

MOTOR CYCLE NEWS

scoop test



Cagiva Alazzurra 650

**NORVIN CAFÉ
black magic**



DRAN PARK SUPERBIKES

250 ENDURO COMPARISON



**MAICO
SE250LC**

**YAMAHA
IT250**

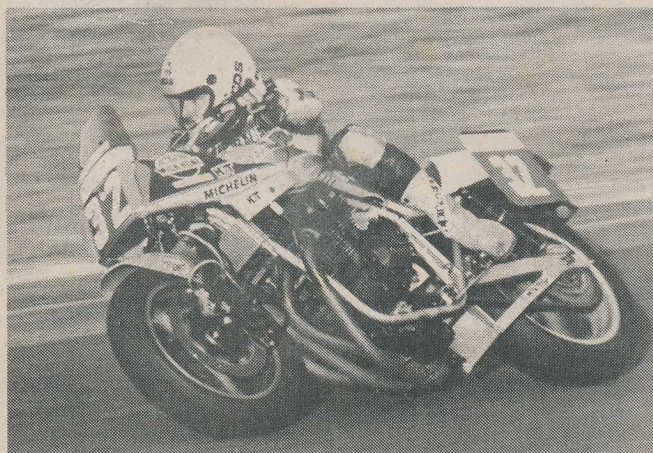
**KAWASAKI
KDX250**

**HONDA
XR250RE**

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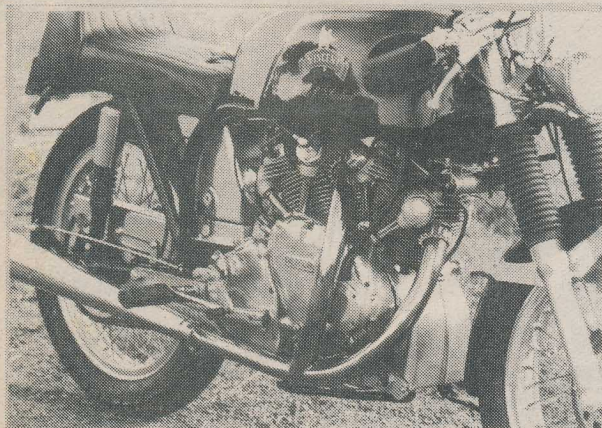
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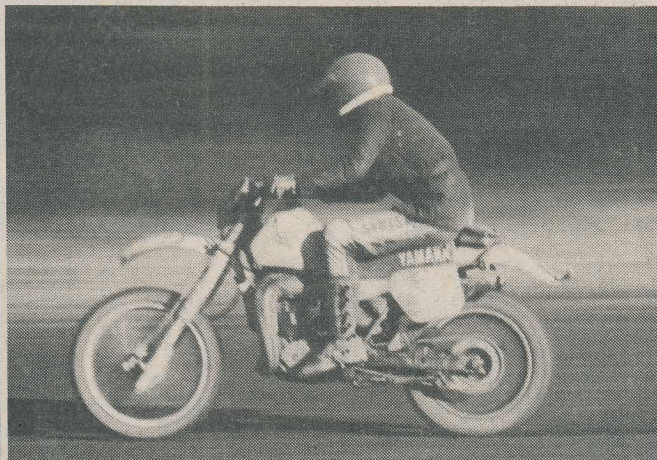
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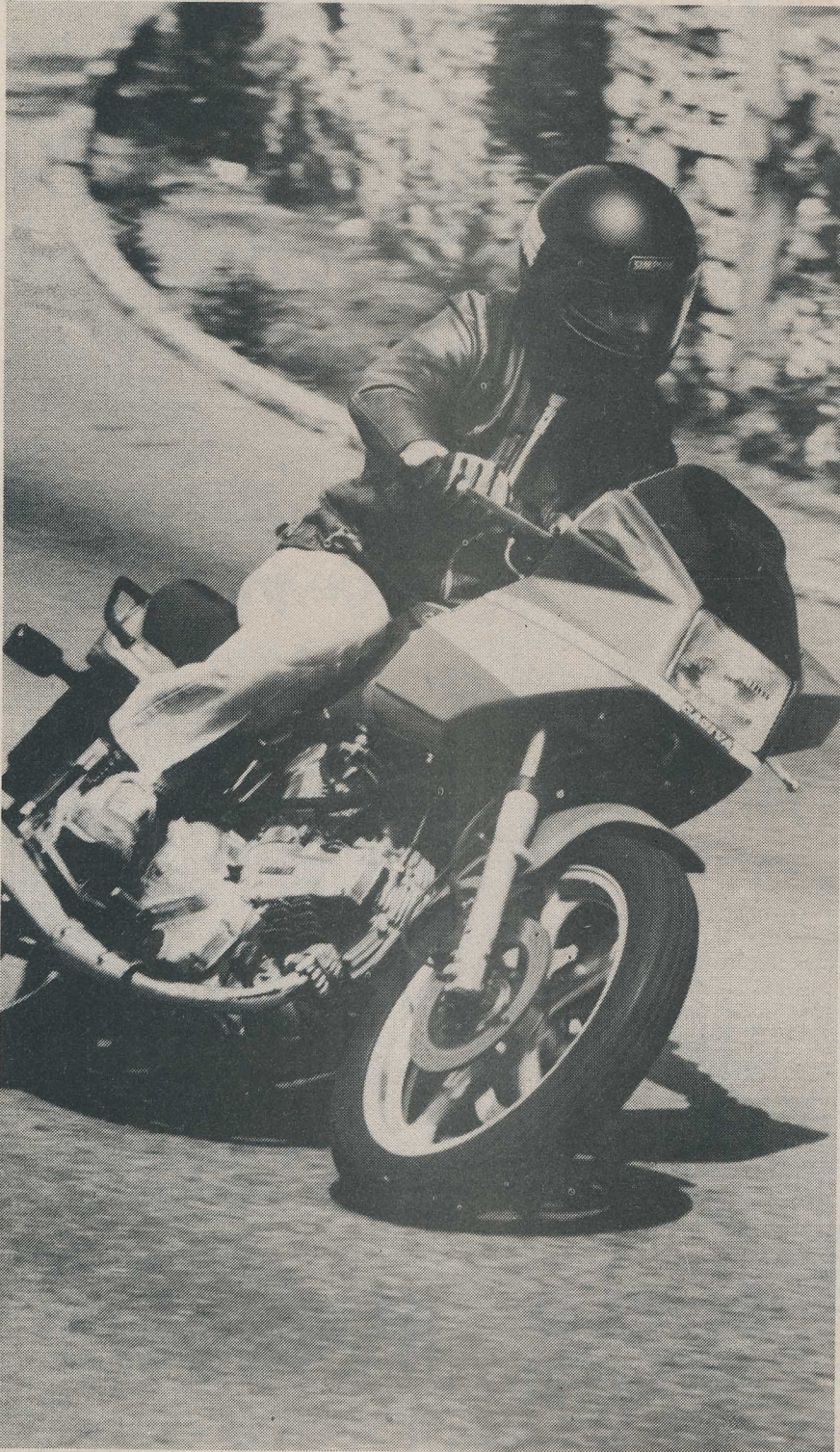
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Cover: Cagiva's new sportster (that's an exclusive, folks!), the mighty Norvin cafe racer and four of the best enduro mounts in the country. Photos respectively by Alan Cathcart, Lou Martin and Mike Hanlon.

