

► WELCOME

IF YOU'VE NEVER ridden a sports twin then you could be missing out on one of the best experiences in motorcycling. Where four-cylinder sportsbikes and their enormous top-end wallop can leave you feeling intimidated, twins deliver their stomp in a totally different way. The broad spread of power allows you to exploit so much more of the engine's potential. You can feel the individual power pulses and it makes for an exhilarating, yet user-friendly, experience. Aprilia's much-underrated Falco, Ducati's air-cooled 1000DS, Honda's long-standing FireStorm and Suzuki's cheap-as-chips SV1000S are all machines that'll smear a grin across most riders' faces. What's more, the

four bikes tested (except for the Ducati) can be picked up for great prices.

For this issue, I'm joined by our regular test team in the shape of Kev and Des as well freelance road tester, Dale Lomas... in the shape of a 70s space hopper. He'll be writing this test while I get on with some holidays.

Thanks to those of you who've written in with comments on our road tests - it's great to get feedback, good or bad. And remember to let us know if there are any bikes you think we're overlooking. See you all next month.

Tim Skilton, chief road tester



Dale Lomas, 24

He's ridden every model made in the last decade and can always find the nearest Little Chef.



Des O'Connell, 58

Fast and smooth, Des is old enough to be many people's dad. And he just might be with that grin!



Kev Smith, 35

Lives to ride and riles 'cos it's cheaper than a car. Kev's Scottish roots keep him canny in a crisis.



The VTR's dated, but that doesn't mean you can't have fun

► TOWN

SUMMER riding. We love it. Warm weather, dry roads, 15 hours of sunshine a day - you just can't beat it. Trouble is, it's late August and Britain's enduring the wettest summer it's seen in years. Even worse, the rain's interspersed with bouts of hot sunshine, which, as we're sure you all know, draws spilt oil and diesel out of the Tarmac, creating a super-slippery surface with the lightest smattering of rain.

So as we head off on our 500-mile test route, we're all pretty chuffed about being on such user-friendly machines. They're on great tyres too. These machines come on a wide variety of rubber, so to create a level playing field we fitted all four with Bridgestone BT014s. They're superb down the twisties and confidence-inspiring in less-than-ideal damp conditions.

The journey out of town is peppered with off-camber mini-roundabouts and treacherously slick manhole covers, but the Aprilia Falco isn't bothered at all. It picks its way through the hazards like the



"You can be enthusiastic with the SV's throttle without risking an accidental wheelspin"

class act it is, happy to lead the pack out of Peterborough on the way to the finest Rutland backroads. The same goes for the SV1000 and VTR1000 FireStorm – the big twins producing far more traction than you'd ever credit. Both the VTR and the SV are held in check with a softer power curve in the first and second gears, so you can be enthusiastic with the throttle without risking an accidental wheelie or wheelspin. In fact, the delivery is so smooth and strong down low, that the VTR, SV and Falco are easier to ride in these conditions than big-capacity inline fours. There's enough steering lock to take on the challenges of a rush-hour Monday morning and the lazy wallop of the Honda's engine makes the VTR a particularly nice bike to pull away from slimy junctions. The SV is just as civil.

The exception is the feisty Ducati. A very firm Ohlins rear shock, combined with massive punch from tickover, conspire to make the Ducati a little more of an expert's machine. Every time one of those big pistons makes a downward stroke, you can feel the tyre pulse and

squirm. Even with the sticky BT014s fitted, it's enough to make you think twice before pulling away hard. The riding position's none too clever either; the low-slung bars put pressure on your wrists and drop your head too low to see over the traffic. The Aprilia, Suzuki and Honda feel perfectly natural dodging around smoky old taxis but the Ducati's wide turning circle and punchy power delivery are hard work

► INSURANCE

WE GOT quotes for a 32-year-old city-living biker with two year's NCB to get an idea of what they'll cost to cover. As you can see there's little to choose between them. Quotes are for a fully-comp policy in a medium-risk postcode. Thanks to Bennetts.co.uk.
Aprilia Falco: £660
Ducati 1000DS: £696
Honda FireStorm: £659
Suzuki SV1000S: £661

