

1985 TTF1 racer (left) meets its predecessor. The '84 suffered reliability problems

## PANTAH POWER

with 750 engine which I had a profitable race on at Donington earlier this year. I used to think the Verlicchi-framed Ducati was my favourite racing motorcycle, but now I have to admit that perfection had been improved on. Tony Rutter was right: the new bike was in a different league. You felt it the moment you accelerated away down pit lane. The works engines Rutter used in 1984 were powerful enough, giving a maximum of 87 bhp at the wheel and sounding that much sharper and stronger than any of the privateer machines – just had more of a crack to them, indicating perhaps higher compression

(though Farne always said not) and/or exotic valve timing (Farne said nothing).

But the engine in the new bike was that much more powerful again, and coupled with the no less than 12 kg. of dry weight saved over the old bike, gave im-

pressive acceleration by any standards. The riding position wasn't ideal for me, given my un-Latin height, with the seat too far forwards to really get flat on the

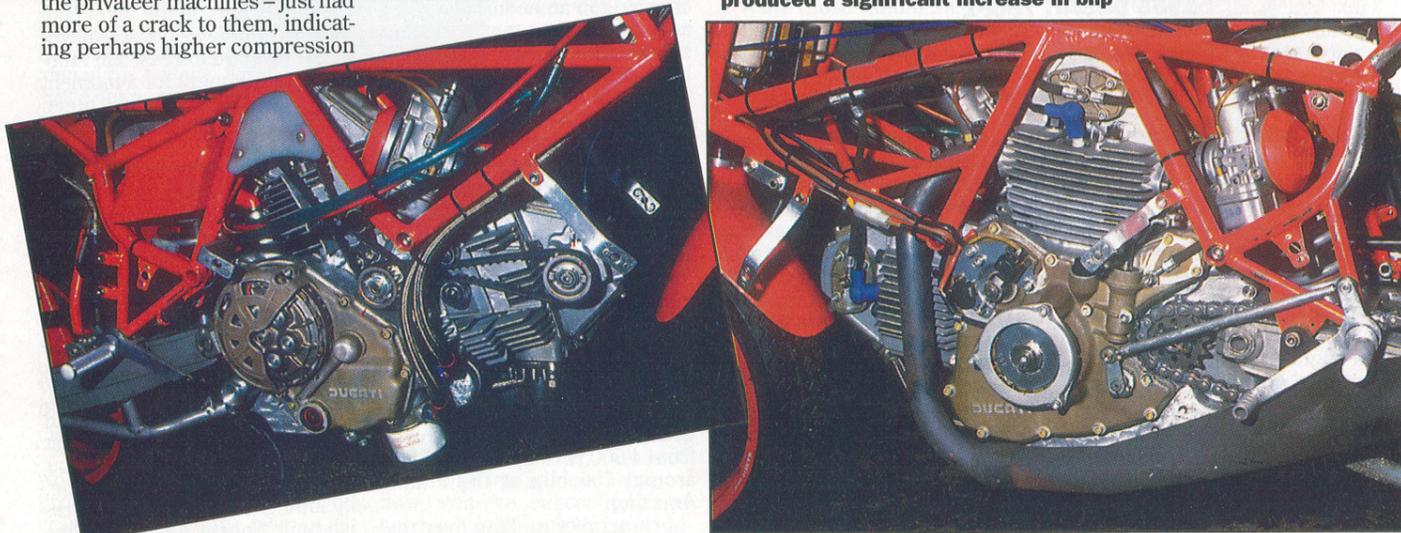
tank. Normally you don't think much about something like that on a test bike, but the Ducati was so slim and narrow a six-foot rider like myself got self-conscious about having body components sticking out all over the place. Of course, the narrow pro-

own up to seeing an extra 800 revs more than ever before on the Mistrale that time thanks to a super good tow from the works Suzuki...

