

**By Richard Newland** EDITOR

ucati have long been a purveyor of achingly gorgeous motorcycles: Jewel like, sometimes fragile, but always soulful and engaging. While some are best kept polished and poised in the garage, ready for a sublime sunny Sunday sojourn – anyone who buys a Multistrada V4S and leaves it languishing, treating it only to adoring looks and caressing coats of carnauba wax, should be flogged for cruelty to motorcycles. This is a bike that should be ridden. Everywhere. Any time. In all weathers.

Some bikes like to hurt you

- the Multistrada isn't one of
them. In fact, it's one of the most
comfortable and cosseting bikes

you can buy if you're addicted to piling on the miles. During my 6500+ miles on one so far this year, I've racked up several 15-hour days of riding where the only breaks have been to fill the tank, and empty my own, before hopping back in the saddle and hitting the starter button again.

And even after adding over 700 miles to the odometer in one hit, there was no bum ache, knee cramps, hip discomfort, back or neck ache. But it's not just about how comfortable it is. The way the Multi manages its airflow means that you're cocooned in a bubble of relative tranquillity – not something that's true on the vast majority of adventure styled machines that buffet and batter you like you've strayed under a low-flying helicopter. Not only

does this serenity mean you're not beaten into taking breaks, but it combines with the bike's superb V4 power-plant, cheeky handling and impressive electronics to allow you to stay sharp and engaged in the ride – meaning you feel energized and fresh long after other bikes will leave you stretching and yawning roadside while nursing a coffee and a headache.

Yes, the 19in front rim robs it of a degree or three of the aggression a 17in allows, but the trade-off is a rolling smoothness and graceful security on the move that feels more beneficial when you're doing anything other than trying to pretend you're on a sportsbike. But it's never more than entertainingly loose – the security is there in spades, and the bike will dig you out of any corner with the rear

## 'It should be ridden. Any time. In all weathers'

grabbing the tarmac and the front sniffing the air. Plus, the versatility of a 19-incher means you really can take the Multistrada off road if you want to. Most won't.

Treat it gentle and the V4 is a tame, refined, smooth force of petrol-burning nature. Dial up the menace, and it becomes a wailing maelstrom of drive. The anti-wheelie will stop things getting out of hand, but it'll lift of its own accord in the first three cogs, and even at Autobahn speeds you

can tap the throttle open in sixth and it'll keep adding digits like you'd dropped a cog first. It's a joy of responsive precision – both aurally and emotively – to cane it, but docile and refined when it's only sipping at the contents of its 22-litre tank.

The V4 is nowhere near as brutal as the old V-twin 1260 in terms of pulsating dollops of punchy torque, but instead you're gifted a rollicking best-of-both-worlds, where it feels V-twinesque in its off-beat gruntiness, while singing like an RC45 at the redline. This thing is Jekyll and Hyde, but all at the same time.

While the defining character of the Multistrada V4 is all laced into the looks, engine and taut manners, there's another whole stratum of accompanying talent

that adds to the riding joy. The superb dash is a class above the competition in presentation and refinement; the rider modes are intuitive and easy to interact with; the semi-active suspension is responsive and whisker-close to perfection on any surface; while the layout and functionality of all the buttons and interfaces are so simple that you don't need to lose a day reading the manual to work out how to turn the indicators on. The same can't be said of all bikes.

Ducati bill it as an adventure bike – and it can be – but it's much more than that. Sunday hooner, weeklong tourer, daily grinder, and occasional trail blazer. A genuine multi-tool. Yes, it's pricey – but even my cynical eyes can see where the money's been spent. And it's worth every penny.



- •£14,999
- 1301cc 8v V-twin
- 1301cc 8v V-twin • 158bhp/102lb.ft

With off-road blood coursing through its veins the KTM feels like a Dakar bike on steroids - tall, soft and comfy with an engine spilling over with grunt.

## BMW \$1000XR TE • £16,150 • 999cc 16v inline four • 163bhp/84lb.ft It might not be as lavish or all-enveloping, but the BMW

has crisper handling and with

its 17in front wheel there's

a bigger choice of sportier

rubber to choose from

**Manufacturer of the Year** 

## 'THEY'RE THE FULL PACKAGE'

Ducati take 2021's top accolade after a year of sterling success

ome years this award is simple to give by dint of the volume or significance of wins, in other years it's given for a single moment of genius, a market-defining bike release, sales results, or a particularly impressive innovation. This year it was the sheer breadth of strength and success, innovation, product development and racing clout that saw Ducati emerge victorious.

Ducati have also won key accolades in this year's other award categories, taking Best All-rounder (left) and Best Sub-1000cc Naked class wins – both with bikes that have come to define the growth and diversity within their range. Where once Ducati would have been only considered a superbike

## 'Once a niche brand, they have become leaders'

brand, their wins with the bold new Monster and highly-evolved Multistrada V4 S demonstrate how broad and deep the range has become in 2021.

Ducati have also enjoyed a highly successful year of global sales despite the instability and challenges of Covid-world trading conditions, while their bravery in risking the alienation of their core



buying audience in the pursuit of new engine innovation (moving their flagship bikes to V4, as well as ditching the Desmodromic valve system for the Multistrada) - and chassis and styling changes that have broken decades of convention (gone is the Monster's trellis frame) that were synonymous with the brand. All the while they continue to build some of the most visceral bikes on the market (this year's Panigale SP is an extraordinary gem), while managing to be aspirational but accessible at the same time though their diverse model range.

Ducati also continue to fight at the sharp end in racing, pushing factories with more experience and bigger budgets all the way to the podium, and taking multiple wins this year in MotoGP, WSB and BSB.

In all aspects of motorcycling, what was once considered a niche brand with just one trick up their sleeves, has become a real leader. They're highly worthy recipients.

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