Cagiva Alazzurra 650



Above: the Alazzurra in action — handling is impeccable.

For Ducati fans the world over, this bike marks the beginning of the transition between pure Ducati and Cagiva motorcycles. This is the first Cagiva roadster destined for full production and, although only one complete bike yet exists, Alan Cathcart managed to throw his leg over it in an exclusive debut ride. From what Cathcart tells us, the Alazzurra 650 seems headed for success. . .

More than one year after the news first broke that Ducati would start selling V-twin desmo engines to Cagiva and at the same time begin to wind down its own production of complete motorcycles, a curtain of confusion still lies over the outcome of this Italian two-wheeled soap opera.

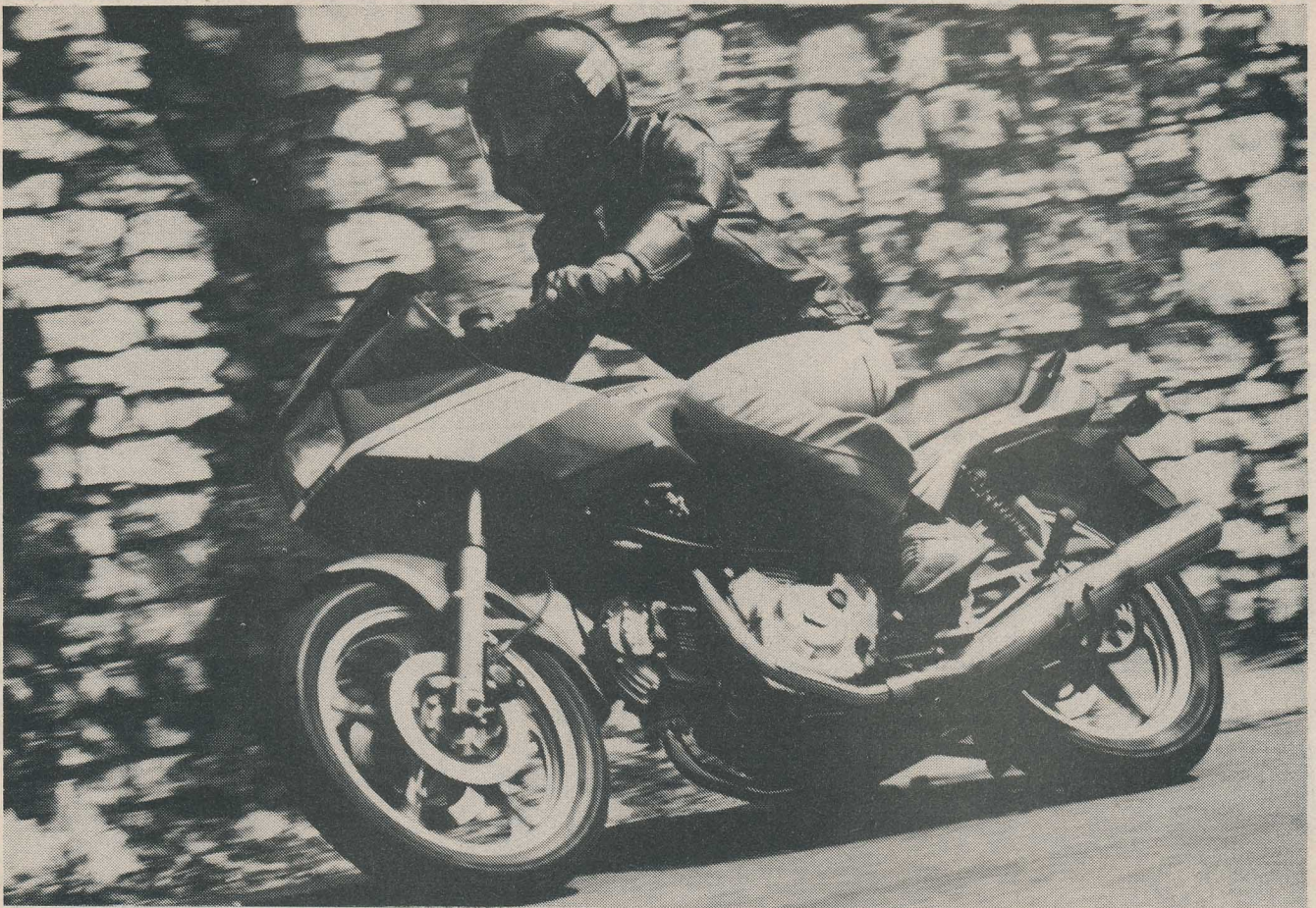
Sure, the first fruits of the agreement were revealed at last November's Milan Show in the form of road and off-road V-twins bearing the Cagiva logo, but since then the promised April target for the start of deliveries has passed by without being met. To further muddy the picture, Ducati has released advance news of a new model bearing its own name; a 1000cc bored and stroked plain-bearing version of the bevel-drive desmo known as the Mille.

