



**DUCATI
MULTISTRADA**

The all-roads Duke gets a new motor for 2007 to match its futuristic styling

**BUELL
FIREBOLT**

The back-road Buell has a motor from millennia past in a new-age frame

In the beginning there was the single cylinder motor. Man saw the single and saw it was good. Soon after he mounted it in a frame with a wheel attached to either end and saw it was better. Then he realised that two was better than one – the twin was born and man was pleased. Then woman arrived, told man that he should stop mucking about with silly single track vehicles, get a job and start saving for a family car, perhaps an estate. Man was less pleased, and reluctantly set on the slippery slope to Volvo ownership.

To be truthful I'm not sure bike evolution went this way (I have a sneaking suspicion it probably didn't), but I never paid much attention at school, and anyway,

MY WEIRD TWIN

Words Jon Urry Photos Oli Tennent

Talk of twins and it's a fair bet you'll be imagining a Ducati 999 or Aprilia Factory. But what are the 'alternative' two-pot choices?



HYOSUNG GT 650R

The Suzuki clone that fanfares a new age of Far Eastern domination



BMW R1200R

The new tech BMW employed to attract riders hankering for yesteryear

'history of the motorcycle' wasn't on the curriculum... Moving swiftly on, and back to the matter in hand: twin cylinder motorcycles. Specifically these four takes on the type, all quite different and with little in common bar the number 'two' – two wheels, two cylinders.

First we have Ducati's Multistrada, or Uglystrada, or whatever insult you care to throw at it. This all-roads moto, designed to take on any terrain short of a supercross track, and in style, thanks to Ducati's superb 1078cc, air-cooled, 90-degree V-twin motor.

Next is the Buell XB12R Firebolt, or 'Firefault' if you've previously owned one for any period of time. Erik Buell's radical and technologically advanced 'cycle uses a whole

host of fresh ideas combined with the oldest – Harley-Davidson's push-rod, air-cooled V-twin 1203cc Sportster motor. It's a sports bike, but not as we know it.

Then we have the BMW R1200R. BMW's Boxer engine has been around longer than George Foreman and punches in the same heavyweight class. And punches well given the latest 1170cc development of the breed. Big, it is often said, is beautiful, but big and naked?

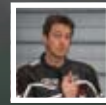
Finally we have the Hyosung GT650R. "The what?" you cry. Read on to find out more about this Korean 650cc V-twin, this could be our the future. Remember how we laughed at the Japanese and their rice burners just a few decades ago? ▶

Despite appearances the Hyosung does well in the twisties – until you need the brakes that is



“The ride is really impressive, no worse than an SV, and comfier”

JB's OPINION HYOSUNG



Good bike this one. Nice motor offering a meaningful mid-range and a good top end with gearing to make even 100mph cruising easy. Nice gearbox too. That's a surprisingly useful fairing as well, and although the ride position is racer-like cramped, it's actually okay and certainly when pushing on it feels better and better.

Counting against it are the brakes. Probably fine on a light 250, they're somewhat overwhelmed here. And mucho annoying are the weedy mirrors, which reflect nothing but blurred elbows. Funny is the rev-counter needle, which isn't illuminated at night.

But you can't help feeling Hyosung are almost there. The build quality looks good, the styling is bang-on and with the exception of the mirrors and the brakes the details are all stacking up. Japan Inc. must be worried – this ain't no cheap copy.



Hyosung GT650R

So what exactly is a Hyosung? Well, Hyosung is the Korean bike manufacturer that's leading the way in the Far East invasion of the bike market. Originally a scooter manufacturer, Hyosung has crept up the motorcycle food chain making a lot of parts for the Japanese bike industry, while on its own account building ever bigger bikes. That Hyosung makes the engine internals for Suzuki's massively popular SV range gives you an idea of the genesis of the GT650R.

Yes, check the bore and stroke: the GT's is the same as the SV650's. So Hyosung have made their own SV, only, here is the key, they've made it for a cheaper price, as you'd expect. An SV650S retails at £4599, the GT650R costs £3999 and has the same two-year warranty.

So what's the catch? Quality must

be lower, right? Not necessarily. Inspecting the GT you can't help but be impressed. Inverted forks, a stylish fairing, adjustable footpegs and a really funky digital dash that has more than a hint of a 90s Casio watch about it. Yes, there are a few cut corners, the top yoke is truly massive and quite ugly, and the tail unit is a bit old looking but overall it's very impressive. And it even has a fuel gauge as standard, which is one up on Suzuki's SV.

