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**FOR SERIOUS EUROPEAN MOTORCYCLE ENTHUSIASTS**

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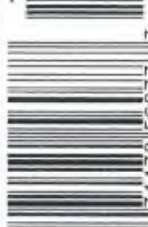
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^ (left) "Old school" cantilever joins the Millona's trick, tig-welded aluminum swingarm to a Double-System pneumatic monoshock. Simple and effective, an eccentric on the shock mount allows adjustments for ride height and shock angle. For those desiring a more traditional unit, a choice of dampeners is offered. (middle) Produced in limited numbers, Poggipolini/NCR will manufacture twelve Ducati 1000DS powered Millona in 2005, with only four coming stateside. Cost is 30K€. (right) A major factor in keeping the Millona light and strong are these forged magnesium wheels, Braking and Brembo components highlight arthful craftsmanship.

Written by Mario Korf and Photographed by GiaJ and Darryl Cannon exclusively for Moto-Euro Magazine

**IT'S** a sunny and windswept afternoon in Pahtump Nevada, an open trackday following the Femmoto event the day before. I'm entering turn seven and looking through my exit point where three Japanese Supersports are lining up the back straight. They're meat. I tip in, roll on the throttle, and let the torque do the talking. If they hadn't heard me coming, they have now, the thunderous boom of a 1000cc twin roars over their four-cylinder sewing machines like Hurricane Ivan. The first one gets dismissed by sheer grunt coming off the corner, the second acquiesces half way down the back straight, but the force is strong in the third. With plenty of real estate between us, he grabs the brakes while I grab an upshift - nothing throws anchor quite like this ship, sister. We enter the ensuing right going two-wide and I stuff it up the inside on the quick flop to the left. Another right sets up the front straight, the rear 190 slick spitting asphalt while the front dances lightly. By the next corner they are distant memories and the NCR Millona and I are gunning for more meat.



This is the finest track bike I have ever ridden. The Millona made its first stateside appearance earlier this year at Laguna Seca. It stood quietly on Ducati Island near the entrance to the museum, amid the glow and buzz of constant onlookers. It wasn't so much the appearance of the bike that had people talking, but the absurd specification: 115 kilos (253 lbs) dry weight. It seemed impossible that a 1000cc twin-cylinder motorcycle could weigh so little - that's less than an Aprilia RS 250 Cup! The 105 hp figure didn't

light anyone's pants on fire, but for an air-cooled two-valve engine, it added to the incessant chatter. Lending cred to the impossible claim were two names: Poggipolini and NCR.

Poggipolini is a longtime supplier of titanium parts for the Ferrari F1 team, so if every nut and bolt were made of Ti, then maybe... And with NCR's experience racing Ducatis, certainly they can extract at least 105 hp from a two-valve duck. Furthermore, Poggipolini owns NCR, so they could conceivably back such a project. It isn't a fantasy, then, NCR's first production motorcycle is a dream bike come true!

NCR's reputation for racing Ducatis is legendary. The storied comeback of Mike Hailwood at the 1979 Isle of Man TT was on an NCR Ducati, and more recently NCR have been racing in World Superbike with Frankie Chili. On the home front, NCR races in the Italian SuperTwins championship with Gian Maria Liverani on the 1000DS-engined Millona. This series limits multi-valve engines to 750cc (with non-desmo heads, no less), but the regulations for 2-valve twins are more liberal. Here the Millona rules.

If you've had your ear to the ground, you may have heard about Bimota's triumphant return to SuperTwins racing last year as well. The bike carried an NCR-modified 1000DS engine in a DB4 chas-

sis, with the same Liverani up. These are, in fact, two different motorcycles, but it's confusing because Bimota was at one point in negotiation to build NCR's prototype "Millone". When the contract didn't work out, NCR gave it fresh styling by Aldo Drudi, changed the final "e" to an "a", and the production "Millona" was born.

Unlike the flashy prototype, the Millona has clean lines that complement its minimalist nature. There are hints of Ducati Supersport in the carbon-fiber half-fairing's shape (notice the side snorkels), but the packaged whole is unlike anything from Bologna, or anywhere else. The paint scheme is remarkably understated - it isn't a bike that screams at you for attention, it walks soft and carries a big stick.

The frame may appear rather standard, but the triangulated and gusseted chromoly tubes benefit from all of NCR's considerable chassis know-how. The engine is used as a stressed member, and even the aluminum engine-breather box is bolted between the subframe rails for rigidity. Unlike a Ducati Supersport chassis, the swingarm is sandwiched between the lower frame rails and the engine cases (as on the '916 and later Superbikes), instead of being hung off the cases alone. The handcrafted aluminum swingarm is a work of art, with impossibly long tig-welded seams and massive, but incredibly light construction.

