

ITALY SPECIAL



RUMBLE SEAT DAN NEIL

ITALY'S MULTICULTURAL MOTORCYCLE

From the nation of lean, chattery bikes comes a big, American-style power cruiser—that's still a Ducati



ALL TECHNOLOGY is idiomatic. A German Leica camera has a feel and operation utterly different than a Japanese-designed Canon, for instance. An LG front-loading washer doesn't beep or buzz when the cycle is over; it plays a cheerful musical phrase to announce the gifting of clean clothes, which is so Korean. And nothing makes a hole in the ground quite so roundly and fragrantly as an American Hellfire missile.

Italian motorcycles? We get them, don't we? They chatter at idle, rev to the moon, weigh nothing, cost megaira and are ridden by skinny leather-clad knee-grinding monkeys with a death wish.

Ah, but that's so 2010. Meet the Ducati Diavel, a "power cruiser" built by the Italian company famed for its scarlet sport bikes. As a rough analogue to a Harley-Davidson V-Rod, the Diavel is more than surprising;

the Star V-Max and a couple other fat, slow bikes I wouldn't be caught dead on.

Now, to be clear, the Japanese-brand power cruisers came first in the 1990s and Harley answered with the V-Rod in 2001. BMW also had a splendid power cruiser called the R1200C for a while. But all of these bikes targeted the American road and rider, which is to say, the American attitude. And thus the category's gun-slinging stance, big pipes, straight-line power and general lack of subtlety.

It's one thing when Yamaha builds a power cruiser. I mean, they also make pianos, right? It's another thing when a brand so focused and self-defined, so Italian, as Ducati lumbers into the cruiser segment. The purists' outrage is exactly what Porsche heard when it decided to build the Cayenne SUV.

My take? Deal with it, *tifosi*. The Diavel is a fantastic bike. The Diavel hits a lot of the power

And it's also recognizably, still, a Ducati. The trademark trellis frame peaks out from underneath the bunched biceps of a gas tank, amid the sculptural shrouds and radiator faring. The single-side swing-arm drives a gorgeous Marchesini forged wheel wrapped in a specially engineered Pirelli tires, a 240/45 ZR17 Diablo Rosso II—specially engineered because tires this fat make bikes fateful in corners.

On both wheels, Brembo calipers grip cross-drilled discs, abetted by ABS. A two-way-adjustable rear shock by Sachs comes with a pre-load dial. The heat-anodized down-pipes wriggle out from under the frame to unite on the right side in a pair of massive alloy cylinders, the "silencers." Yeah, right.

Speaking of noise, this engine—the same unit as in the 1198 Superbike and Multistrada 1200—snickers with Ducati's characteristic desmodromic valvetrain noise. The so-called Testastretta engine (90-degree twin, water-cooled, four-valve, throttle-by-wire) has been mildly retuned to produce more torque across a lower and wider rev band. Peak torque is 94 pound-feet at 8,000 rpm, and yet, in aural character, the Ducati has little of the molten flatulence of a Harley V-twin. This is still a pricy Italian sound: stressed, refined, musically mechanical, and loud.

Horsepower is respectable: 162 hp at 9,600 rpm. On my test ride through the Mojave there were times when I wished for a little more throttle twist, another 500 rpm or so, so pleasant is the sound of the Testastretta being caned. The six-speed gearbox with hydraulically actuated multiplate wet clutch ascends through the gears beautifully and a slipper-clutch provides assurance as you ratchet down coming into a corner. Stick a pitchfork in the Diavel

2011 DUCATI DIAVEL

Price as tested: \$19,995

Powertrain: Liquid-cooled fuel-injected 1,198-cc V-twin engine with desmodromic valvetrain; six-speed manual transmission with hydraulically actuated wet-plate clutch and slipper clutch

Horsepower/torque: 162 hp at 9,500 rpm; 94 pound-feet at 8,000 rpm

Length/weight: 88.9 inches/456 pounds (dry)

Wheelbase: 62.2 inches

0-60 mph: <3 seconds

Seat height: 30.3 inches



In one important respect, the Diavel flouts power-cruiser convention. It's lightweight, and not by a little but a lot.

it's a radical exercise in multiculturalism.