And the ride is really impressive. With budget middleweights you have to allow some leeway for the suspension, which is always slightly poor, but the GT's isn't really that bad, no worse than an SV and the riding position is certainly comfier. Despite having a slightly race-rep riding position it isn't as extreme as an SV and I actually found it quite comfortable.

Clockset is Casio-retro cool; top yoke is Forth Bridge huge; build and finish are good; USD forks are a bonus, weak brakes a disappointment

Somewhat unsurprisingly the Hyosung's engine felt almost identical to an SV's, although the old version. Next year Hyosung are aiming to inject the 650, but at the moment they are relying on good old-fashioned carbs, just like the previous incarnation of SV.

A large part of the SV's success has to be put down to the motor, because that little V-twin is a gem. And so it is with the GT. Despite only being a 650 it rips along at a decent pace, has a really strong midrange and a top end of over 100mph, which is also a bit of a worry because the GT's brakes are truly terrible.

It's not that often we encounter a bike with bad brakes these days but the Hyosung's are lacking in both power and feel. Although a similar

twin-piston sliding caliper style to the SV, they lack strength. It is possible that the bike we tested was particularly bad, but we can only comment on what we ride.

So is the Hyosung a viable purchase? Yes and no. The price isn't to be sniffed at and the quality and ride is as good as an SV. But when it comes to resale the Hyosung will suffer simply because of the brand. The SV650 holds its resale value well, but I can't see the Hyosung doing the same. At least for the time being. Also Suzuki are offering some great deals on the SV with dealers often willing to cut the price to nearer the Hyosung's. Yet with a ride and performance comparable to the SV it's very clear that this alternative Oriental bike is fast coming of age.



BMW R1200R

A moment at the end of our test summed up the BMW. Myself and JB were preparing to ride home and the conversation turned to which bike we wanted. "I'll take the BMW. It's got heated grips," said JB.

"Great," I said. "I'll have the Ducati. It pulls big wheelies." That not only sums up the difference between myself and JB but also the effect the BMW can have. Then JB reminded me the BMW pulled three-gear monos too. Yes, but...

Look, I'm not anti-BMW by any stretch, but while I totally understand why potential owners would want this bike, it just left me cold. To me naked bikes should be fun, have

some kind of character and provide a thrill. It's a quid pro quo thing, as Hannibal Lecter would say. The discomfort suffered for a lack of fairing should be offset by the fun factor. On the BMW it isn't. For me.

As a day-to-day bike the R1200R would be excellent. The riding position is really comfortable for motorway miles and town riding. You could quite happily ride the R1200R for all its whopping 160-mile tank range, stop quickly to fill it up again then carry on.

The (optional) fly screen looks a bit weedy but does a fine job of keeping the worst of the wind at bay and the bars, for me at least, seemed just so for a comfortable ride.

The tank is the bodywork; Paralever rear is good, soft shock isn't; funky clocks are a tough read (bring back LED!); 1200 motor is mighty good

Meanwhile the new 1200 motor adds a new dimension to BMW's bikes. Compared to the old 1150 engine the new one is light years ahead. The gearbox can actually engage a higher gear without the clutch, and the pull throughout the whole rev range is very impressive.

In all, a character that matches the chassis perfectly. The handling on the R1200R is what I would describe as soft but reassuring. It holds no scares and with the suspension set softly-softly it provides a comfortable ride that can turn its hand to sporty, of a sort at least.

So what is it about the R1200R that fails to light my fire? According to BMW this bike is aimed at the traditional BMW rider put off by the firm's latest generation of funky-weird looking bikes. The kind of rider who'd love the BMW's heated grips, comfy, non-threatening ride, strong engine, excellent new-generation brakes and subtle looks (and probably the optional ABS and, soon, TCS traction control).

The R1200R is a practical, all-round useful if mildly pricey grown-up bike for riders who want to enjoy the delights of two wheels. ▶

Dark skies, dark rider, dark bike – the photographer sweats his trade. BeeEm is, as ever, competent

JB's OPINION BMW



It's a slow burn is the R1200R. To look at, and by reading the specs, really there's nothing to get excited about. And even on first ride impressions it's just another BMW. But like all BeeEms, ride it for a good 200 miles and it'll worm its way into your affections.

The engine's a good 'un. Meaty enough (102bhp at the wheel) with good fueling and a gearbox that's a match for the motor. The handling's not bad either, although compromised by a shock that feels undersprung and under-damped. The ride position's comfortable too, although I'd need the high seat option to properly sort the legroom and flatter bars would help (shades of Rockster coming in here).

