



Italian revolution

Ducati Monster gets its biggest-ever shake-up – and the result is wonderful

£10,643 otr

Ducati Monster

- 937cc dohc 8v desmo V-twin
- 109bhp @ 9250rpm (claimed)
- 188kg (wet, claimed)



By Mike Armitage
DEPUTY EDITOR, MOTORCYCLING

Disregard everything you know about the Monster. Forget all about steel trellis frames, cooling fins, low-slung handling and weighty dynamics. Ignore too any preconceptions of it being a makeshift model assembled from

parts swept off the storeroom floor. The V-twin is completely revamped for 2021 – and it's potentially the surprise of the year.

It grabs attention in just the first few yards of today's thrum around the B-road route of the MCN250. Tall, slim, the Monster has delicate low-speed handling, super-light steering and is fabulously agile.

Continued over

ALL-NEW TEST ROUTES

It's Britain's toughest road test route. A fun but punishing mix of A- and B-roads, busy motorway, towns and villages. It's all Britain's road types compressed into one route. There are three sections and we combine the two that best test the bike's character. On average we ride 450 miles per bike, per test.

MCN

250

MILE ROAD TEST

THE HOTTEST BIKES

EVERY WEEK



- ROUTE 1

122.73 miles of fast-flowing A and B-roads
- ROUTE 2

126.94 miles of open A and B-roads and towns
- ROUTE 3

117.88 miles of big A roads and motorway

WEATHER WATCH

Breezy, changeable, odd shower 14°C

Previous versions in a model run lasting almost three decades could require hefty input, with a steadfast feel and limited dynamic. But the new one is as fruity and eager as KTM's flyaway 890 Duke.

This thorough modernisation is a result of Ducati starting from scratch. The steel tube frame that's been a Monster signature since 1993 is no more, replaced by the cast aluminium 'front frame' of the Panigale. Yes, just as the original M900 Monster borrowed the frame of Ducati's sportsbike of the time, the 851, so the latest version swipes parts from the current superbike. The engine is the civilised yet enthusiastic 937cc desmodromic 90° V-twin from the SuperSport 950 and Hypermotard, and the rear subframe and swingarm mount directly to it – and with no conventional frame it's the rear cylinder that governs width in the middle, so it's gloriously slender.

Weight drops by 18 bags of Tate & Lyle to 188kg fuelled and ready to ride, the centre of gravity is higher, and the seat is placed at a taller 820mm. Add in sporty steering geometry and its slight build, and the Ducati flick-flacks effortlessly along Lincolnshire's tangled B-roads. It has loads of feel through the controls and this brings huge confidence, even when April's heavy showers turn up in mid-May.

It's a bike that overflows with zest. 'Just fun!' shouts Ducati's marketing, and they ain't wrong.

It's not the most secure handling at speed. Despite the 24-degree head angle, abrupt 93mm of trail and low weight Ducati haven't fitted a steering damper. This means fabulously breezy steering at any speed, but with sportily firm suspension the Monster is a little lively on bumpier lanes. It never feels like it's going to toss you over the hawthorn and the feel of the bars lightly jiggling adds to a sense

Continued over



The engine is just as sweet pootling around town

2 Fun... but unnecessary

With no traffic I stop to try the DPL – Ducati Power Launch. The idea is you can nail the throttle and the bike holds at the engine at optimum revs for a snappy start, while you simply feed out the clutch. It works and is quite amusing, but the way the motor bangs off a limiter is a bit unnerving and it isn't as quick as manual launches.

3 Trendy urban socialite

The new bike is tall and slim like an MT-09 or 890 Duke. Sitting higher than on previous Monsters gives greater confidence negotiating Leicester's bustle, where the servo-assist clutch is light, fuelling is spotless. It has oodles of steering lock. Either it's the city's 'Cheerful Driver Day 2021' or the Monster's large DRL catches the eye too.