► SECOND OPINION

NAME: Des O'Connell, road tester

■ APRILIA

It's top dog in this company with power and handling to satisfy. To complete the package, you get fresh styling and top quality components. I would choose this model over other Aprilia race reps because of its all-round ability. On the downside I found the seat a bit tall, fussy detailing in the cockpit area and upside-down left hand switchgear. OK it's something you will get to used to but why is it like that in the first place?

■ HONDA

I remember testing the VTR when it first came out. I loved it then, but the game has moved and the bike hasn't kept pace. It's still a nice looking, in a chunky, neat way, but improvements are needed in power and suspension to bring the Honda back to the top.

■ SUZUKI

I've ridden the 650 version and been quite impressed. The big 'un is only marginally taller and slightly fatter but a whole lot more powerful. For me, this bike is challenging the Aprilia for top place with a very willing and strong engine. The suspension needs a bit of tweaking, but it's a joy to ride.

■ DUCATI

I can't make my mind up about this bike. I want to like it and in a way I do, it's not a winner but it's certainly not a loser either... The Duke works really well, gutsy power in a fine handling chassis, two fingered braking, curvaceous good looks and very, very red. So what don't I like? I can't quite put my finger on it. Ask again after my third pint, or perhaps I just fell in love with the 998.





"The Aprilia rider is always relaxed and always fast"

all the way out of town. As we approach the national speed limit signs, there's a definite running order:

- 1st Falco
- 2nd FireStorm
- 2nd SV1000S
- 4th 1000DS

► B-ROADS

Suddenly the order reverses. Dry lines appear down twisty country lanes and the 1000DS comes into its own. That fully-adjustable Öhlins rear shock and the similar-spec upside down forks see the Ducati leaping down the backlanes like a dog on a scent, its exhaust note barking as the rider short-shifts through the gears. Nothing can stop it.

The Aprilia and Suzuki are keeping up, but the VTR's starting to slap and protest. The Honda's forks are just too soft to handle more than one job at a time. You can either go over a bump, go around a corner or brake. Don't try two at once, it's not fun. Do all three and it's plain scary.

The FireStorm's motor is great below 6000rpm, but above that it's starting to vibrate. And the gearbox is terrible. It's like climbing a broken ladder. Factor in some decidedly average brakes, and it's hardly surprising the Honda's getting left behind.

All of these bikes enjoy being short-shifted through the twisty stuff, but it's Aprilia's 60° V-twin engine that's providing the smoothest ride. Blessed with the decent suspension and a fantastic riding position, the Aprilia rider's always the most relaxed of the bunch, and never the slowest. The de-tuned RSV Mille motor packs a blend of the Ducati's low-down stomp and the SV's revvy power, while the gearbox is a world away from the Honda's clunky effort. The Aprilia's Brembo brakes are definitely the best of the bunch and, like the sporty Ducati, they've got lever-firming stainless lines as standard.

The SV feels faster down the straights, but it's deceptive – it's no quicker than the Falco. You've got to really rev the Suzuki to get the best from it – a most unlikely trait for a litre V-twin, but there you go. The suspension's definitely lacking, too, when compared to the more expensive



Like a dog on a scent... and that's just the Ducati's rider

Ducati and Aprilia. The right-way-up forks just aren't as supple, although they're still better than the Honda's dated efforts. Between the two Japanese bikes, Suzuki's SV1000S is definitely pushing ahead; providing a quicker ride for less effort than the clunky old FireStorm. But it can't rival the Italians through the twisty stuff. So which of the European bikes is going

to take the lead in a backlane scratch? It's just got to be the Ducati. The air-cooled thoroughbred has top-notch components and brilliant cornering which just edge ahead of the similarly good Aprilia Falco. Having said that, the Falco is easier to ride, so if you're building experience that may be your top choice here.