Perhaps you're wondering what, exactly, constitutes a power cruiser, also known by the vaguely homoerotic term "muscle cruiser." Essentially it's a huge and powerful motorcycle with a sinister technological mien—the Ducati looks like it was designed by the Borg—that is exceptionally comfortable and doesn't handle very well. This class of bike includes the V-Rod, the Suzuki Boulevard M109R,

cruiser notes: a stretched wheelbase (62.6 inches, a whopping 6.3 inches longer than the wheelbase of the Ducati 1198), a 28-degree rake, a 30.3-inch seat height, a 41-degree lean angle, a hilariously fat 8-inch-wide rear tire. The Diavel design isn't quite as ludicrous as some of its classmates—if the Star V-Max were a men's cologne it would be called "Sex Panther"—but it's still pretty bonkers: Bleak, malevolent, a suicide machine like Kevorkian couldn't have imagined.

and it will accelerate from zero to 60 in under 3 seconds, and it will also pull the front wheel up with a well-goosed throttle. But what this bike does absolutely best is course serenely through the air of the high desert at 80 mph. Even the cacti turn around to look.

In one important respect, the Diavel flouts power-cruiser convention. It's lightweight, and not by a little but a lot. The dry weight of 456 pounds for the Carbon Edition, which I tested, is about 200 pounds lighter than some competitors and nearly 300 pounds lighter than the Suzuki. That lack of mass translates into a long, rakish bike that can actually manage corners pretty well. The turn-in is affirmative and precise but not too abrupt. You can heft the bike from right-side rail to left and not feel like you're getting behind in the twisties.

The other great thing about the

Diavel is the riding position, which is upright and natural, with the footpegs directly under the seat and not stuck out forward. The seat height is low and comfortable.

Here's where it lands for me: I'm too old and too sane for a Ducati superbike. The tank-humping riding position is massively uncomfortable. The throttle response and braking of the race-bred bikes is just too frantic for me. At the same time, I don't want to ride some Rose Bowl parade float. The Diavel gene-splices the lean, rider-first nature of Ducati's hot-snot bikes with a more relaxed, livable bike configuration. And the whole thing is carved in strokes of Machine Age lightning.

An Italian cruiser. Who'd a thunk it?

► See a slideshow on the Ducati Diavel at WSJ.com/Cars. Email Dan at rumbleseat@wsj.com.

FOOD

CUCINA CONFIDENTIAL

There are some things you can't get online. Here's what three chefs always bring back from trips to Italy



Who: Ruth Rogers of The River Cafe in London
What: 'Stagionato' Pecorino

"I spend my summers in Val D'Orcia in southern Tuscany and always bring home a well aged 'stagionato' Pecorino from Pienza. The cheese is totally local and I love it's strong and robust flavours. Bringing it back to London is like bringing part of my summer holiday home with me." \$TK, tk.com



Who: Michael White of Mareia, Osteria Morini and ai Fiori in New York
What: Mostarda

"I'm mad for mostarda, the traditional Italian conserve made from candied fruit cooked with savory spices. When I'm in Italy, I'll try any variety I can get my hands on, but a Piedmontese version made from Nebbiolo grapes is my favorite. Back in New York, at my restaurants, I serve it with squash tortelli, as a condiment on cheese plates and even in some desserts." ritrovo.com



Who: Barbara Lynch of Sportello and No. 9 Park in Boston

What: Crocetti
"Because they're hard to find at home, when I'm in Liguria I always seek out both dried crocetti—which are a very traditional disc-shaped pastas embossed with intricate designs—and crocetti stamps, which are the hand-carved wooden molds used to make them. Fresh or dried, they're delicious simply with butter lemon sauce." \$7.50, italianharvest.com