

# SINGLES Spot

THE LOVE AFFAIR OF A MAN AND HIS SINGLE

by Tom Dudones

You can talk about your superbikes and quarter-mile e.t.'s all you want, but for my money nothing packs more excitement per cubic inch than a small bore production road racer. Although there have been a number of fast, sporting roadracers in recent years, most of these have been heavy, large displacement, complicated multi-cylinder, behemoths, more suited to gobbling up miles of Interstate than carving turns along a narrow, twisting, backcountry lane. Of the motorcycles in production now, none could be taken right off the showroom floor and be competitive out on the race track. The choice of bikes is even more limited if you want to be able to legally use the machine on the public roads. Two of the best of this rare breed were the Bultaco Metralla and the Ducati Diana. Even the very mention of these names sends a shiver of excitement through anyone who has ever ridden one of these little stormers. Both are 250 singles, and honest-to-God, genuine road racers--barely legal, and faster than hell. Though different in origin and design, the Italian Ducati, a single overhead cam four-stroke, and the Spanish Bultaco a piston-port two-stroke--both machines were similar in their purpose. That purpose being to provide the ultimate in handling, speed and excitement of any road-going motorcycle of their day.

The Metralla was the product of Senor Bulto of Barcelona, and it was a near perfect reflection of the Spanish temperament. Very fast and somewhat fragile, this little roadster was probably the best handling bike of it's day. Although the simple design and detailed execution of the Metralla was almost faultless, the quality of the materials used in production were not up to the same high standards. Things tended to break easily. Shift and brake levers, cables and spokes, had to be inspected regularly for signs of fatigue. Anything that wasn't painted or made of alloy would quickly show signs of rust. Chrome plating was thin and tended to pit and peel easily unless it was kept waxed with religious zeal. The paint, though finely applied, was rather thin and would wear through to the primer where the riders knees gripped the fuel tank. But these minor flaws were quickly forgotten once the Metralla was in motion. It would do anything the rider asked of it, with never a trace of hesitation or contrariness. You didn't steer the Metralla through a turn, you just thought about it...and before you knew it the bike was heeled over and carving a line through the turn. The two-stroke engine provided plenty of power once it climbed above 4000 rpm, and punch lasted right to the 9000 rpm redline. The big four-shoe vented front brake would pull the Metralla down quickly and smoothly from any speed, the tires howling in protest and smudging the road with black rubber. The clean simple lines, the shining ebony tank, a broad silver stripe along the top and the famous "thumbs up" logo on each flank, the dark, squat cylinder atop the bright alloy engine casing, the delicate fenders scribing silvery arcs over each wheel; all of these elements in harmony made the Metralla a visual standout when compared to the cluttered, overstated styling of most of the motorcycles of its day. Handling power, braking, style, the Bultaco Metralla had it all. There was only one other motorcycle in the same class, and it too was a product of the Latin imagination. The legendary Ducati Diana, the fastest 250 roadster of its day, and a racer from the word go.

The Italian 250 was a direct descendant of the famous desmodromic single of Fabio Taglioni. The 125cc desmo came within a hairs breath of beating the MV Agusta multi for the World Championship

in 1960. Though not a desmo, the Diana was every bit as much a racer as the factory sponsored bikes. The difference was the factory desmos were strictly roadracers, the Ducati Diana was a racer for the open road. It was street legal complete with lights, license plate, and passenger pegs. The Diana could be ridden to the track, and then go out and be competitive with anything in its class. The specs on the Diana will give you an indication of the type of machine that it was; overhead cam, eleven to one compression ration, magneto ignition, megaphone exhaust, rear-set foot controls, 30 mm De10rto carb with a short intake horn instead of the usual air filter, a huge front brake with functional air scoops, low bars and there right over the steering head, a big Veglia tachometer with the redline at 8,500 rpm's. The Diana looked like it was doing 80mph just sitting in the garage. The minute you saw it, you just knew that there was a real screamer. This wasn't your run-of-the-mill commuter bike or Interstate tourer. Here was the poorman's equivalent of the Ferrari GTB. For only eight hundred bucks, "everyman" could have a blood-red Italian racing excitement machine, complete with five-speed transmission, tuned-exhaust and high winding, overhead cam, alloy engine, pumping out horsepower at the rate of two horses per cubic inch. The Diana had but one purpose; to cover any twisting stretch of highway faster than anything else on two wheels. It would give any decent 650 fits on a tight section of blacktop, and a well tuned Diana would blow off most of the contemporary sports cars like leaves in the wind.

But the reason for the Ducati Diana's existence was to be ridden, and ridden hard. Let your imagination float freely for a moment...It's early morning, and the sky is just beginning to lighten with the promise of a clear spring day. The air is damp and cool with the freshness of last night's rain still lingering. You gulp down the last of the coffee and pull on your old, brown leather jacket. You walk over to the hall closet and reach up to the top shelf to get the helmet, it's read color scratched and faded to a dusty orange, by the weather and sun. In the helmet are a pair of green tinted goggles, and tan leather driving gloves, a strip of chamoe along the back of each index finger to wipe the rain from the glass lenses of the goggles. Turn off the kitchen light and walk out the back door. The street still glissens with water, and here and there puddles reflect the rising morning sun. Cross the driveway and swing up the overhead garage door. There it stands, in the far corner of the garage, a gleaming red Ducati Diana. The simple lines of the black enameled frame and the graceful silver crescents of the fenders provide a pleasing contrast to the massive crimson fuel tank and the elongated cone of the flat-black, megaphone exhaust. The polished aluminum of the engine casing and cam-drive tower, the dull silver of the alloy cylinder and blue tinge on the curve of the exhaust pipe, all lend touches of muted color to the Diana. The shining spoked wheels seem to be silver webs of reflected light radiating from the polished alloy

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