Then the FireStorm's fuel light comes

I MADE MINE EVEN BETTER...

RiDE readers' V-twin tweaks

MARTIN ROBIETTE

DETAILS: 35, from Preston.
Rides an Aprilia Falco

Martin's owned his Falco from new and has covered 21,000 miles.

He reckons his best mod was fitting a Maxton rear shock (01928 740531). "It's ride-height adjustable and on its current settings the back end's around 10mm higher

at the shock and 35mm at the seat. The bike tips into corners much quicker and feels far more natural."

But that's not the only mod. The forks are raised through the yoke by 10mm to sharpen the steering and he's fitted a smaller front sprocket to quicken the acceleration. He's also fitted an NWS hugger, shorter Renegade sidestand plate (so the bike leans over further on the stand) and R&G crash bungs.



DAZ SEAR

DETAILS: 34, from Mansfield.
Rides a Honda FireStorm

Unbelievably, Daz is a traffic police sergeant. We say unbelievably because his modified-to-the-hilt VTR is so loud it makes your ears bleed. Coated in carbon fibre from Italy's ultra-exotic Mario Nava workshops, this is where most of Pete's money, time and love goes.

"The forks are from a Ducati 916 with home-made

yokes, so's the rear wheel. Sort of. Half the hub is 916 so I could fit the three-spoke wheel. The other half is VFR, like the rest of the single-sided swinger. The tank is nearly 25 litres (up from 19), so the thirstiness isn't so bad now." Even the mirrors are modified R1 stalks. "My elbows got in the way with the Honda ones," says Daz.

But Daz, if you saw a bike like this on patrol wouldn't you have to pull it over?

"Errr, can I keep my right to silence?"

PETE RICHARDSON

DETAILS: 45, from Southampton.
Rides a Suzuki SV1000S

"I bought the Suzuki just to ride around of an evening," says Pete. "I never intended to modify it, honestly!"

Pete bought his SV after recovering from a major drag racing accident and at the time declared he would no longer be

dragging anything, anywhere. Then a mate said he should have a little go on the SV, and it went well.

So well, in fact, that Pete started modding there

and then. First it was just cosmetics, changing the undertray and fitting an iridium-coated screen.

"But then it got serious.

First it was a Power Commander and airbox mods then it got daft."

Three weeks and £1000 later the bike had been fitted with an extra long swingarm

and lost its rear shock. It sounds mad, but it helps get the power down in drag racing. Pete can rev the SV to 9000rpm, dump the clutch and go – try that on a stock bike and you'd be on your arse. And there's more:

"I'm planning to fit nitrous and push it up to 170bhp. That should be fun!"



Errr... we're not sure about that devil's tail, but the drag mods are cool

on, with just 80 miles on the clock. Not impressed, we stop for fuel, a weather check and a route-planning session.

