

# DUCATI DESERTX



# MULTISTRADA V4 RALLY



---

WITH DUCATI BOASTING TWO OF THE MOST DESIRABLE AND CAPABLE ADVENTURE BIKES EVER MADE IN ITS 2023 LINE-UP, **JULIAN CHALLIS** ASKS WHICH IS MOST WORTHY OF A SPOT IN YOUR GARAGE



As a road touring bike, the Multistrada V4 Rally is near impossible to beat

Until recently, if you wanted a Ducati adventure bike, you bought a Multistrada and rode away on one of the most desirable and capable motorcycles ever made. But with the introduction of the achingly beautiful DesertX to its line up, the Italian manufacturer gave prospective buyers an incredibly tough decision.

After all, they are two of the most exciting and sought after adventure bikes we've had the pleasure of testing. On one side we have the wonderful Ducati Multistrada models, bikes so individual and sophisticated that they are among the most advanced motorcycles ever manufactured. And on the other side we have the young pretender and stablemate, the awesome Ducati DesertX, the Italian firm's first genuine dual-sport machine and a remarkably capable one at that.

Both are exceptional motorcycles in a crowded marketplace, but if you are walking into a dealership this weekend, which should you choose: Multistrada or Desert X? Four cylinders or two? We've ridden them, so it's time to find out.

### MULTISTRADA V4 RALLY

Although the Multistrada family of bikes boasts multiple models, they can be broadly split into two categories. There are those with the barnstorming V4, four-cylinder engine, and those with the less powerful but very capable V2, two-cylinder engine.

Launched in the spring of 2021, the V4 replaced the leviathan Multistrada 1260 and frankly was like nothing we'd ever seen or ridden before. With just about every other manufacturer doggedly sticking to big twins or triples, Ducati came out of leftfield with its compact V4 motor, shoehorning the four big cylinders into an impossibly small unit within the Multistrada's familiar geometry.

For this comparison, we are going to focus on the latest and best, the V4 Rally model. The Multistrada platform might have been going since as far back as 2003, but this is a Ducati taken to the next level

with a larger 30l fuel tank, improved comfort, and an obscenely capable electronics package.

### THE DESERTX

The light(er)weight contender in our battle is something of a new venture for Ducati. While producing road-based bikes from its northern Italian base has been the firm's bread and butter (or should that be ciabatta and olive oil), since the '50s, it never produced a dual sport motorcycle.

OK, so those classic Cagivas that took Dakar victories in 1990 and 1994 were equipped with Ducati engines (little wonder as Cagiva owned Ducati at the time), but as to a genuine off-road capable machine, the Multistrada was the closest they came. That all changed in late 2021 when Ducati revealed the DesertX. It used the exquisite motor from the Multistrada V2 and wrapped it in an all-new trellis frame and gorgeous bodywork inspired by classic Dakar bikes.

Yet, the Desert X did not only talk the talk of those classic rally bikes, it could walk the walk too. Launched in the idyllic setting of central Sardinia, the X proved to be just as competent on the wonderful trails that traverse the island as it was on the glorious roads. With top notch Showa suspension, proper off-road spec 21" and 18" wheels clad in Pirelli Rally STRs, and that punchy 950cc motor, the DesertX was better than we could possibly have hoped. So, which should you buy? After riding them both, here's my verdict.

### POWER AND PERFORMANCE

Straightaway the V4 Rally is going to win on outright figures. With a 90-degree, liquid cooled, V4 motor and an hugely impressive 1,158cc capacity, the V4 engine pumps out a class leading 170bhp at 10,000rpm. Factor in the 121Nm of torque and this is one powerful motorcycle. In comparison, the Ducati Desert X looks positively weedy. The 937cc liquid cooled motor is good for 110bhp at 9,250 rpm and a maximum torque figure of 92Nm.

Both bikes are hugely capable off road, but the more nimble DesertX is better suited to hitting the trails



Both bikes run Bosch's faultless fuel injection systems and ride-by-wire throttle set up, have six-speed gearboxes with the obligatory quickshifter and hydraulically controlled slipper clutch. But out on the road these bikes ride in a very different way that mere figures and spec sheets cannot possibly convey.

The motor on the V4 Rally feels and sounds just like two V-twins running alongside each other, and even in Touring mode, it delivers such an addictively powerful punch that it's hard not to whoop out loud every time you nail that throttle out of a corner. Toggle it into Sport mode using the left-hand switch and the more aggressive throttle map releases 170bhp like it's releasing the hounds of Hell. The scenery blurs, the motor roars beneath you, and everything goes into warp mode in the most wonderful way.