In an age where rear shocks work through a linkage or entirely within the swingarm, the cantilever setup on the Millona is decidedly old school. NCR director Michele Poggipolini said they chose this layout because it's lighter and acts on the shock directly. (We may see more cantilever layouts yet, as they are starting to reappear on concept motocross bikes.) There's an eccentric on the shock mount that allows you to change ride height and shock angle, though not independently.

The shock itself is a throwback of sorts; it's pneumatic. But this isn't your dad's air shock; it's a modern Double System shock and damper from Rome, Italy. NCR chose the shock because it's the lightest suspension system in the world and it seems to suit the bike well. Frankie Chili tried both Ohlins and Double System and preferred the latter. Still, this is a custom-built bike and owners can specify whatever equipment they want.

The front fork is a Marzocchi, with each lower supporting a radially mounted Brembo caliper acting on Wave rotors by Braking. On a bike whose mission is light weight, nothing less than forged Marchesini magnesium wheels will do. Likewise, the titanium rearsets are all business, short and stubby with nifty knurled nylon toe sleeves that spin on their housings. That level of detail adorns every piece of the Millona.

You may wonder why NCR chose to use the pedestrian two-valve Ducati 1000DS engine on such exotica; a Testastretta seems much more logical. But there are several good reasons to choose the air-cooled twin. For one, it's a lightweight engine, and that's >





the whole point. Also, NCR wanted to develop performance parts for ST and Multistrada customers, and what better way than to race the engine? From experience, NCR has developed kits and full 1000DS engines with up to 1080cc and 105 hp. (Expect another 5-10 hp when NCR gets around to doing the cams.) Bimota's next Tesi and DB4-based bikes will also feature 1000DS engines, it's that good.

But forget all the logical reasons for using the 1000DS engine, because in a chassis this light, it's visceral. The torque curve is as fat as it is flat, and it has enough power regardless of the specification. Our Millona was slightly heavier and less powerful than the race version, as it didn't have the magnesium engine cases, titanium engine pieces, or 1080 kit. This amounts to a difference of about 5 kilos in weight and maybe 15 horsepower. The engine in our test bike was, in fact, a bone-stock 1000DS, and even though NCR claims the same 85 hp that Ducati does, it's likely that it makes at least 5 hp more by virtue of its better breathing. At the front, two carbon-fiber snorkels sit under the chin of the fairing and sweep back to pressurize a carbon-fiber airbox; spent gasses exit through a custom two-into-one stainless header bent by Tubi (who makes pipes for Ferrari), terminating in a titanium HPE can.

Anyone with enough beans for a Millona could likely afford any engine spec they wanted, but there are certain advantages to a "stock" engine: reliability, ability to use pump gas, a broad spread of torque, and pushbutton starting. To ignite the engine, plug in an auxiliary battery to the terminals on the starter motor and press the starter button. That's it; no bumping or rollers required. The fuel-injection system takes care of the rest, and because it's basically a street engine, it settles immediately into an easy loping idle.

Push it off the titanium rear stand and the first thing you notice is that it feels like someone left the motor out, it's that light. Hop aboard and you'll find that the riding position is very aggressive; your hands are about down to the front axle and your butt is way up in the air on a thinly padded seat. There's not a lot of fore-aft room between the seat and the tank, but that makes it easy to push back on the seat and lock your lower body in with your outside leg. There's virtually no steering lock, so maneuvering around the pits can be tricky, but once under its own power it all makes sense.

A couple laps of tire scrubbing reveals that the Millona flicks with ease, but is also battleship stable through a turn. When the Dunlop slicks come up to temperature you can start to push harder and harder until



*^ With a rich history in developing high performance Ducati-powered specials and historic racing motorcycles, NCR introduces the Millona; a machine for the new generation of Ducatisti. Our test unit uses a mostly stock, air-cooled, 2v 1000DS Supersport engine, a perfect test bed for NCR's line of high performance accessories aimed at ST and Multistrada owners. Lightness and attention to detail make it work.*



*^ A key to the Millona's handling prowess is this strengthened swingarm pivot that uses both the frame tab and engine case; long a standard feature on Ducati's Superbike models.*



*< Spartan dash layout hints at the Millona's indented mission. Seating position is racebike-radical, steering lock minimal. Note: Horizontal steering dampener.*

*v Fully adjustable Marzocchi USD fork fits twin Braking/Wave rotors and radial-mount 4-pot Brembos. Note the ultra rigid calliper mount and Marchesini scripting on magnesium wheel. The ultimate track day weapon?*



you find your limits; not the bike's. It's unreal how easily it changes lines, even flattening your chest on the tank will noticeably tighten your turn. The EFI is Ducati-perfect, the powerband has no frightening hit in it, and there are gobs of power everywhere; it's ridiculously easy to ride. Torque is prodigious, but surprisingly the Millona doesn't like to wheelie - instead putting all the power into launching the bike forward.