- 1st 1000DS
- 2nd Falco
- 3rd SV1000
- 4th FireStorm

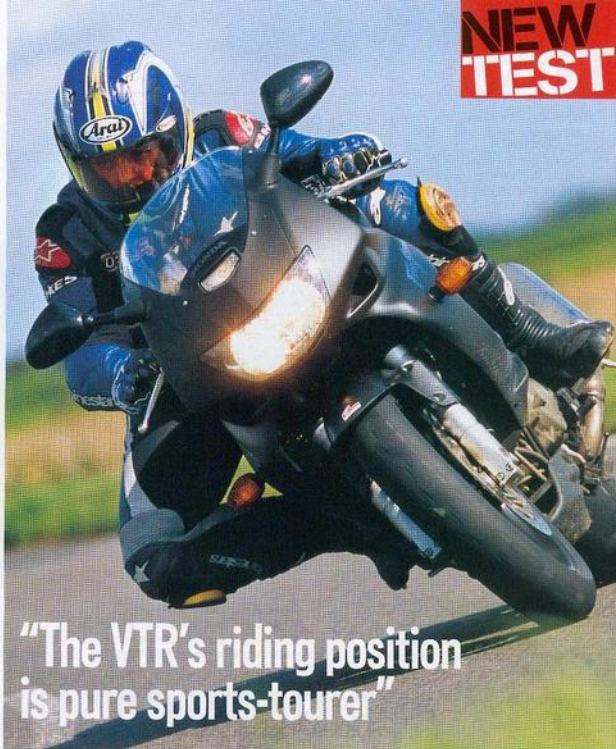
A-ROADS

The roads open up just a few minutes before the skies do. Once again, we find ourselves riding through flood scenes reminiscent of Hollywood blockbuster *The Day After Tomorrow*. Juggernauts throw up bow-waves of filthy spray, moving through the murk and mist like cargo ships. The four V-twins feel like speedboats, glancing off standing water and zipping around the slower moving traffic. Their widely-spaced power pulses are finding plenty of grip in the treacherous conditions. But, as speeds increase on the dual carriageways, the Ducati's starting to feel a little weak. Lacking the top-end pull of the Aprilia

and Suzuki, the 1000DS is getting left behind. But that's not the only problem. Discomfort is setting in as well. The finely-tuned racetrack suspension is still telling your brain about every bump, ripple, pothole and puddle. But sat on mile-after-mile of fast-paced trunk road, all that info's the last thing you want. The low fairing is creating the sort of turbulence normally only experienced by sticking your head in a 747 engine and rainwater is forced down every nook and cranny. But we get to dry off for a bit as Tim holds up a hand and points to the tank of the FireStorm. Again. Just 90 miles are showing on the Honda's simple-looking clocks this time. The Ducati still had 50 miles to go while the Aprilia and Suzuki can both get 150 between fill-ups.

Pulling out of another petrol station, the Aprilia is a revelation. It's comfy, well-protected and a real pleasure to manoeuvre through the darkening fog. The clocks are straight off the Mille, offering everything from an adjustable shift light (to tell you when to change gear) to a trip computer with top speeds, averages and even lap times. And despite its half-haired appearance, the reality is you're nearly as well looked after as on a Honda VFR. The clip-on bars are quite high – far higher than the ones on an RSV Mille – so you get a comfy, upright riding position. The Aprilia's screen does a good job too, keeping your shoulders and neck out of the weather. Midrange oomph blends flawlessly into top-end power as the Aprilia sets the pace.

The Honda's a similar story in terms of ergonomics. The riding position is pure sports-tourer, comfy low-set footpegs and natural-feeling bars. The smooth



"The VTR's riding position is pure sports-tourer"

▶ SECOND OPINION

NAME: Tim Skilton, chief road tester

■ FALCO

Aprilia's SL1000 Falco is a stunningly good motorcycle. It uses a retuned version of Aprilia's RSV Mille engine and while it lacks the full-on poise of the Mille, it's a far better road machine in many ways. The slightly higher position of the Falco's bars makes it distinctly easier on the wrists and far more entertaining on long runs. What's more, you sit more in the bike, rather than being perched on top of it, which again makes for a far better every day proposition. The performance is strong throughout the rev range, if a little glitchy at low rpm, the brakes are just right and the handling's light and predictable. My winner hands down.

■ DUCATI

The Ducati was the surprise of the bunch. After the disappointment of

the Monster 1000DS last month, this bike was like a breath of fresh air. The motor felt punchy, the handling was taut and responsive and the brakes felt strong with loads of feedback – even the gearbox was good. I was impressed by the bike's top-notch hardware too, the fully adjustable suspension was well impressive. I reckon the 1000DS would make a reasonable first big-bore sportsbike and still a great bike for experienced riders, although the dry clutch takes some getting used to when you first climb aboard.