Whoever said this story would run, and run, with about as many twists to the plot as 'Dallas' was dead right!

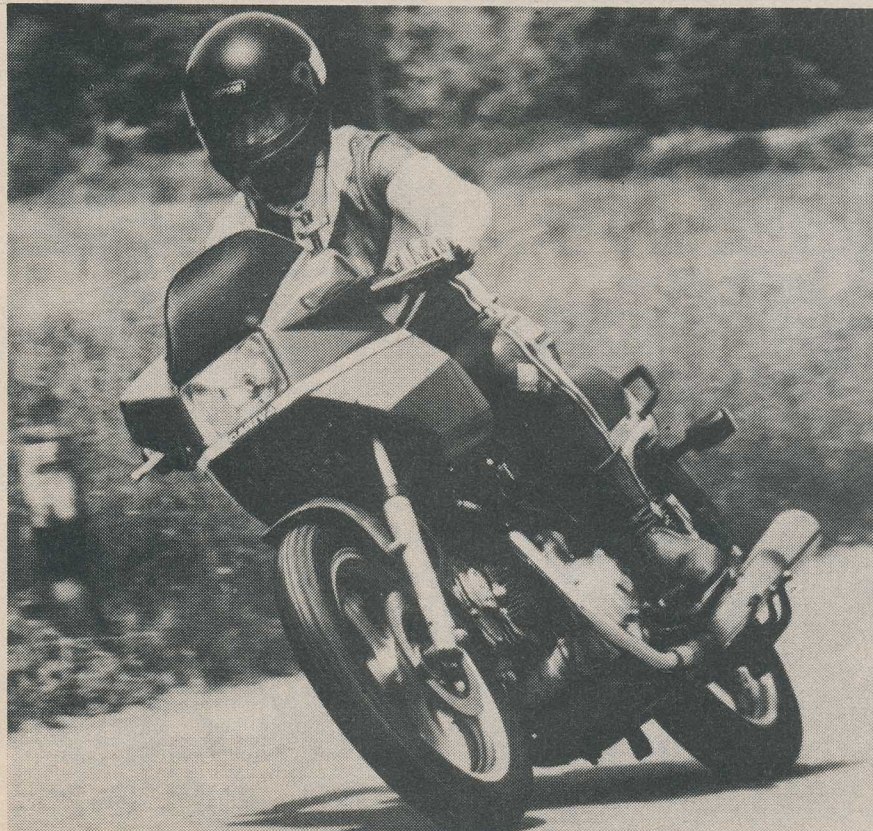
Yet a return visit this summer to the Cagiva factory on the shores of Lake Varese dismissed any doubts. This dynamic and successful company, run by the Castiglione brothers Gianfranco and Claudio, will not be diverted from its stated purpose of expanding its model capacity range upwards by means of consummating the relationship with Ducati.

There, awaiting me for an exclusive debut ride, was the first desmo Cagiva roadster, the Alazzurra 650, fitted with an enlarged version of the belt-drive Ducati engine which has already superseded the 583cc unit in the Pantahs which continue to flow, albeit in reduced numbers, from the Bologna factory.

Ducati's targeted figure for production of complete motorcycles is 2500 for 1984 compared with 6000 in 1983 — Cagiva's



Above: the riding position is an excellent balance between forward lean and upright town comfort.



