill some essential function. The clip-on 'bars automatically place the rider in a semi-racing crouch, completed when you finally get tucked in behind the one-piece fairing and screen. The long, slim five gallon petrol tank forces your bum back a fair way so it's quite a stretch to the 'bars. This tank, say Ducati in their handbook, is 'Of anatomical shape specially studied for a correct racing position of rider. This styling represents a valid solution between shape and capacity requirements.'

Oh, yeah man, quite agree...

This riding position forces the rider to take a very objective view of his riding style. Threepenny-bitting (for all you extremely young readers, a 3d bit was a pre-decimalisation coin with eleven flats) is definitely out; only neat consistent lines are allowed and, indeed, it's almost difficult to do anything else. Just a slight shift of rider weight to one side and the bike'll bank into the turn with no trace of over or understeer, one or other of which seems ever-present on big, multi-cylinder bikes.

It's this oh-so-secure feeling when you're going into a turn, and when you're in it, and when you're exiting, that distinguishes the Ducati from almost every other production bike available. During our test day at MIRA (Motor Industry Research Association's circuit), when we had the GSX1100 Suzuki and Replica out there together, the Ducati was no