This really could be the best Monster Ducati have made

1 Tea with the vicar

Nothing wrong with the Monster's manners. On the rolling route west towards Melton Mowbray the 937cc V-twin is quiet and calm, with little more than a polite muffled mumble cruising on a tiny throttle opening. 60mph is a relaxed 4000rpm in sixth (same as the latest Triumph Speed Triple) and the real-time economy readout flicks up beyond 60mpg.



7 Willpower required

The Monster negotiates flicking roads with such a delicate touch and is so happy carrying corner speed that it's easy to start looking like a terrorist to other traffic. Slowing for a village to what feels like an appropriate speed and glancing down to see 50mph showing is a reminder that I need to avoid getting carried away...



The tank is small but this Monster isn't too thirsty

8 Coping with the boring stuff

Obviously, there's windblast, but the supportive riding position and light controls mean straight slogs aren't too tiresome. And practicality is boosted by a storage area with a USB port under the rider's seat, plus decent service intervals – minor services are every 9000 miles and valve-check majors are 18,000. There's a Monster + for an extra £250 that has a single seat cowl and a flyscreen, though it's a dinky bit of plastic and hard to imagine it does anything; instead, go for the accessory tinted screen (£237.60) and heated grips (£263) to make a truly practical Monster.

FUEL FACTS

How far can you get between fuel stops? DUCATI MONSTER

154 miles

120 miles to fuel light

50 mpg

Only a 14-litre tank, but the twin's frugal

Functionality and features

Clocks	★★★★☆
Switches	★★★★☆
Mirrors	★★★★☆

'Gloriously light on its feet but with plenty of feedback'

4 Circuit breaker

The Monster has three-level ABS, with lean sensitivity in three and two, and front-only function and no rear lift management in level one. There are eight levels of TC. Despite enthusiastic riding, the only thing letting me know the systems are doing anything is a flickering TC light on scrabbling corner exits.

5 Effortless tossability

Imagine the most tangled rollercoaster you've been on and drape its whoops, crests, kinks and elbows over some fresh green British countryside. That's what this part of the B6047 is like (kinda). It's draped in a 50mph limit but this is plenty brisk enough for the tightest parts, and the Monster dances through with breath-taking ease. It feels gloriously light on its feet, yet at the same time has plenty of feedback and connection.

9 Smartly dressed...

Stopping to refill the 14-litre tank allows time to really take in the Ducati's look. I wasn't overly convinced by the 'upside-down' curve on the bottom of the tank, but the lines grow on you. Trim and honed back, it's a contemporary design but there's a definite hint of old-school Monster. A vocal passer-by isn't convinced by all the plastic covering the engine, though, saying: "It looks like the back of a fridge."

10 Bucket and sponge

Rain. And it was all going so swimmingly. The Monster's chassis feedback, sense of connection and Pirelli tyres supply surefooted confidence in the wet, but the short oddly-shaped front mudguard and poxy rear hugger appear to be more for decoration than function – the underside of the seat unit, rear shock and engine are given a liberal smothering of road slop.



Wide bars give plenty of control in the twisties



6 Electronic slap on the wrists

The wheelie control allows enough lift for the best possible acceleration. This also means it jumps in to prevent crest-top shenanigans – over small rises you get playful lift but particularly sharp lips that send the front tyre skyward see the power cut. It stops you getting too carried away, but operation could be smoother.

'I OWN A 696 AND 796...

...and need to see the new one in person'

Caroline Wheelhouse
Age 63 Height 5ft 3in
Current bike Monster 696, Monster 796
Been riding Three years
First bike Honda Hornet 600
Dream bike Custom bike built to suit me

"I've only been riding for three years but should've moved from the pillion seat years ago. My first bike was a Honda Hornet, and I currently have two Monsters – a 696 that I ride through winter and a 796 Anniversary for the rest of the year. I bought the 696 after sitting on a friend's bike and being impressed by its small size. Moving from the smooth four-cylinder Honda to the V-twin was quite an experience but one I soon came to enjoy, so a year later I added the 796.

"I'm keen to see the new Monster in a showroom. I've only seen pictures so far, so it's not easy to pass a qualified opinion, but it does seem to have split the ranks of Monster enthusiasts. I'm disappointed not to see a passing nod to the trellis and agree with comments that it looks that bit too Japanese.