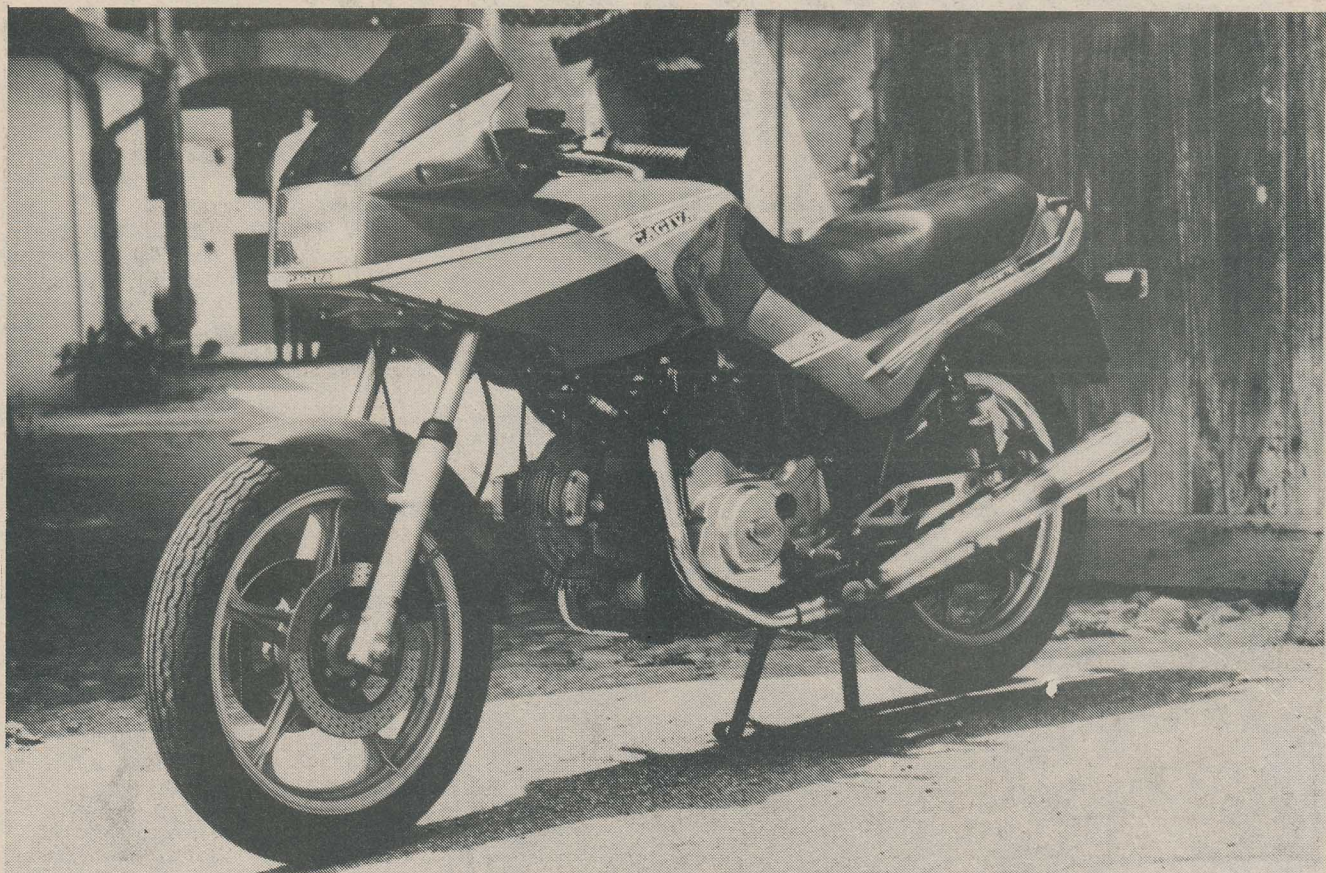
Above: sure-footed and agile, the 650 is most at home on open sweepers.

'83/'84 July/June production year saw 45,000 machines built. Cagiva's figure is still 5000 less than anticipated due to supply problems thanks to the German metalworkers' strike. The company sold out of its 350cc four-stroke trail bike best-seller, for instance, two months before the end of its model year.

In contrast, Ducati has large unsold stocks of its 350TL twin — stocks which are apparently being passed over to Cagiva as part of The Deal to be re-clothed, re-labelled and re-offered.

While the 350 Alazzura, due to be launched next September alongside its bigger brother, is essentially a badge engineering job on the 350TL Duke with some new fibreglass thrown in, the 650 version is effectively a whole new motorcycle — especially in those countries which are yet to receive supplies of the 650 Pantah.

The name Alazzura incidentally, means 'Blue Wing' — a throw-back to the company's Aermacchi days when it was used on one of the horizontal pushrod singles. It is also a nifty piece of chauvinistic marketing since the 'Azzurri' are the Italian national team members in any sport, especially soccer. A little flag waving never hurt anyone!



In any case, 300 kilometres in the company of the single works prototype so far made convinced me that here at last is an effective European answer to the recent wave of new Japanese middleweight sportsters. The bike displays the traditional Ducati qualities of performance and rideability (improved with mechanical alterations) but couple these with graceful, modern styling that enhances the engine's distinctive appearance.

In short: I liked it very much.

Given that the Alazzurra employs the basic Pantah chassis, bought directly from manufacturer Verlicchi, while work proceeds at Varese on a completely new monoshock frame for the Ducati engine range, the new Cagiva's styling becomes even more of a critical point. I'm not alone among Ducatisti in never having cared much for the Pantah's styling. Heavy and slab-sided, it recalls the disastrous Giugaaro-designed 860GTS rather than the lithe but cobby 750/900 Super Sports which for most enthusiasts represents the ultimate in Ducati appeal, or even the elegant lines of Tartarini's Darmah.

Beauty never lay so much in the eyes of the beholder as when it comes to motorcycle or automotive styling, but I doubt there will be many who won't find the Alazzurra's lines alluring.

Alluring; but also vaguely Oriental. Note the VF750-type frame-mounted fairing and dashboard covered by a spun alloy surround. Neither could it be coincidence that I happened to see a brand new V-four Japanese motorcycle, sans seat, being pushed around the Varese yard on my way in one morning.

But there's only a resemblance, no more. A styling theme rather than a derivation — and the way the fairing's lines blend effortlessly into the sculpted tank and smoothly contoured seat and tail unit is one I personally find very pleasing. Of course, if you think the Pantah's the goods, you probably won't agree: handsome is as handsome does.

But Cagiva's engineers have done a great deal more than simply kit the old girl out in a new set of clobber. Detail improvements abound, from useful gadgets to the long-overdue vacuum fuel taps (which can now be left 'on' all the time, just like their Japanese counterparts), revised switchgear and more complete instrumentation.

