

## DUCATI M900 MONSTER



IF YOU WANT a stropy, noisy little runt of a bike, nothing has ever been more aptly named than the Ducati Monster. Stubby, hunched and harsh, the M900 is an evil little tyke after the comparatively huge, smooth and soft Honda.

The tiny Ducati is a hard stick of chalk compared to the Honda's tub of cream

cheese. The Monster's bucket seat cants you forward towards simple, virtually straight bars. Knees slot into the tank. Feet find rearsets. There's no messing, no sloppiness, just hard-nosed aggression.

That impression is compacted the moment you thumb the starter. With a lazy clatter the 900SS motor kicks into life; chinking and chiming from the clutch; a deep, gobby inimitable rumble from the clumsy-looking twin pipes. Where the liquid-cooled, four-cylinder Honda is all slickness and sheen, the oil and air-cooled V-twin Duke is as hairy-arsed as they come.

Everything about it is hard and gruff and excitingly simple. The view over the neat one-piece bars is as plain as an enduro bike: handlebars, white-faced speedo, a few idiot lights, that's it. The

clutch is two-fingers heavy; the typically sloppy and rattly Ducati gearbox engages first with a clonk; the desmo rumbles and flutters at idle and low revs, but once it hits 4000 or above the Monster takes off.

Taut, stiffly-sprung, short and narrow, the little Duke accelerates at low speed like only a light bike can. You feel every ounce of the 110lb weight advantage it holds over the Honda. There's no particular meat in the desmo V-twin's delivery – the impression of urge is merely exaggerated by the bounding cacophony resounding from the twin pipes. But because it's so light, it's certainly sprightly, sharp and quick.

Only in the upper reaches does the Monster's powerplant start to lose out to the slicker triple and four. Wind up the wick and the Duke needs fistfuls of revs almost as much as the Honda and long, straight drags see it easily beaten.

The Ducati's chassis is every bit as blunt as its power delivery. Though unique to the Monster, the chrome-moly steel trellis, upside-down forks and rising-rate rear end seem just as harsh, sharp and uncompromising as a 900SS. Though the Monster's head angle has been kicked out compared to the SS, this is still one hell of a twitchy, sharp steering, wrist-pummelling little git of a bike.

On smooth surfaces or round slow, tight corners it's nimble, effortless and a joy – at least, until the exhaust grounds out prematurely, that is ('94 models have chamfered end cans to avoid this, but ours, being a demonstrator, had '93 versions). But on rougher surfaces at higher speeds it kicks like a mule, the bars skitter and the rider jars, grits teeth and hangs on. Even the huge 320mm Brembo brakes are as sharp as a buck knife and make those of the other two bikes seem positively mushy and underpowered.

Equipment is minimal. The motor is so flexible it doesn't really need a tach; so there isn't one. There's no fuel tap, just a slightly worrisome fuel warning light

## SECOND OPINION

## The Testosterone Factor

LET'S NOT BEAT about the bush. What all these bikes offer is pose potential. Being 'new men' at BIKE, we're aware that some women will buy these bikes, but when they were on the drawing board the designer was thinking MEN. Broad shouldered, bristly chinned, scuffed knuckled men. Men who don't have to try – too hard.

Of course, people who ride these things, you and I, are men who generally have to try VERY hard, but the bikes can help.

## Ducati Monster

Well there's a name to scare the ladies and it's great for opening lines: "Do you want to see my Monster?" or "Fancy a ride, you'll love it, it's a Monster" etc. A smack in the teeth is a likely outcome.

It's red. Never underestimate the power of red machines. At a car auction you'll notice how interest in any red car is 100 per cent up on the previous brown model.

The Monster is Italian. Robert de Niro is also Italian (well, sort of), so is lasagne. Women love 'em both.

It's a small bike so if you're a little bloke it makes you look big and the bars are wide enough to give that 'wrestling a steer to the ground' look.

Noise is a major asset here, the noise of a rutting stag. Phwoarr! And that seat is really only for one because you're a drifter, a lone heart looking for kicks on the highway of love. Well, you're desperate for a shag but she'd be in such a state after a ride on Beelzebub's pillion, forget it.

Testosterone factor: 8/10

## Honda CB1000 Super Four

Already having problems with the name here. Those who came through the late 70s with their sanity intact will still associate the letters 'CB' with breaker breaker

saddo anorak types. Code letters and numbers are only flash on fighter aircraft, and most of them have sexier names than Super Four, which sounds too like Famous Five and Secret Seven to be truly manly.

Black, though, is good. Dark, hidden depths, a man of mystery, the evil bit of rough, all classic biker images that still pull weight, and hopefully women.

The CB's country of origin is a bit of a handicap in the macho stakes, Japan is known for many things but butch men isn't really one of them. But the immense size of the bike means lanky types look normal and titches, while appearing even smaller than usual, can wow the women by stamping their authority on the mighty beast. "Ooh, you're sooo strong."

An engine that sounds like a Nissan Micra is not good unless you're trying to impress her grandmother and combined with that plush pillion seat she'll have slipped into a deep sleep and dropped off the back before you get home.

Testosterone factor: 6/10

## Triumph Speed Triple

A real name including the word 'Speed' so it must be fast. Just like you.

Bright yellow plumage can't help but get you noticed, the long stretch to the sleek, aggressive clip-ons helps smooth out the beer gut and the engine note is a rich, Barry White bellow.

It's a high quality package you can ride fast. Pillions arrive wide-eyed and ready for action, essential knee joints still intact.

The alloy warning lights panel looks hand cut so you can spin some yarn about crafting it yourself from kryptonite. "He's sooo good with his hands."

A dead cert, best put the Hoover round.

Testosterone factor: 9/10

Mick Phillips