"But I'm sure there's more to the new bike than is conveyed through the pictures. The performance sounds appealing, and the new electronics would give me confidence.

"Again, it's not necessarily what the purists want but it's what is expected of a bike in this category today. It's light too, and with three seat-height options (one with lowered suspension) it sounds a good bet for a smaller person like me."



MCN reader Caroline has a summer Monster and a winter Monster...

of playfulness; however, it's not a bike you'd describe as planted when you're really 'making progress'.

Nothing wrong with the suspension though. It's easy to lazily assume a lack of adjusters on the 43mm forks and preload-only rear shock means they're 'budget' parts. Don't be fooled. Failing to spot a pothole on the crest-filled frolic towards Uppingham demonstrates the quality of the damping, and there's a fine balance of sporty ride comfort and corner-slicing control. Feel through the front-end allows all manner of late braking silliness when applying the mighty Brembo calipers, too. Tease the lever, the forks dip a just-so amount, and – bang – you stop.

With 109bhp and 69lb.ft delivered at accessible revs, the liquid-cooled V-twin is a willing accomplice. Gearing is snappy, meaning wheel-lifting capers exiting tight corners, and with the spread of thrust you can worry about vanishing points and the sudden appearance of tractors rather than gear selection.

Yet after refilling the 14-litre tank (and stuffing an egg mayo cob into my grinning face), this perky powerplant demonstrates that it can also be polite on the afternoon's more sedate A-road jaunt. Fuelling is spotless, the ability to trundle calmly at low revs highlights how lumpy and obstinate V-twins used to be, and it whirrs discreetly while I get frustrated by solid white lines and 50 limits. As with all recent Ducatis, the self-servo clutch is light and the gearbox action clean, though the two-way quickshifter on this low-miler isn't overly enthused about popping from first to second.

Pleasingly the chassis works on these wider roads as well. Smooth



The nimble new Monster is ideal on our B-road route

surfaces bring a settled ride, and the ergonomics are pretty much cock-on. You could grumble about the lack of weather protection, but that'd be like choosing alcohol-free beer then complaining you're not tipsy. With wider bars that are positioned closer than on the 797 and 821 models it replaces, the Monster gave an increased sense of control while being flung around the B-roads earlier; and now, thanks to lower-mounted footpegs, the riding position is spacious and comfortable. Win-win, as they say.

The Ducati is even happy through town. Light controls, nimbleness and a friendly engine allow stress-free navigation through traffic.

It takes almost 200 miles before I stop accidentally resetting the trip, though. The colour TFT display carries as much info as you need and is managed by recognisable

Ducati controls on the left bar, with the switch for the self-cancelling indicators also being used to select which of the three riding modes you fancy and to reset the trip. Despite the indicators turning themselves off, 30 years of riding means I still prod the button after a junction... and accidentally reset the trip.

After a full riding-day it speaks volumes that this minor niggle is just about the only negative. At £10,643 it's more expensive than the new Yamaha MT-09, KTM 890 Duke or a Triumph Street Triple R. However, retrieving my phone from the natty storage area under the seat and unplugging the charger from the USB port, I genuinely think the Monster will sell. Sporty, invigorating and engaging yet well-mannered, civil and usable, with a high-quality feel and great spec, it deserves to be a monster hit. **MCN**

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MILE ROAD TEST
• THE HOTTEST BIKES
• EVERY WEEK



Light, slender and up for fun. It is a real cracker

DIVE IN TO THE DETAIL



TFT dash gives you all the information you could possibly need and is in keeping with the overall feel of a completely contemporary Monster



Let the self-cancelling indicators do their thing or you will end up resetting the trip meter



With a light squeeze of the lever and a just-right dip from the forks the radial Brembos stop the bike fast



★★★★★
£10,643 Ducati Monster

Engine	937cc dohc 8v desmo V-twin
Frame	Cast aluminium 'front frame'
Suspension	43mm telescopic fork, no adjustment monoshock, adjustable preload
Front brake	2x 320mm discs, four-piston calipers
Rear brake	245mm disc, two-piston caliper
Seat height	820mm