■ SUZUKI SV1000S

I've always liked the SV650S and was really looking forward to riding the litre-sized version. It's easy to ride, not too bad at low speeds and has decent performance throughout the rev range although, unlike the Ducati, it needs thrashing for best results. It's

good in the turns, too, and quickly dispatched the FireStorm when it came to outright cornering performance. My only dislike of the SV was the build quality. Our bike had covered a few thousand miles and was looking pretty ratty already. The dampers look very tatty in no time.

■ HONDA FIRESTORM

I once owned a FireStorm five years ago and didn't much care for it. The Honda's motor felt rough when revved hard and the gearbox was just awful. The tank range is abysmal, the mirrors are just as bad and the bike slips quite badly over bumpy surfaces if pushed hard. The only redeeming factors are the midrange punch from the motor and the bike's strong build quality. The bike would have to be a really appealing price to tempt me to buy another.



mid-range is impressive too. What's not so clever is the way the engine vibrates.

The SV is scrapping with the Honda again though. With similar levels of comfort and civility, it also boasts a lovely top-end whack. The screen is also a little bit more protective, although the pegs are slightly more rear-set than the Honda's. It's tit-for-tat in the Japanese corner. Then the Honda's fuel light blinks. Again. The Suzuki doesn't have the greatest tank range but it's better than the VTR – deputy editor Simon Brown has one and says the light normally comes on at 116 miles. Longer trips see that figure rise to 130.

On motorways and dual carriageways the Aprilia, Honda and Suzuki are all easy to get comfy on. You can pull in your elbows, hunch your shoulders a little and find a position that'll get you half way through France before bedtime. The only way to get comfy with the Ducati would be to phone the AA and sit in the rescue truck.

1st Falco
2nd SV1000S
3rd FireStorm
4th 1000DS

HUGGER

The Falco doesn't come with one as standard, but it does need one. This NWS unit is particularly good as it's big enough to cover the shock as well as the wheel.

REAR SHOCK

A quality unit that's fully adjustable. Make sure you start with the settings in the handbook, and never change more than one thing at a time. A badly set-up Falco isn't much fun at all.

SPECIFICATIONS

Engine	16, 8v, 60° inj V-twin, 998cc
Power (tested)	103.6bhp @ 9250rpm
Torque (tested)	63.8lbft @ 7250rpm
Chassis	aluminium twin beam
Dry weight	190kg (418lb)
Seat height	815mm (32in)
Fuel capacity	21 litres (4.62gal)
Fuel consumption	32.2mpg
Tyres	120/70 x ZR17; 180/55 x ZR17
NU insurance group	15
Top speed	157mph



EXHAUST SYSTEM

The original system is quite fruity, but if you want some carbon race cans, be careful as the Aprilia's power pulses can wreck cheaper ones.

SIDESTAND

Not only is the sidestand switch prone to road muck, the plate to which it attaches is at a funny angle. Many people swap this plate for a more secure one made by Renegade (01474 852255).

STARTER COGS

A few earlier Falcos stripped their starter cogs shortly after delivery. They were all fixed under warranty, but bumping a twin isn't easy!

£6448 APRILIA FALCO

Thought Italian meant expensive? Think again...



The Sachs rear shock not only looks good, it's arguably the best one in this whole test. Plenty of adjustment for two-up trips



Gone are the tacky red calipers of early Falcos, to be replaced with these rather forceful Brembo four-pots



Grabrails are always welcome, but these are at an awkward angle and passengers end up having to twist their wrists to get a grip



They may look daunting, but these clocks are only as complicated as you want to make them. BSc graduates will love 'em...



TUNING MODS

The biggest modifications on the SV, like most twins, are with the intake/exhaust systems. Aftermarket cans, a Power Commander and a high-performance air filter should add up to 10bhp.

ENGINE

Rumours persist about a knocking noise, even on low mileage machines. It's said to be down to excess play in the main bearings but this sounds doubtful as TL1000-based engines have been successfully used on many models.