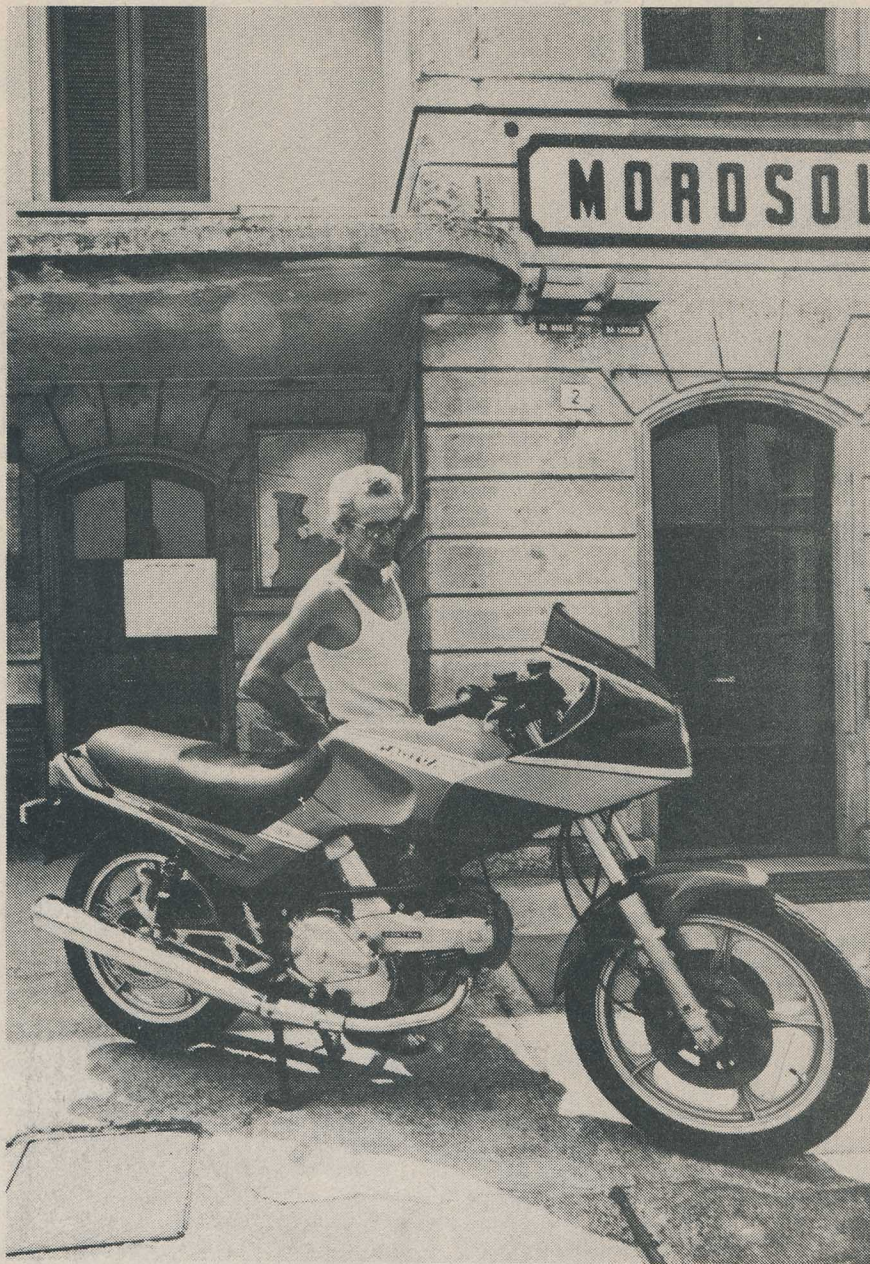
The latter consists of Veglia 250kmh speedo and 11,000rpm rev-counter with new, really sharp, modern graphics based on a grid system, a small quartz clock and a long strip of eight warning lights which not only include the usual ignition and headlamp idiot bulbs, but also those for low fuel and a reminder

Above: all the finest traditions of Bologna mated to the practical touches of Varese — a superb mix of Italy's best.

that the left-mounted sidestand is down.

The latter is really superfluous since the Alazzurra also has a Kawasaki-type solenoid which cuts out the ignition automatically if you try to move off with the sidestand down. Likewise there's another cut-out if you try to thumb the starter with the bike in gear, but this can be circumvented by pulling in the clutch lever. Another modern touch is the provision of a BMW-style beeper accompanying the use of the direction indicators. Hmmm.

A Bologna purist would so far dismiss these alterations as mere cosmetic window-dressing, but Cagiva's improvements are more than just skin-deep. Those familiar with the rock-hard damping characteristics of the Pantah's Marzocchi suspension will agree that, while it's ideal for getting around the 33rd Milestone on the TT course flat out in top, the ride is a little, er, uncompromising for everyday riding. The Alazzurra's 35mm front forks have been modified internally to improve low speed damping, while the adjustable rear units have new springs which have a softer initial rate and so, a more comfortable ride.



A ready comparison for me was available in the form of the development team's hack 600cc Ducati. The Cagiva registered a noticeable improvement in riding comfort, the flat bars and well proportioned seat offering an excellent and slightly more upright posture than the SL Pantah most commonly sold outside Italy.

I felt positioned just right to avoid having too much weight on my arms and shoulders while at the same time not offering too great a target to the wind. The suspension response was outstanding, offering a sensitive feel and comfortable ride at the expense only of some front-end dive under heavy braking.

The triple 260mm Brembo discs are the same as those fitted to the Pantah, and work equally well. But if that slight dive is the trade-off necessary to experience the Cagiva's supple suspension compared to the Ducati's stiffer but unsympathetic ride, count me in.

While the refinements thus far can be credited to the account of Cagiva, the evolutionary improvements to the mechanical package are Bologna-bred, and are indeed also featured on the 650 Pantah now gradually reaching some export markets to replace the now out-of-production 600.