Even when you are not fully on the gas, the V4 motor rides unlike anything else in the adventure bike sector and with the choice of Touring, Sport, Urban and Enduro modes, you can select the mode that's right for the conditions. Hell, it even turns off two of the cylinders in traffic to keep the heat and the fuel consumption down.

On the flip side of the coin is the smaller but ultimately satisfying V2 engine of the DesertX (which is taken straight out of the Multistrada V2 model). Less brutal than its 1260cc sibling, the DesertX's motor is a rewarding ride, the 110bhp arguably more usable on tight and twisty British roads than the 170 horses of the V4. And being a smaller and less complex V-twin engine, it's still got that characteristic growl that we always love, going from a soft burble to a rasping scream as you open the taps.

Both bikes pack a tremendous punch, but whereas the V4 Rally feels like the massive hit of a professional heavyweight boxer, the V2 is more akin to a lean bare-knuckle fighter.

## CHASSIS AND SUSPENSION

Just like the motors, the Multistrada and the DesertX go about things in completely different ways. The V4 Rally has an aluminium monocoque frame and trellis rear subframe, and uses the engine as a stressed member. However, the DesertX uses a more durable trellis construction for both main and sub frame, much like modern Dakar bikes, for those off road hits.

The Multistrada runs Ducati's fully electronic Skyhook suspension, the Showa units constantly monitored, adjusted and tweaked by the complex electronics according to riding mode, braking, acceleration, cornering ABS... the list goes on.

You can electronically set the suspension for different loads, for one or two people with or without luggage, as appropriate, or just click it into Auto Levelling and allow the bike to do the rest, delivering an almost magic carpet level of suspension control.

On the DesertX, it's a distinctly less technical set up. In keeping with the more off-road focus of the bike, Kayaba conventional suspension is used at either end. More commonly associated with Yamaha, and with a formidable reputation from trail bikes, the KYB units fore and aft on the DesertX are well

matched to the bike's intended dual sport use. And the suspension is spot on for both on and off road.

While there's no electronic trickery, the forks are adjustable for preload, compression, and rebound damping. Both bikes run Brembo brakes and huge discs at either end so whichever you choose you are not going to find anything to fault here. These babies will stop on, if not slightly before, a penny.

If you come from a road bike background, the feel and sophistication of the Multistrada V4 Rally may get your vote, but if you prefer things a bit dirtier, then the DesertX feels like a wonderful big dirt bike.

Back on the road, the smaller 19" front and 17" rear wheels on the V4 Rally feels more planted through the turns, but if you put some sticky road tyres on the DesertX, the lighter bike would have little difficulty staying with the V4 Rally, regardless of its larger 21" front and 18" rear wheels.

## TECHNOLOGY AND COMFORT

While both bikes have similar tech in terms of the riding modes, wheelie control, engine braking control, adjustable ABS with cornering ABS, quickshifters, TFT screens, and power sockets, the DesertX taps out at conventional cruise control. While things like heated grips, multimedia packages, navigation software, and fog lights are available as options to buy, you won't get them on the standard bike. In fact, you won't even get an adjustable screen.

But go for the bigger brother and a positive smorgasbord of the latest technology is awaiting you from electronic suspension upwards. If you are keen to fine tune your ride, almost every possible parameter of the V4 Rally's electronics are adjustable, from suspension to power, traction control to wheelie control.

In fact, the Multistrada's electronics are now so advanced, they take the riding experience to new heights, with levels of precision and performance like we've never experienced before. We especially enjoyed the front and rear mounted radar units that provide the adaptive cruise control and the astoundingly useful blind spot detection system.

So, for long journeys and big distances, the Multistrada clearly has the upper hand over the DesertX. The seat is wider and more comfortable for both rider and pillion, the large screen is easily adjustable with the best mechanism on the market, and the wide bars can be easily rolled forward or back to suit.

You've also got heated grips, a heated seat, and even a handy little pocket on the tank to store your phone and debit card for those continental toll booths. With Ducati Connect already plumbed in, you can run all your music apps and have full navigation on the screen in front of you, cosseted from the wind behind that wide fairing.