SPECIFICATIONS

Engine	16, 84, 90° in V-twin, 996cc
Power (tested)	102bhp @ 9100rpm
Torque (tested)	64.7lb ft @ 7500rpm
Chassis	die-cast aluminium
Dry weight	189kg (415.8lb)
Seat height	810mm (32in)
Fuel capacity	17 litres (3.75gal)
Fuel consumption	33.8mpg
Tyres	120/70 x ZR17; 180/55 x ZR17
NU insurance group	14
Top speed	147mph



SEAT

The SV's seat isn't a strong point. Plenty of owners complain of a numb bum within 100 miles. Suzuki do a gel option, but it's over £100.

CLUTCH

Although the clutch is prone to a small amount of rattle (usually from the primary clutch basket) the Suzuki plates are more than capable of handling the power of the V-twin engine.

STEERING DAMPER

Many owners prefer to fit an adjustable steering damper, but there's nothing much wrong with the non-adjustable standard unit.

£6049 SUZUKI SV1000S

Stonking value, but the build quality isn't the best



✓ LIKE IT



Tokico four pots are strong enough and have a really nice feel – giving you plenty of confidence in their stopping ability

✓ LIKE IT



Room for your sarnies and a big u-lock. The standard tool kit doesn't even have tools for your own mirror adjustment though

✓ LIKE IT



Proper bungee points under the grab-rail and on the pillion pegs make the SV pretty handy for carrying luggage

✗ CHANGE IT



LED tail lights are bright but the bike doesn't have the cutest of back ends, aftermarket numberplate/indicator sets are popular

SEATING OPTIONS

If you're feeling sporty, Ducati Performance offer a single-seat tail unit for around £500. Not that there's anything wrong with taking a pillion on this particular thoroughbred.

PLASTIC TANK

The heavily-styled tank can be annoying when it comes to fitting tank bags but you can run straps around the frame. The bike isn't that comfy for touring anyway.

SPECIFICATIONS

Engine	alc. 4v 90° inj V-twin, 992cc
Power (tested)	84.7bhp @ 7800rpm
Torque (tested)	63lbft @ 5800rpm
Chassis	tubular steel
Dry weight	182kg (400lb)
Seat height	820mm (32in)
Fuel capacity	16 litres (3.52gal)
Fuel consumption	32mpg
Tyres	120/70 x ZR17; 180/55 x ZR17
NIU insurance group	14
Top speed	143.6mph



WHEELS

The 1000S comes with five-spoke Marchesini wheels and Michelin Pilot tyres although we used Bridgestones as a control for the test.

FOUR-VALVE ENGINE

The Ducati has just two valves per cylinder. That may sound old fashioned but the advantage is you get loads of low-down performance, which means fun at realistic speeds.

DRY CLUTCH

It's quite grabby and very noisy. And why it has to be quite so heavy to use is beyond us. It's only got to control 84-odd horses...

£7250 DUCATI 1000S

It's the most pricey here, but it's got loads of character



Ride-height-adjustable Ohlins shock is a choice bit of suspension although a little too firm for everyday use. Great on twisties



There's plenty of storage under the ample seating area and a really nifty-looking tool kit as well



Brembo brakes and Showa forks result in some fantastic brake feedback. They don't feel too powerful, just really good



A dead simple layout, but the clocks are rendered unreadable thanks to their odd red-orange text. Shame



REAR SEAT

Under the standard seat cowl is a decent pillion perch. The passenger footpegs are at a sensible height too, but there's no grabrail so your pillion will have to hold on to you instead.

FUEL RANGE

The fuel tank has been increased to nearly 19 litres, but the reserve light still blinks at 80-90 miles without fail. The guzzling carbs leave the bike making the odd pop and bang on the over-run too.

SPECIFICATIONS

Engine	1c 8v, 90°, V-twin, 996cc
Power (tested)	93.3bhp @ 8800rpm
Torque (tested)	62.2bft @ 6600rpm
Chassis	twin-spar aluminium
Dry weight	153kg (424.6lb)
Seat height	810mm (31.8in)
Fuel capacity	19 litres (4.2 gal)
Fuel consumption	28mpg
Tyres	120/70 x ZR17; 180/55 x ZR17
NU insurance group	14
Top speed	143mph



REAR SHOCK

Owners recommend a Penske rear shock as the best modification for the back end. The standard shock starts weak and only gets worse.