Chief of these improvements is the increase in bore to 82mm and stroke to 61.5mm for a capacity just a tad under 650cc so that what we have here is a more than ten percent increase in displacement. The older, 583cc motor measured 80mm x 58mm. This, of itself, would not be so vital had other changes not been wrought to take advantage of the increased power and torque to produce considerably improved acceleration at the expense of a nominal reduction in outright top speed.

Left: the Alazzurra attracted attention wherever it went — even from apparent non-motorcyclists. Being the only example so far in existence, it's no wonder.

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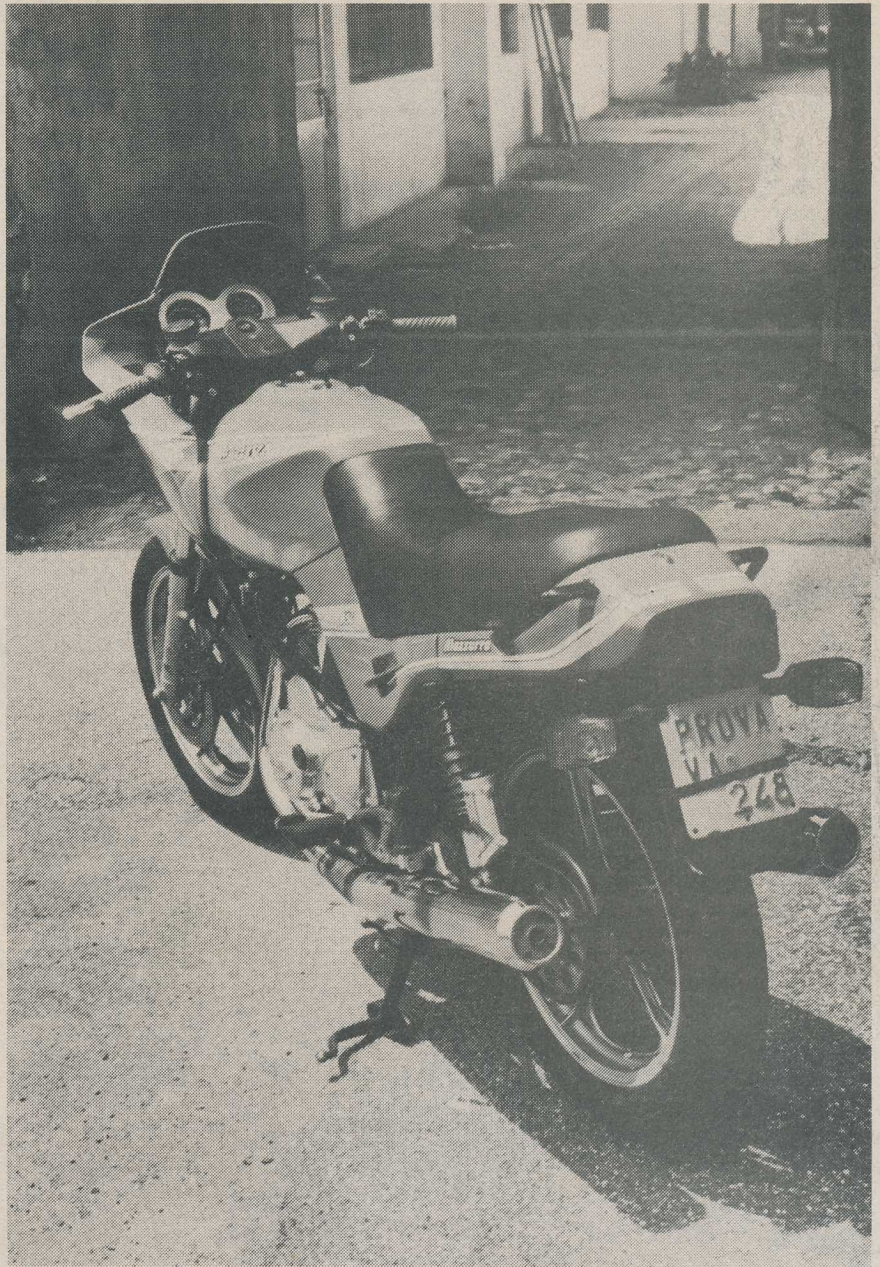
Here's how it's been done. To improve the already considerable torque of the heavily over-square engine, the 36mm pumper Dell'Ortos have been rejettied, the compression dropped from 10.4:1 to 10:1 and the ignition advance curve of the electronic Bosch BTZ unit altered. Then a one tooth *larger* rear sprocket has been fitted (15/37T instead of 15/36T), which has the effect of dropping the overall gearing in the interests of brisker acceleration.

To counter this, a longer fifth gear (1:0.965 instead of 1:0.931) has been fitted internally to offer effectively the same top speed as the 600SL, but at peak revs of 8400rpm (the tachometer is actually redlined at 9000rpm) instead of the Pantah's 9100rpm. That's what it says on the spec sheet, anyway. Incidentally, most Pantah riders will regale you with stories of how, thanks to the plain bearings, their bikes often take them into the five figure field without detriment. Really.

On the road the increased zip is really noticeable: you have a choice of really screwing it on if you have such a mind, in which case the Alazzurra will reveal the performance of most Japanese 750s, or else permitting the incredibly flexible, as-ever lazy-sounding 90 degree V-twin to pull you away from as low as 1500rpm in top gear without transmission snatch.

At just on 5000rpm the cams start to really do their work and the engine takes off. Row the positive, precise gearchange to stay in this super-power band and you'll be amazed at how speedily the Cagiva streaks off the mark. I was.

And once you get onto racer road, like the Varese-Milano autostrada with its fast, sweeping curves and long straights, the traditional advantages of the Pantah frame manifest themselves. Rock steady
Right: the 650 is a well integrated bike, featuring many detail improvements over the earlier Ducati Pantahs which make it more of a practical all-rounder.



