

DOWN AMONG THE DUKES

The following article was taken from the Jan/81 issue of THE BIKER. Our thanks to them for the use. And our thanks to the member who sent it in.

The new Ducati factory alongside the old facilities at Bologna represents a considerable investment in machine tools and test equipment. Everything is kept immaculately clean and tidy while most of the workers, although busy, are cheerful and friendly.

Current production is concentrated on the 500cc Pantah V-twin and the 900SS Desmo, while there is a large output of industrial diesels, outboard motors and pumps.

Five or six men work together as a team to assemble a V-twin up to the cycle parts stage, when they are stored in a large holding bay. Not that Ducati wants it that way, but they are being held up by an uneven flow of parts from their suppliers.

I was shown around the area in which all the completed engines are connected to electric motors and given an initial break-in. This is also the place where you come across Ducati's V4 and 500 and 600cc turbo V-twin projects.

In the engine assembly and machine shops Ducati have installed two new computerized milling and drilling machines over the past two years. Each one performs about 18 separate operations, but is capable of many more. They should speed up production without increasing Ducati's wage bill.

Next stop was the final test department where all the bikes are checked to see that they meet emission regulations, are tuned up and then taken round the test track. Suddenly, and much to my surprise, I was introduced to Senor Calcagnite, Ducati's commercial manager, and asked into his office for a chat.

During 98 Ducati have plans to introduce a 600cc version of the 500 Pantah. They will then be producing a 500, a 600 tourer and a 600 sports machine — which may be similar to the Hailwood Replica 900SS — although plans were not too firm. Currently they are promoting the Pantah as much as possible and in conjunction with tuning specialists Scuderia NCR they have a Formula 2 race program underway, with three bikes on the stocks.

I was not surprised to learn that Ducati plans to drop the 500 Vertical twin and 125 shortly. 1980 was a bad year for Ducati production due to the introduction of the Pantah, with the factory finding itself with too many models to build. Unreliable outside suppliers also helped to screw things up pretty badly.

However, this year the situation should be rather different, as Ducati has ordered ahead from its suppliers, so that reject parts can be rectified in time. It's going to mean higher costs with more parts on the shelf, but production should be smoother.

At the time I visited the factory the spares situation was chronic (it was impossible to get a 900SS kickstart even in Bologna!), but improvements are in hand. A new sparis store has been created; before, parts had to be removed from production stores, which involved miles of red tape.

Ducati currently exports about 70 percent of production, and when I questioned Senor Calcagnite about the absence of Dukes locally he agreed that it was necessary to increase local publicity. It's possible to ride through Bologna and not see a single Duke on the road — quite a different situation to that near the Guzzi factory at Mandello where the big V-twins abound.

I asked if Ducati envisaged having any problems in the future with regard to noise and exhaust pollution. Senor Calcagnite told me that the noise and emission levels on Dukes were currently well below US figures for '81-'82 and that they have been working closely with carburetor manufacturers Dellorto. So maybe we'll be seeing a new type of carb on Dukes soon.

Questioned about the breakage of cast wheels fitted to Ducatis, the management informed me that they will no longer be fitting Campagnolo or Speedline magnesium alloy wheels, but new aluminum alloy FPS wheels which are almost as light and much stronger. I can testify to their lightness as Senor Calcagnite took the trouble to let me compare the old and new wheels.

Ducati aren't complacent, although currently they can sell more bikes than they can build. Quality control is being tightened up and they seem content to stick to fairly low volume production for enthusiasts.

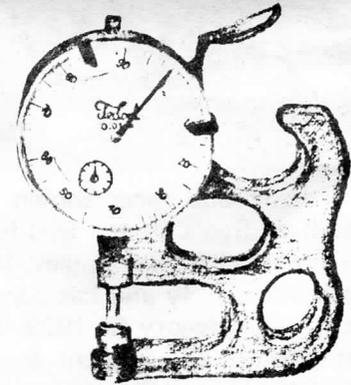
Down in the race development department for a look at the 500 F2 Pantahs being prepared for Misano, I was introduced to Dr. Taglioni, famed engineer and inventor of Ducati's desmo valve gear. He explained that they were experimenting with the handling of the F2 bikes, hence one of the machines was fitted with the rear wheel from a 900 racer. They feared that this was too wide however, with 6.5-7 inches of rubber crammed into that small frame. It looked superb.

So, there's plenty going on at Ducati at the moment, although I'd hate you to get carried away with the thought of a production V4 or turbo on sale soon. The 600s will be with us before long, however, while of the other two experimental developments the turbo looks very promising, especially if you know how far Morihhi have got with their turbo experiments.

Editors Notes:

We recently got some prices for some NCR items. A conversion kit to turn a 500 into a 600 goes for a whopping \$1450. Head porting and big seats put in by NCR \$950. Big valves 44 in., 38 ex and 40 ex. \$40 each. A two into one exhaust system for the Pantah 500, 600 and 900s \$400... OUCH! For more info contact DIOC.

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