ENGINE

Apart from an annoying choke lever (which won't stay out) there's not much wrong. There have been isolated cases of camchain tensioner problems but the engine is tough and well proven.

FRONT END

Many owners firm up the forks by changing the oil for a heavier 15w option. Sintered pads help improve the braking performance.

£6699 FIRESTORM

Bit long in the tooth, but the Honda's still worth a look at the right price



✓ LIKE IT



Classic styling and a nifty paint job too. There's no denying that, nearly a decade on, the FireStorm still looks good

✓ LIKE IT



Under the seat you'll find a decent-quality tool kit. Unfortunately, there isn't room for a sturdy lock, or much else, down there

✓ LIKE IT



Easy to read clocks are complemented by a useful digital display which shows the time, trip and fuel level all at once

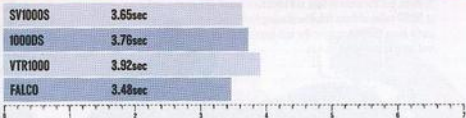
✗ CHANGE IT



Front forks are completely overwhelmed by the merely average braking system. Owners recommend heavier fork oil

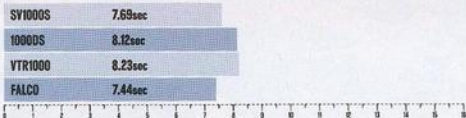
ACCELERATION 0-60MPH

As you'd expect from four 1000cc V-twins, there are no slouches in the race to 60mph. The Falco's superb throttle and clutch win the day, the SV coming second. The heavy clutch hampers the Ducati and the Honda tends to wheeze.



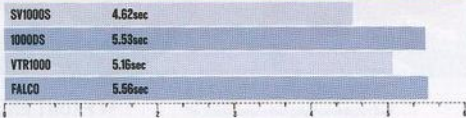
ACCELERATION 0-100MPH

Again, the Falco trumps its rivals, but the SV1000's not far behind. They're identical in power, but the Falco's easier to ride. Surprisingly, the water-cooled 96bhp FireStorm is outpaced by the older, air-cooled Ducati.



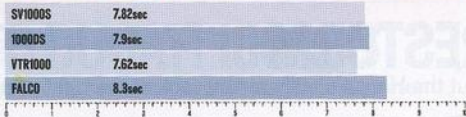
BRAKING 100-0MPH

The SV1000S wins this by some way, but the FireStorm coming second was a real surprise, given its soft front end. Dampening conditions may have influenced the results for the Ducati and Aprilia, but not by much.



TOP GEAR ROLL-ON 60MPH-100MPH

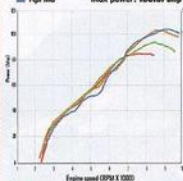
The Falco's overly long sixth gear is a pleasure on the motorway, but loses it this test. The 84bhp Ducati comes third, and the SV is next. The FireStorm is the winner, thanks to its grumpy engine and lower gearing.



DYNO CURVES

MAX POWER

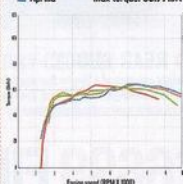
Suzuki	Max power: 102.42bhp
Ducati	Max power: 84.70bhp
Honda	Max power: 93.32bhp
Aprilia	Max power: 103.57bhp



The Ducati is way behind on peak power, but has plenty of poke at the lower end of the rev range.

MAX TORQUE

Suzuki	Max torque: 64.68lbft
Ducati	Max torque: 63.75lbft
Honda	Max torque: 62.23lbft
Aprilia	Max torque: 63.77lbft



All our V-twins have decent amount of low-down torque, that means plenty of user friendly performance as you pull away.