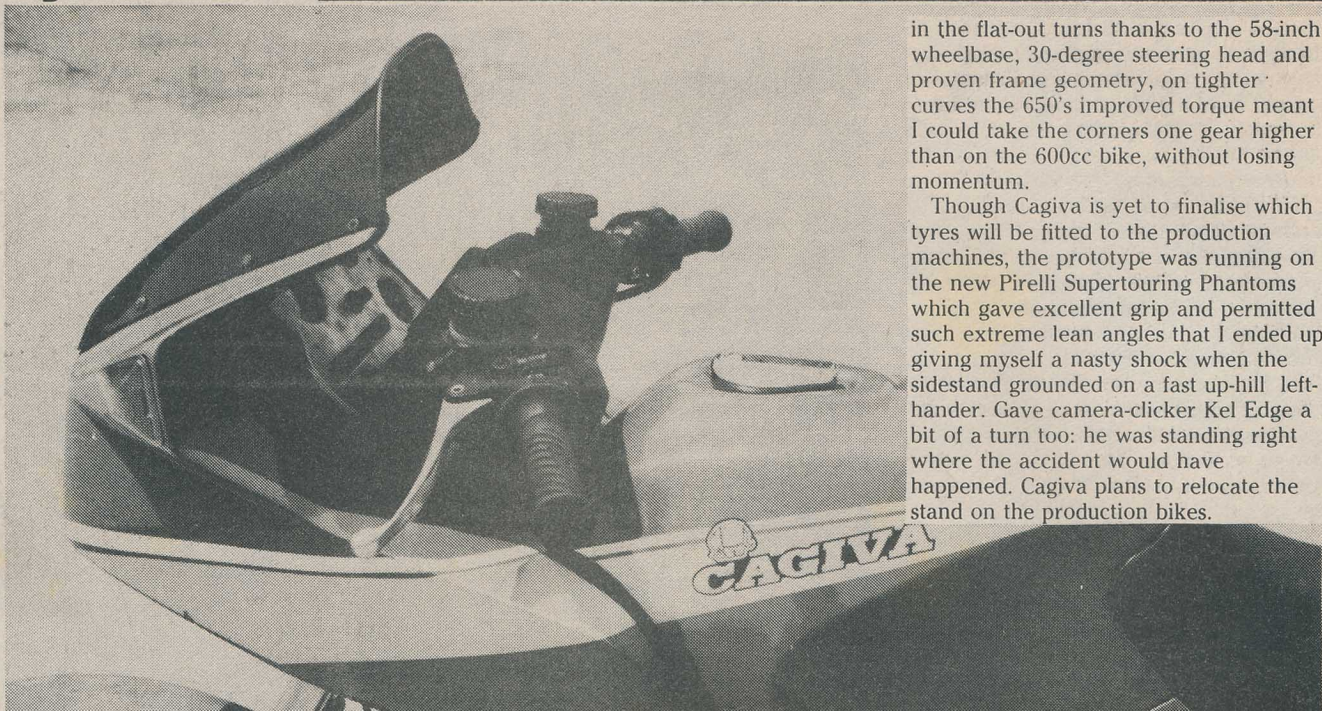
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Absolutely Motorcycle



Cagiva Alazzurra 650



Above: fairing shape is reminiscent of Honda's VF item.



Above: instrumentation is clear, neatly laid out and includes a clock.

in the flat-out turns thanks to the 58-inch wheelbase, 30-degree steering head and proven frame geometry, on tighter curves the 650's improved torque meant I could take the corners one gear higher than on the 600cc bike, without losing momentum.

Though Cagiva is yet to finalise which tyres will be fitted to the production machines, the prototype was running on the new Pirelli Supertouring Phantoms which gave excellent grip and permitted such extreme lean angles that I ended up giving myself a nasty shock when the sidestand grounded on a fast up-hill left-hander. Gave camera-clicker Kel Edge a bit of a turn too: he was standing right where the accident would have happened. Cagiva plans to relocate the stand on the production bikes.

Make and model Cagiva Alazzurra 650

ENGINE

Engine type 90 degree air cooled V-twin four-stroke with desmodromic valve actuation. 2 valves/cylinder.
 Bore x stroke 82 x 61.5mm
 Displacement 649.57cc
 Compression ratio 10:1
 Induction 2 x PHF 36 Dell'Orto
 Starting electric
 Gears five, constant mesh
 Clutch wet multiplate
 Lubrication wet sump, forced
 Primary Drive helical gear
 Final Drive chain
 Redline revs 9000rpm
 Fuel capacity 19.3lt

CHASSIS AND RUNNING GEAR

Frame type tubular trellis of round section steel (as for Pantah Ducati)
 Front suspension 35mm Marzocchi hydraulically damped, coil sprung forks with 150mm travel
 Rear suspension Marzocchi adjustable twin coil sprung, oil damped units on swinging arm with 110mm travel
 Front wheel 18" alloy
 Rear wheel 18" alloy
 Front brakes 2 x Brembo 260mm disc
 Rear brakes 1 x Brembo 260mm disc

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase 1450mm
 Fork rake 30 degrees
 Seat height 800mm
 Static ground clearance 176mm
 Weight (claimed dry) 185kg

PERFORMANCE

Fuel consumption 16.2km/lt
 Range per tank 310km plus
 RPM at 100 kmh in top gear 4750rpm (indic)
 Top speed after one km 200km (indic)
 Maximum power (claimed) 56bhp

Test bike supplied by Cagiva Motor SpA
 Price as tested not established
 Tested by Alan Cathcart

Road Test

Though the bike's high speed stability was impeccable, it's achieved only at the expense of heavier steering around town thanks to the kicked-out 18-inch front wheel. But more tiresome, and tiring, was the clutch action: after a quarter of an hour spent stopping and starting in what passes for the rush hour in Varese, my fingers were numb and my hand aching.