It wins over faired BMWs by having less steering inertia, but loses out for having less protection and fewer gizmos. And finally it wins for offering the BMW experience at a reasonable ticket.

"The 1200 motor has added a whole new dimension to BMW"

**JB's OPINION
DUCATI**

On paper the Multistrada is the answer to so many biking wants.

Comfortable, upright riding position, great torque (exposed) motor, decent fairing (not too big), and probably handy in the twisties.

But for this tester that seating position is too upright. And the saddle is mighty firm, like a bar stool without the cushion top. The suspension action isn't too flash either, with little to dampen the sudden small bumps. Plush it isn't. And that motor. Hmm, actually it's great, lots of torque, crisp fuelling and the gearbox and clutch action are all good, although the clutch itself is a bit stiff at the lever.

Ultimately, though, it feels a bit coarse – which is a sin for this kind of bike. It vibrates, the feedback is direct to the point of abruptness and it has zero steering lock. All fine for a 999 but a curse on a quasi-tourer. And, lord strike me down, but the aesthetic is too challenging.

Jon Urry demonstrates the 'squashed-up supermoto-ish' riding position. Like it or hate it



"The engine wins me over. It's quite simply stunning"

**Ducati Multistrada 1100**

Ducati's Multistrada is a triumph of substance over style. Let's pull no punches here, the cosmetically challenged 'Strada ain't much of a looker. But she doesn't half go like a good one, and that wins me over every time.

I like bikes with some real character, a quirk, something about them that makes me smile and want to go out for a ride purely for the hell of it. And the Multistrada does just that. When you're sat on the Ducati you can forget about the looks (nearly – you're still faced with a decidedly odd-looking screen and top fairing), slot into the slightly weird riding position and prepare for a blast.

The squashed-forward, elbows up, supermoto-ish riding style of the Multistrada isn't to all tastes. Those coming off sports bikes may struggle to adapt more readily than riders of

more upright machinery, but it doesn't take too long to get your head round it. Oddly though JB, who spends more time than most of us at TWO off-road, isn't a fan, while I like it, despite regular GSX-R use. So that's that theory scuppered.

Anyway, I think the main thing that wins me over with the Ducati is the engine, which is quite simply stunning. I love the raw sound, instant torque and explosion of power that the big-bored 1078cc air-cooled V-twin gives. Okay, so it's not the most refined of power units and is certainly more than a little direct between opening the throttle and the power kicking in, but that raw, punchy character is perfect in a bike like this. And there's a lovely spread of torque throughout with near-flawless fuel injection.

But no matter how good the engine is the clutch action is still way

Ray gun silencers are whisper quiet; headlight is powerful; the nice bits – frame and motor; not so nice bits – clocks on a stalk, odd bend of bars

too heavy. And that's a massive nuisance through town, where the lofty riding position, quick steering and punchy motor make for an otherwise excellent package.

The suspension isn't ideal either. When you really start getting a lick on the forks and shock on occasion get a bit flustered. JB felt it was a bit harsh, which is fair enough because it is certainly set up for a sportier ride, but the weight distribution and riding position is possibly at odds with the set-up. For me the main concern is that every now and then the front feels a bit odd. This is mainly due to the long travel front suspension. Let off the brakes just before you tip into a corner and the forks can bounce up a bit too fast. There isn't enough rebound damp-

ing to keep things in control, and that unsettles the front. It's a bit of a quirk of this style of bike and can easily be ridden around – we know this because we've taken 'Stradas on track and they've been fantastic fun.

But as well as being fun the Multistrada is fairly practical too. The riding position, despite the firm seat, is fairly comfortable (once you're used to it...), the instruments have loads of touring-friendly features such as a fuel gauge and miles to reserve, and Ducati even sell panniers for it. The Multistrada is designed to cover serious mileage.

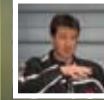
I could quite happily live with one of these on a day-to-day basis. The Multistrada offers fun, character and practicality, and delivers all three in spades. Still no looker, though. ►

With steering twice as quick as its motor the XB12R is a mind game to master



“The Buell is incredibly nimble and a fantastic back-road play thing”

JB'S OPINION BUELL



Riding the XB12R is an exercise in patience. The Harley gearbox may have come a long way in recent years, yet by any measure it's still the slowest box of cogs known to mankind. Tractors shift quicker.