In terms of tank size, its 30l fuel capacity should take you from Calais to Cannes with no more than two fuel stops even if the mpg is in the low thirties. Not to say that the same journey is not possible on the DesertX with its 21l fuel tank and 42mpg return, it just wouldn't be quite as comfortable and refined, but could arguably be just as enjoyable if you factored in

Unlike the Multistrada's electronic suspension, the DesertX has traditional KYB units which can be adjusted by hand



the odd gravel trail for good measure. And if you suffer with range anxiety, there is an optional 8l fuel tank available to bolt onto your DesertX.

## OFF-ROAD RIDING

Yes, the DesertX is an outstanding bike for hitting the trails, but let's be clear, the V4 Rally is pretty damn good off road for a big adventure bike. With the right tyres, it can conquer inhospitable terrain, but let's be real, how many owners will submit a bike quite so beautiful to the Strata Florida in November? Can you imagine drowning it in peat-stained brown water?

If off roading is your thing, then the Desert X will be a very willing and capable companion. It's like an upmarket Tenere 700 crossed with a Honda CRF450R. I love it.

## TOP TRUMP

So, which is the best bike here? Well, that's not an easy question to answer and it really depends on what type of adventures you want to have. The Multistrada V4 Rally took the premier adventure bike class to the next level when it was released.

In terms of performance, handling, technology, and just about everything else, it is one of the best bikes you could ever hope to own. Although the lack of a shaft drive could put off a proportion of potential buyers, as could the whopping £23,590 asking price.

For long weekends away, or big continental trips, the comfort and refinement of the Multistrada V4 Rally is comparable to anything in the adventure and indeed the sports tourer market. This is a very sophisticated and seriously beautiful motorcycle with almost infinite adjustability. If you stick to the blacktop on your adventures, and you can afford a big Multistrada, it would be our choice. And it's also no slouch off-road, if you're comfortable riding a bike of it's size in the dirt.

But in terms of an everyday ride, the DesertX makes more sense. At £14,795, it's cheaper, lighter and more agile. If your scooter has to do everything from a daily commute to backroad scratching, and still be able to take you to the Italian Riviera and back, the smaller bike is a formidable machine. And of course, the DesertX is an absolute hoot to ride off road. Strap on some serious knobbies and it is a formidable and joyful machine in the rough stuff. This bike can do it all and it can do it all year round.

For my money the Ducati DesertX has the edge in this head to head for the simple reason I enjoy riding off road regularly throughout the year, an area it wins in. But if you only venture on the trails occasionally or not at all, and your wallet is fat, the Multistrada V4 Rally is currently near impossible to beat for road touring adventures. If only it had a shaft drive. **ABR**

## SPECS AT A GLANCE

### MULTISTRADA V4 RALLY

**Price:** From £23,590

**Engine:** Liquid-cooled Ducati V4 Granturismo, four valves per cylinder

**Final drive:** Chain

**Capacity:** 1,158cc

**Power:** 170bhp at 10,750rpm

**Torque:** 121Nm at 8,750rpm

**Gears:** Six-speed

**Suspension:** Front: 50mm fully adjustable USD fork with internal stroke sensor. Electronic compression and rebound damping adjustment with Ducati Skyhook Suspension EVO, 200mm of travel. Rear: Cantilever suspension with fully adjustable monoshock.

Electronic compression and rebound damping adjustment. Electronic spring pre-load adjustment with Ducati Skyhook

**Brakes:** Front: 2 x 330mm semi-floating discs, radially mounted Brembo Stylema 4-piston callipers, and cornering ABS.

Rear: 265 mm disc, 2-piston floating calliper, with cornering ABS

**Weight:** 260kg (wet)

**Tank capacity:** 30l

**Seat height:** 870mm - 890mm

**Ground clearance:** 230mm

**Wheels:** Spoked 19" front, 17" rear

### DESERTX

**Price:** From £14,795

**Engine:** 937cc, liquid-cooled, Testastretta L-twin engine, Desmodromic valve train

**Final drive:** Chain

**Capacity:** 937cc

**Power:** 110bhp

**Torque:** 92Nm

**Gears:** Six speed

**Suspension:** Front: KYB 46mm upside-down fork, fully adjustable, 230mm travel. Rear: KYB monoshock, fully adjustable, 220mm travel

**Brakes:** Front: Twin 320mm aluminium semi-floating discs, radial mount Brembo mono-bloc 4-pistons callipers, Bosch Cornering ABS. Rear: 265 mm disc, Brembo floating 2-pistons calliper, Bosch Cornering ABS

**Weight:** 223kg (wet)

**Tank capacity:** 21l (additional 8l tank optional)

**Seat height:** 875mm

**Ground clearance:** 250mm

**Wheels:** 21" front, 18" rear