To cope with the increased power and torque of the bigger engine, Ing. Taglioni has beefed up the clutch and reverted to hydraulic actuation. What's really needed is a crankcase redesign incorporating a larger, stronger clutch with a lighter action, but such expensive retooling is out of the question at Borgo Pinigale, hence the heavy-handed compromise, and the main reason that the new bike is a 650 instead of a full 750.

But the stroke is the same as the works 750 TT1 racers, and Omega makes these really neat off-the-shelf 88mm bore pistons, so . . . but that's another story.

Several minor touches give the indication that the guys who produced the Alazzurra really ride bikes. There's a lockable cubby-hole in the tail big enough for papers, a few tools and other odds and ends — though not for an oversuit (sunny Italy and all that).

The pair of grab handles in front of the rear light are not only well placed for a pillion, but also make levering the bike on and off the stand a cinch and provide suitable anchor points for bungee cords.

Below: frame and engine easily pick the bike out as a Ducati Pantah derivative.

A notable omission on the fairing is a set of mirrors. Though I saw the 350 Alazzurra prototype fitted with a handlebar-mounted pair that made it look like a preying mantis, some thought will be required here to make this necessary addition without spoiling the clean, svelte lines.

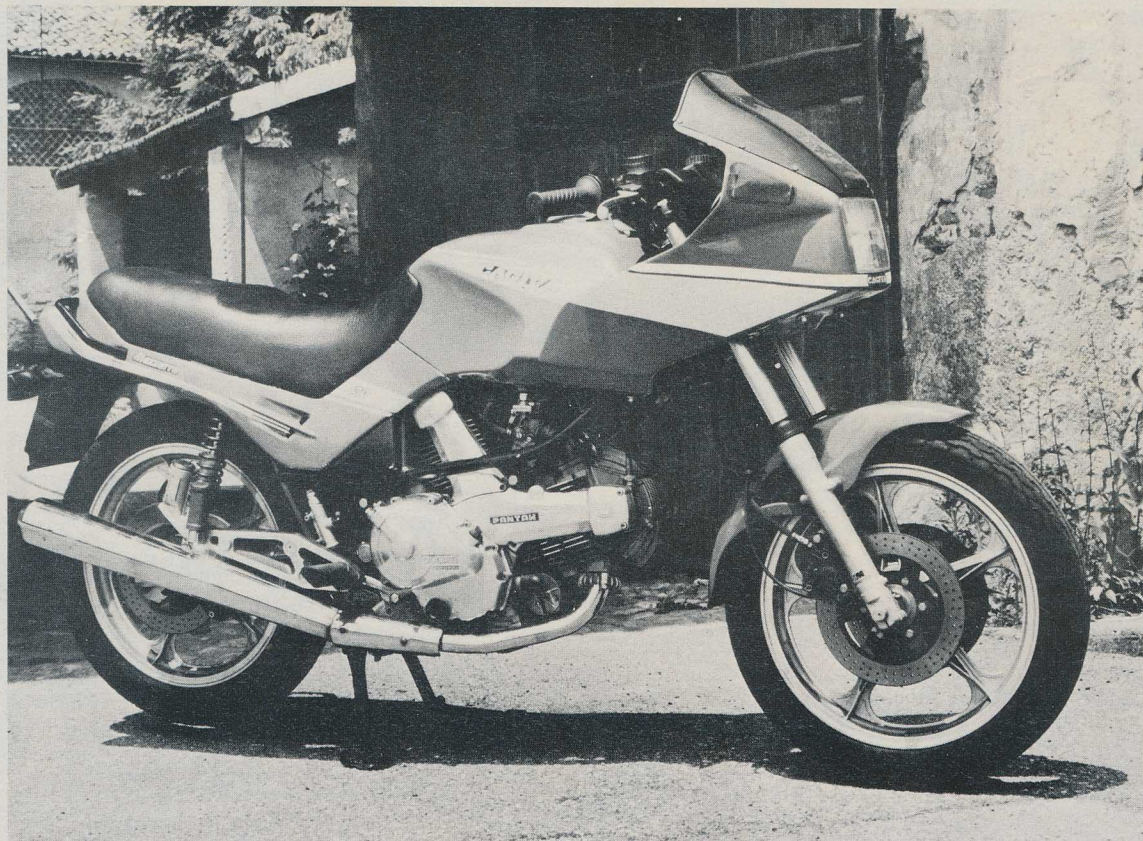
Silentium silencers are fitted which effectively quieten the exhaust note, though there's still a satisfying growl when you crack the throttle open hard, while at high speeds the fairing's efficiency is proved by the still-air pocket a crouched rider encounters tucked down on the tank. Thus prone, the best indicated speed I saw was bang on 200kmh at 9500rpm: if you want more, fit a 600 Pantah rear sprocket and be prepared to lose the Traffic Light GP.

Ducati fans all over the world have been anxiously awaiting the arrival of the Cagiva Alazzurra because, like it or not, this is the only way you're likely to be able to buy a desmodromic V-twin motorcycle in five years' time. The Castiglione brothers have their fingers crossed there are enough of us who want to, and can afford to, pay the as yet unfixed price of doing so. My bet is they're onto a winner.

Relax, Ducatisti — it's all turned out okay.

words — Alan Cathcart
photos — Kel Edge

Opposite: attractive styling, a zippy engine and plenty of top speed make the Alazzurra 650 one of the smoothest Italians yet. Only the question of price remains unanswered.



LA PREALPINA

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