What the XB12R does answer is that age-old question: if you stuck a Vincent motor in an RGV chassis would it be the best bike ever? The answer is no. What happens is you get the quickest, trickiest chassis ever strangled by the slowest most languid motor ever.

Yet here's the thing. It actually isn't all that bad. Get your head around that old motor, start slowing things down and the Buell becomes a rather cool, nippy ride. That motor rewards with a wonderfully relaxing gait, sort of boom (long pause) boom (long pause) boom... And the chassis works. And the suspension is far plusher than the Multistrada's. And it's surprisingly comfortable. It even looks rather good. Nice.



Buell Firebolt

Something about Buell's Firebolt keeps drawing me in. For the life of me I can't work out what it is. There are a lot of things not to like about this quirky American twin. I'm not a huge fan of the Harley engine, especially in a sporty application. I'm quite tall and the XB12R is probably the smallest bike in the world. And I've had my fair share of reliability problems with Buells in the past. But I still love the Firebolt. Why?

The only thing I can put it down to is character. The Milwaukee twin is as packed full of character as mom's apple pie is of Yankee goodness. From the moment you fire up the huge

lump and sit with it vibrating below, the Buell starts to grow on you. Push the heavy gear lever and the gearbox clunks into first; let out the stupidly heavy clutch and you're away, with a cacophony of thuds only a Harley can produce. Get a race can on a Buell and it sounds like a squadron of Lancaster bombers, but even with a stock pipe the sound is fantastic.

Stand next to a Buell and it's impossible to believe it can actually be comfortable to ride. The XB12R is so small it looks like a minimoto next to a six-foot tall rider, but it's amazingly roomy and comfortable. It's the biking equivalent of the TARDIS. I still can't understand how some-

The yellow is effective. Honest; the clocks look cheap; rim-mounted disc offers mucho braking force; wheezy old air-cooled twin lends character

thing so compact can feel so big.

Then you take it on the back roads and the fun really begins. Because of its small size and radical geometry the Buell is incredibly nimble and a fantastic back-road plaything. The handling takes some getting used to – it doesn't really feel like a 'normal' bike – but it doesn't take long to get into the swing of things and exploit the short wheelbase and ultra-quick steering chassis.

The Harley engine suits this kind of riding perfectly. As long as you don't try and rush it, the big V-twin is

a lovely motor. Try fast changes and the gearbox simply stops shifting, but use the massive spread of torque and avoid working the box and it's brilliant fun. But it wouldn't be a Buell if it wasn't all plain sailing.

Unfortunately whenever you mention Buells, reliability also crops up in the conversation. In the past Buells have fallen foul of a number of gremlins, generally not serious ones but enough to either be annoying or require a recovery trip home. Buell people always claim these problems have been ironed out but they do

seem to keep cropping up.

The key to the Buell, any Buell, is you have to want to own one. If you do, you won't be disappointed. It's a quirky, good looking (especially in yellow) bike that will really grow on you. Yes, it has its faults: the gearbox is poor, clutch heavy, there's no steering lock and a question mark over reliability, but despite all this (phew) it's hard not to enjoy riding a Buell. If you want something a bit out of the ordinary give one a try, but accept that ownership comes with its own trials and tribulations.

CONCLUSION

So where has evolution led us, and which of these variations of the twin offers the best package?

For the price the Hyosung is very impressive. It may lack a bit of quality to the finish and the resale value will be less, but the Hyosung brand will only get stronger from here. It's hard to not recommend the Hyosung to someone looking for a cheap middle-weight, especially if money is tight.

For the more, er, discerning rider, it's really a choice of two, the Ducati

or the BMW. Both have limitations, and both have their strengths. The Ducati is for the more adventurous rider. It's a blast to ride, a hoot on back roads and packed full of mischief. But the heavy clutch, odd riding position and odder looks can dissuade some. The BMW is positioned differently. It's a competent, solid bike that does everything, but without much pizzazz. Reliable, practical and sturdy, that's the BMW. If that's what you're after then BMW's R1200R is a really good bike.

As always with Buells it's down to

you whether you want one. It isn't a case of, "Shall I have a Speed Triple or a Firebolt?" If you want one you want one, it's that simple. If you do then try the Firebolt, it will grow on you and it's the kind of bike owners fall in love with in a way that simply isn't possible with Japanese fare.

So praise be to the twin, let its evolutionary path continue and let no inline four or triple stand in its way. Variety is the spice of life, and there is none as varied as the twin.

Full specs over the page! Go! Go now!



From some angles the R1200R doesn't look half bad. Pity same can't be said for the Multistrada