Neale Bayly and I swapped sessions on the Millona, diving under or going around anyone in our group and then using the light weight and torque to out-brake and out-accelerate our victims. I watched Neale dispose of every brand of 1000cc Superstock bike, their 60-odd horsepower advantage seemingly no advantage at all. Each debriefing session was an I-can't-believe-it-of-the-handling-limits, though we both agreed the rearsets could use heel plates, as we were rubbing our boots on the swingarm. That's our sole complaint. Everything else was nigh perfect. And at 30,000 Euros, it ought to be. For the same coin you could buy yourself three of the aforementioned fours, or a much more sophisticated and street-legal Ducati 999R.

As fate would have it, we happened to have a 999R on hand, and the differences are astounding. For one, the Millona makes the 999R feel fat. Which is surprising because nothing should make a 999R feel like a hog. Unless it weighs 200 pounds less, which the Millona does. It's not an entirely fair comparison because the 999R has all the required street equipment, and in race trim it would be a different story. The 999R rails corners with the best of them, but the Millona's weight advantage worked everywhere, especially on the brakes where it felt like the pavement reached up and grabbed the tire as soon as a single finger hovered near the lever. Corner speeds are faster, and initial



Inside the helmet with Neale Bayly

**POGGIOLINI**  
TITANIUM

Price: \$36,000 (track), \$42,000 (race)  
 Frame: CrMo tubing, alum swingarm  
 Engine: Ducati 1000DS  
 Power: est 90hp@ 7750 rpm (track)  
 Wheelbase: 1400mm/55"  
 Dry Weight: 115kg/254lbs (race), 120kg/264lbs (track)  
 for information on the NCR Millona visit [www.racemetal.com](http://www.racemetal.com)



grunt coming out gives you more of a boot in the pants. With a straight section of road ahead, the 999R will put its power to good use, but on this tight track, it just wasn't happening. In the end, we went faster on the Millona than the 999R.

Alas, you can't ride a Millona out the showroom floor. The Millona will be sold through four west-coast dealers: Ducati Seattle in Wash., and Beverly Hills Ducati, Pro Italia, and Spectrum Motorsports in Calif. Twelve bikes are expected to be produced this year, with only four slated for US distribution. More could be made if the demand is high, but don't expect as many as even 50; these are hand crafted

and individually personalized. No two are the same. The price depends on specification, but figure 30,000 Euros for a track day-spec Millona and 35k for a racing version. A street-legal version? Crafty owners will find the grey-market loopholes that exist, leave it at that for now.

For many, the Millona represents the perfect track day bike: light, fast, nimble, easy to start, easy to ride, reliable, and eminently capable. Its design is the embodiment of simplicity and minimalism. Its production numbers make it an instant collector's item. It is a triumph of function, light weight, and the definitive answer to how low can you go.



There are two blind right-hand turns at Pahrump and they're definitely intimidating, until I spent a day in the hot seat of the NCR Ducati that is. This bike is blessed with such incredible handling and the most powerful brakes imaginable; it was just wild how late I could wait to put 'em to work before flicking the bike into the turns. No sooner had this action been performed it was time to get hard on the gas. With the huge 195-section Dunlop slick glued to the hot Nevada asphalt, it was then possible to wring out every ounce of the NCR's superb midrange power to slingshot into the next bend.

These blind turns quickly became my passing place of choice as I battled with anything that got in the crosshairs. Barking through its two-into-one titanium pipe, the diminutive NCR was constantly nipping at the heels of the open class bikes like an angry terrier. Putting out around 90 horsepower with the standard DS motor in place, it was giving away a good 60-70 ponies to the liter bikes and certainly couldn't hang on the straights. But, as soon as the next corner approached, and the going got technical, I quickly had a face shield full of exhaust pipe before diving up the inside to make the pass. The way the NCR changes direction, or line for that matter, relegated our Ducati 999R test bike to pit ornament. It is just that good, and sliding and bouncing around on a CBR1000 later in the day really brought it home. NCR has maybe just gone and built the ultimate track day motorcycle.

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