But it was in cornering that the new bike really stood out against the old, where Tony Rutter found he had to constantly experiment with the suspension from one circuit to another to get what he called his 'rocking horse' handling acceptably. The new works racer felt right from the start: suspension response was excellent, and you hardly felt the bumps like the Rivazza, a tight left hander with steep downhill approach where the constant hammering of F1 cars brought up ridges in the surface. A corner like that tests everything

file was one clue to the Duke's amazing turn of top speed – though rider Walter Villa did

The '85 Pantah weighed some 12 kilos less than the '84 and produced a significant increase in bhp



about a bike's handling qualities, and though the track started out greasy – hence the intermediate tyres fitted – it had pretty much dried up by the time we came back from a spot of *mangiare* and resumed operations.

The rear wheel seemed to follow the road irregularities perfectly – no hop, skip, and hope it lands more or less where you wanted – yet the smooth and progressive action of the Double System damper ironed them out before they reached the seat of the rider's pants. Preload was wrong for my weight and the ride height a little low, but that was all fine tuning: the bike was set up for Tony, not me.

Front suspension was equally impressive, with no trace of chatter over the ripples (and none from the back end under heavy braking and the reverse torque of the desmo engine: no valve springs meant you could use as much engine braking as you like on a Ducati). In spite of the gyroscopic effect of the smaller wheels, the bike didn't sit up and try to understeer under braking as a Verlicchi Ducati I once tested with a 16" wheel did. That's also a tribute to the anti-dive qualities of the prototype Marzocchi forks, which didn't freeze under braking and retained enough suspension feel to iron out the Rivazza ripples. The engine pulled smoothly from as low as 4,500 rpm up to the 9,500 revs appointed as the day's limit, though Walter Villa used 10 grand normally in the gears: with the engine safe to 11,000, all that slightly over-revving it would do would be to shorten component life.

The throttle was rather stiff and jerky, though, thanks to strong return springs which had to be fitted to each 42mm Dell'Orto carb to stop the slides sticking open in the wet. On the other hand, Pantah riders the world over would have been amazed to hear that the clutch was featherlight – you could operate it with your little finger. Maybe all road Ducatis should have been fitted with 12-plate dry clutches to obviate the necessity of Charles Atlas courses for the owners, but the cost of the special magnesium outer covers would have been exorbitant.

The gearchange was so light and positive upwards, however, that I ended up using the clutch/

only on the bottom to second change coming out of the ridiculous chicanes that so spoilt Imola as a circuit for bikes. I can't deny feeling a real thrill accelerating hard away coming out of the last one before the pits, though, notching each gear up in turn with barely a change in the booming, meaty exhaust note, before easing and equally easily going down one speed for the still slippery fast left after the pits.

The Ducati made an average rider good, and a good rider great. Part of this confidence was bred by the Michelin radials: this was the first time I'd ridden a bike fitted with racing tyres of this type, and all I can say is that I can now understand why Spencer and the rest of those lucky guys who raced on them all so highly. Apart from a slight but not unsettling weave in a straight line – perhaps caused by the tread pattern on the intermediates? – they behaved superbly, giving loads of grip and feeling very responsive.

The radial construction didn't make the steering heavy, as I'd been led beforehand to expect it might: the Ducati almost picked its own way round tight corners such as now about at Imola, with light steering that retained plenty of feel – the opposite of most fast-steering machines.

If this sounds like a paean of praise from a committed Ducatisti, that's partly true – but then listen to Tony Rutter's comments of the time: "This is the best bike I've ridden in 20 years of road racing. It's almost perfect right from the start. Franco and Walter and the others have done a great job. My bikes last season gave me some good rides, but it was always a question of having to make do: I never really, really liked the handling of them. But you can't compare this new bike to them – this is like a Grand Prix racer. And I can't get over how superb the radial tyres are: this is the first time I've ridden on them, and all I can say is they're like night and day. If we can get the proper back-up from the factory next season, the Ducati's going to be a real threat, even in TT F1 against the new bikes from Ja-

## TONY RUTTER

### A glittering career

Tony Rutter started racing in March, 1962, at Brands Hatch on a BSA 350cc Gold Star. His first national success came three years after when he rode 350 and 500 Manx Nortons built by Bill Stewart, an ex-Norton Motors man, and Rutter continued to ride the singles until 1968/69 when the two-stroke 350 Yamaha started to appear on the scene.