109
bhp

69
lb.ft

188
kg (wet)

14
litres

PCP DEAL	£119.86 per month x36	£2500 Total deposit payable	4000 Annual mileage	7.9% APR fixed	£5550 Optional final payment
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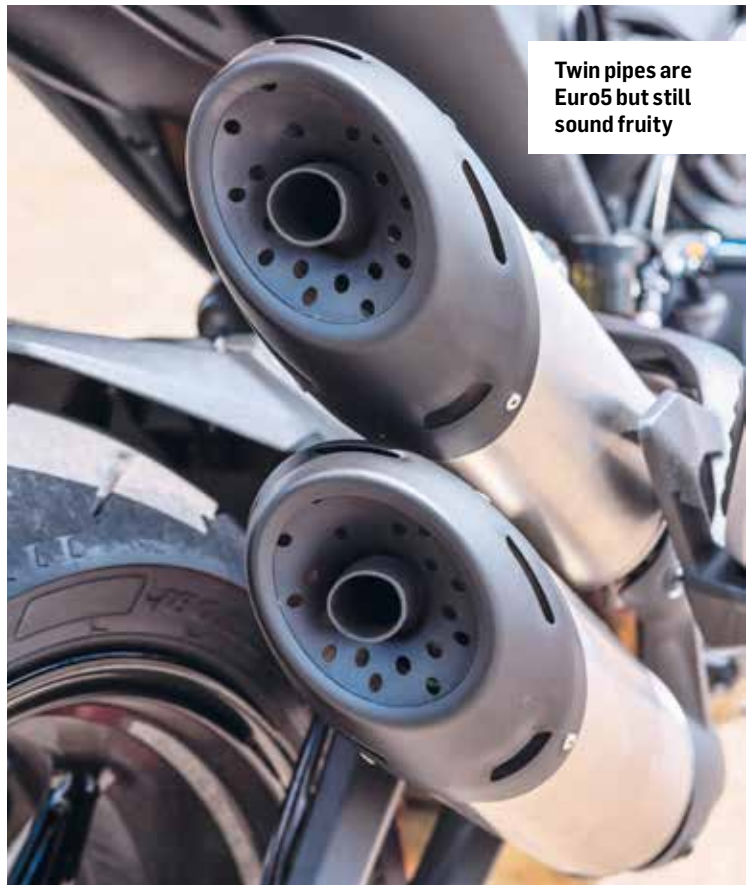
No trellis. Instead you have the front frame from the Panigale with the engine dictating the width – so end the result is gloriously slender



The headlight is suitably Monster while running lights and Audi style indicators are ace in traffic



Preload adjustment on the rear and nothing up front but the suspension isn't lacking control in any way



Twin pipes are Euro5 but still sound fruity

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VERDICT
MIKE ARMITAGE
DEPUTY EDITOR,
MOTORCYCLING

'A genuine, slap-in-the-face surprise'

Over the years I've been fortunate enough to ride many Monsters, from the original M900 through to the air-cooled 620, 800 and 797, the over-the-top S4R, to the 1100s and still current 1200. So, I cockily thought I knew what to expect from the new one.

But it's a genuine, slap-in-the-face surprise. More agile and easier to sling about than an MT-09? Better feel and presentation than an 890 Duke, and more cheeky fun than a Street Triple? Blimey.

The all-new Monster is a complete reset that brings it smack up to date with contemporary rivals, not only on engine performance and handling capability, but also in terms of equipment, quality and rideability. It's as fruity or friendly as you want. And while the ten-and-a-half asking price puts it up with racier RS and SP versions of the competition, let's not forget that this is a Ducati with all the status, class finish and solid residuals that brings. I reckon it's a cracker.



The Monster has been truly reborn

LIKES

- Light, accessible handling
- Confidence on all types of road in all conditions
- That something so fruity is also usable and practical

DISLIKES

- My middle-age brain being confused by the multi-function indicator switch
- Pointless launch control instead of heated grips