

WORDS GEZ KANE PHOTOGRAPHY MARK MANNING & SIMON HIPPERSON

BEAUTY IN THE BEASTS

Ducati's slick Monster and Triumph's musclebound first-generation Speed Triple were landmarks for their marques. Sometimes less is more when it comes to creating legends

1993 DUCATI M900 MONSTER

If there were ever a firm qualified to build a proper naked sportsbike then it's Ducati. The M900 Monster invented a new class of bike and bankrolled Ducati for a decade



1994 TRIUMPH SPEED TRIPLE

Triumph undressed the Daytona to bring us the Speed Triple. Of course it wasn't just as simple as tearing the fairing off, the Speed Triple is more than the sum of its parts



DUCATI'S M900 and Triumph's Speed Triple are cult classics. They both have their own dedicated owners' clubs, prices for both are on the rise after a period languishing, undervalued, as 'cheap old bikes' and both can still really cut it on the road after nearly 20 years. That smacks of good design rather than luck, but which bike has weathered the last two decades best?

Ducati (then owned by Cagiva) launched the 900 Monster in 1992 – largely to help the Ducati brand into profitability. A relatively low volume manufacturer at the time, Ducati needed to

broaden their model range without racking up extra R&D costs – which were largely being spent on the development of the 916 anyway. With the SS models struggling for sales, the Monster – a parts bin special in reality – was a gamble at the time. But it was a gamble that paid off. In 1992, Ducati produced just 12,049 bikes. By 1995, that had almost doubled to 20,989 – and more than half of those were Monsters.

The original production machines were based on designer Miguel Angel Galluzzi's personal bike – a stripped-down 888 cc

rode to work. When Cagiva boss Claudio Castiglioni saw it, he instantly decided to make it the basis of the new model Ducati needed – though with a 900SS engine, rather than the fiery 888 mill. From 1993 until 1999, when the first serious update of the model appeared, the M900 Monster remained largely unchanged, save for a reduction in valve sizes for 1997 to improve torque at the expense of peak power. It wasn't until 2000 that the Monster became effectively a new model with fuel injection and an all air-cooled engine based on the 1999 900SS.

In contrast, the Mk1 Speed Triple lasted for just three production years. But, as with Ducati and the Monster, it became Triumph's bestseller. With Mk1 development limited to colour changes and a six-speed gearbox for 1996, the Speed Triple metamorphosed into the T509 model for 1997, with all-new frame, single-sided swingarm and fuel injection. A short production run has just served to make the early T300 series bikes all the more attractive to the discerning few and making the Speed Triple a cult. Should you succumb to their charms? Let's see. 