► "I'VE NEVER RIDDEN A V-TWIN, WILL I LIKE IT?"

NAME: Rocky Fuller
BIKE: Suzuki GSX-R750

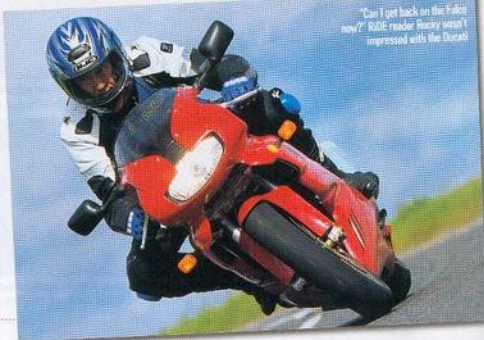


RIDE reader Rocky is a V-twin virgin who owns an inline four-cylinder GSX-R. We invited him along to try the twins...

"THEY'RE REALLY tractable. I know it's clichéd, but these bikes really do pull from nothing. The Aprilia Falco was my favourite. It shifted when you revved it hard, but it still surged forward lower down in the range.

"The SV1000 and FireStorm were fine, but I wouldn't trade the GSX-R in for either of them. They felt a bit cheap to be honest. Lovely engines but not classy like the Aprilia. The Ducati looked very different but was far too basic. I know it's higher specced and all that, but it was like riding a tractor! Really lumpy and torquey - just too agricultural-feeling for me.

"I'd always been told that twins were easy to ride, and I was impressed by just how torquey they all were. I'd definitely consider a Falco over the GSX-R, but maybe not the others."



"Can I get back on the Falco now?" RIDE reader Rocky wasn't impressed with the Ducati

And the winner is...

BIG TWINS like these make an ideal first step into litre bikes. They cosset you with easy power and rapid overtaking and they let you enjoy everything from a two-up continental holiday to a summer's track day.

Or rather three of them can. The Ducati is just a little too sport focused to be a jack-of-all-trades. It can boogie harder than any of the other machines here, but it certainly won't be as happy getting up for work the next morning... Depending on some key questions, the 1000DS either comes last or first. If you think the Sunday morning blast should never be less than 100 miles, you hate to leave your pillow at home and you think regular trips across the channel are essential, the pricey Ducati is fourth place.

However, if you've got wafer-thin sliders, make annual pilgrimages to Bologna and think liquid-cooled engines ruin perfectly good motorcycles, stop reading now and put the 1000DS down in first place. It oozes class, torque and speed. And it's red.

In a more definite third place is Honda's dependable FireStorm. It's a fine bike but the thirsty carbs and dated suspension leave it lagging behind. On a more positive note, look carefully and you'll find parallel-imports for as little as £4700.

The Suzuki comes second – and there are some blinding deals available. We've seen new bikes going for as little as £4699 and the unfaired version can be found for £4499. It's got a lovely engine, some daring looks and is a really classy bike to tootle

around on. The SV is everything you expect from a twin and it's a fantastic all-rounder. The only fly in the ointment is cheap construction. Our test bike had done just under 4000 miles and the downpipes had already turned an ugly brown.

Suffering from none of this is Aprilia's Falco. Underrated since its launch in 2001, the Falco is finally dropping to a more affordable price. The Italian bike boasts build quality to rival Honda and the best performance. Whether it's slicing through urban jams, ripping up the track or posing down the pub, the Falco's a winner. Aprilia have blessed it with bits that shouldn't be on a bike costing £6448. It's up there with the best and makes a compelling argument to any biker of any ability.

THANKS

- Abingdon Honda for the lovingly polished VTR1000 (01235 550055)
- RIDE reader Clare Ledwith for lending us her brand-new metallic-sludge colour Falco
- Planet Bikes (0116 244 2000) for lending Clare a bike while we borrowed hers

"Aprilia have blessed the Falco with bits that shouldn't be on a bike costing £6448"