Unlike some of the die-hard British bike racers of the time, Rutter switched to the strokers almost immediately, with his sponsor, Bob Priest, buying the second TZ350 that came into the country. "I recall that there were only three of us on the Yamahas at the time," says Rutter, "myself, Phil Read and Rod Gould."

The switch to the Priest red, white and black Yamahas established Rutter as one of the stalwarts of UK national racing. He won the 350 British title in 1972 and countless races on 350s and 250s.

He also rode big bikes too: for John Player Norton until the deal ended when he crashed and broke his wrist, and for Honda in the World Endurance Championship alongside Stan Woods, Geoff Barry and Charlie Williams. And there was a time when he rode a Yamaha TZ700/750S too.

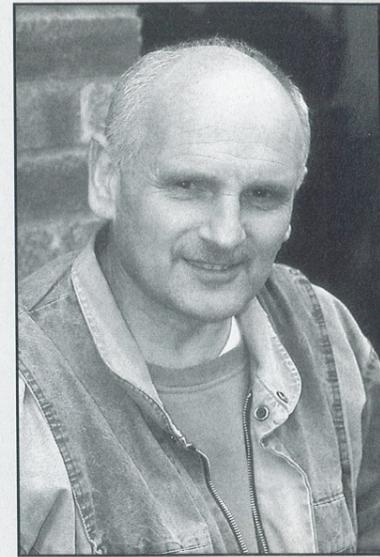
But Rutter is probably best known for his four World TTF2 Championship victories riding Ducatis between 1981 and 1984. "In 1981 Sports Motorcycles built a 600cc Ducati for the F2 series. The bike started out as a 500 Pantah and was enlarged to 600cc by Steve Wynne. We won the TT on that and that got the factory interested in what we were doing. They built the 600 – and later a 750 version, which we raced on through until 1985."

That for Rutter was a fateful year. Up until then, he had four World titles under his belt, and had finished third in the 1984 TTF1 series, also on a Ducati. Then on July 13 at Montjuich

pan, including the strokers."

But for the Ducatis to be successful in the TT Formula and endurance championships in 1985, the team knew they would have to be more reliable than previous. Were their problems really cured? Franco Farne thought so. "We were really let down by our outside suppliers last season, because on several occasions we found that components had not been made as specified. The trouble was, we made that discovery usually only as a post-mortem because we were so short of development time we simply couldn't do enough testing to check everything out."

So the centrifugally-spun valve seats which should have been made in austenitic iron were in-



Park, Barcelona, in a World TTF1 race he was involved in a multiple bike pile-up and nearly lost his life, suffering multiple injuries.

He recovered and raced again at the TT in 1987 until 1989

## insight

where he finished ten of his 11 starts and carried on at national level with a Ducati in the UK Twins series but his World Championship days were over.

Tony Rutter is still a regular on the British scene, helping his 21-year-old son Michael on the road to success. Tony, in addition to his four World titles, won eight TTs, eight North West 200 races (including winning three classes in one day during 1979 riding Priest's TZ750 and 350 plus Harold Coppuck's RG500 against the works Suzuki 560cc 'specials'), the British 350 title, the Bill Ivy Trophy, scored a rostrum place at the Dutch TT and won numerous other national races. A glittering career indeed. ♦

Gary Pinchin  
Photo: Barrie Lynn

stead made in ordinary cast iron and came loose, sending a valve into the head in Japan! Gears were incorrectly case-hardened, sending the bike into retirement in its first race in Austria when lying second. And a new design of lighter piston which Mahle had promised would offer increased reliability turned out to be the reverse, causing them to pop out when leading the Mugello round.

Such difficulties were inevitable with a small factory like Ducati which, unlike the Japanese, did not manufacture all its key components in-house, but Farne hoped that now the worst was over. To produce this kind of competitive power, several changes had been made to the engine's internal specification