

**CLOSEST RIVAL >
DUCATI MULTISTRADA 1000DS**



The Multistrada is Ducati's universal spanner, so to speak – a competent performer in almost every respect, bar the small fuel tank, which is reminiscent of the 620 version.

It has a zesty engine and is willing, if a little underpowered for a one litre bike, but it will take you anywhere. Handling is good, but not revolutionary and goodies are hard to come by. Its love 'em or hate 'em looks means that you don't see a great deal of them around.

In all, a good, safe, solid bet; a bike you would buy with your head rather than your heart.



Above: Like a greyhound off the trap; the Benelli surges forward at an alarming rate when you open the gate.

Below: All the trick bits; Brembo calipers and wavy discs tick the relevant specification boxes.

The cockpit is well laid out, with a large rev counter side by side with an LED display for speedometer, odometer, trip and lap timer – yes a lap timer (?). Strangely enough, I sat on the bike several times trying to work out how to change information between mileage and clock via the lap counter. I found myself pushing buttons, mountings and rubber bits all to no avail. Then, as my gloves became increasingly vague with the weight of water, I accidentally pressed the starter button while moving and it changed the reading; press it again and the lap timer starts – quite bizarre.

The fuel gauge is again an LCD visual and tracks the last quarter or so of the tank. You'll ride for 100 miles and then the gauge plummets like a stone. Quite

unnerving as I was never quite sure what was left in the tank. With prudent use of the throttle, fuel consumption was about 40mpg so on an 18 litre tank a range of about 150 miles is not out of the question. Use the bike ruthlessly and this soon drops as you attempt to quench the thirst of the triple.

The roads that lead from Louth to 'civilisation' are absolutely superb and a test of any motorcycle. Throw in some water and the job gets even more fun. The Amazonas has a sports bike feel to both the frame and the forks. The USD Marzocchis keep the front end firm and throwing the bike into turns is no problem at all. In fact, the handling is more like a supermoto than an 'off-road' machine, allowing rider to place the bike exactly where you want it with pin point accuracy. The brakes are superb and unlike every other bike I've ever ridden, the back brake actually works well – so well that if you're not careful the back wheel will skip and lock under medium braking, especially if you're slack at changing down gear in support of the brakes. The rear shock is excellent with great feel and a quality ride. It has full adjustment on hand to set the bike up to your taste, as has the front.

One of the issues of the engine, though, is demonstrated in the wet and I

have no doubt will translate to off-road use. The throttle control is critical and with torque seemingly delivered from tick-over to redline, even the slightest, overly zealous moment with the throttle is punished with the back tyre losing traction with the road, hence a couple of rather large slides occurring even riding with my brain set to rain mode. Translate to the soft stuff and I'm sure the bike would be quite a handful for the general population.

So, seven hours later, the miles have been conquered and the rain stopped with five miles to go, and I have thoroughly enjoyed the Benelli. It's a lot of bike for the money. Sure it doesn't have ABS or some of the refinements of say, a BMW, but it does have character, something that I think is being lost with bikes today. Its idiosyncrasies are endearing and everywhere you stop fellow two wheelers want to stop and talk about this unique machine, the badge on the tank acting as a magnet for debate (about previous Benelli experiences). The design is its forte, and when coupled to a winning engine it has all the hallmarks of a great bike.

So on the Tre-K, I have to say très bon, it is a bike that I for one am sure will take the name Benelli back to the masses – well done.

