

Words and photos: Kev and Glen Williams

ALICE, ALICE,

Who The Hell Is Alice?



Well, for starters, it's pronounced Ah-Lee-Chay and it's the name of an Italian internet provider. Oh, and the bar code not only has nothing to do with Alice, it's one of the most cunning non-logos ever.



DUCATI
DESMOSEDICI RR

Alice

DUCATI DESMOSEDICCI D16RR

Price (in 2006): \$US100,000 – to be paid up-front as it was an order only model

Engine: Gear-driven DOHC Desmodromic valve V-4 (only 17.4mm wider than 1098 powerplant)

Transmission: 6-speed cassette type, slipper clutch

Chassis: Handmade steel trellis with carbon fibre subframes front and rear. Adjustable rake, billet side-plates

Bodywork: Carbon all over the show, as in all panels etc, dash, airbox and intake, guards, ceramic and carbon tail...

Suspension: Gas-charged Ohlins - the first ever on a 'production bike'

Brakes: Brembo monobloc 4-piston with 330mm rotors up front. Both ends employ radial master cylinders.

Wheels: Forged magnesium super lightweight with specially developed anti-corrosion coating. 400g front and 700g rear. Front is 17" diameter and rear is 16".

Performance: (in this trim with GP7 exhaust, race ECU and dialled cams)

Maximum power (see dyno chart): (with ECU and GP7 exhaust: 203hp @ 14,000rpm
Maximum torque: 120Nm @ 10,500rpm

You do realise I now have to hate you, don't you? The answer to which was laughter and empathy in a smart-arsed "yep, figured that – but it's very cool..."

And so, as I was heading down to watch the final round of the NZSBK series at Manfeild, I managed to blag a spin on one of 'those' bikes you have always coveted. To make a great trip even better, following on from some of the best racing I've had the pleasure of watching, Glen's new toy just happened to have the full (read \$16,000 as an optional accessory) GP7 titanium Termignoni exhaust system in place. "So what?" you say. "The Desmosedici sounds pretty fabulous anyway, how much difference is a few extra decibels going to make?"

HEAD-BANGIN'

Thumbing the starter on the D16RR lets loose an amazing cacophony of sounds. Yes the dry clutch rattle is there, as is a fair amount of mechanical noise but all of that is gathumped by the high/low exhaust and the brutal yet alluring RROTT!-RROTT! that emanates as the engine is warmed up. Birdlife shifted to a neighbouring suburb immediately and it may well have been the first thing the elderly deaf folk in town had heard for years. Or felt; it's a fine line with what sounds like several thousand decibels all trying to escape at once. It is the noisiest motorcycle I've ever ridden on the road. You'd get turfed out of any race circuit here in NZ pretty smartly too – before you even opened the pit garage door. Ear-plugs? And miss out on that orchestral manoeuvre? Pah!

With a first leg tall enough to shame a supermodel, I was off, 'sneaking' out of Dodge at around 120Db and 60km/h in first, as the MotoGP replica doesn't really do 'around town' too well. Once out on the open backroads, it was time to follow the instructions given. "It feels like crap when going slow, keep the revs up above six grand, push it in the corners and brake hard and it all starts to work... and for F*ck's sake, be careful. Fearing Julie (Glen's lovely wife) more than the irate driver or two, I stuck to the words.

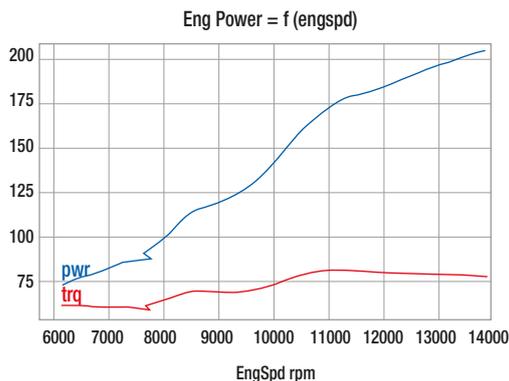
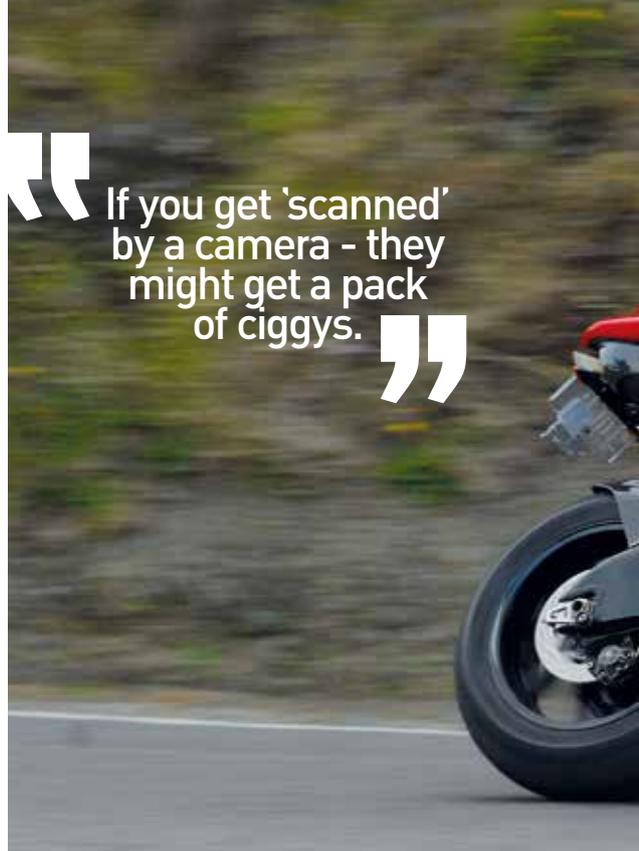
The Desmosedici, with race ECU, dialled cams and pipe has a power delivery that, while absolutely brutal when asked, is predictable and beefy, pumping out over 200hp and has a torque curve that would make most sportsbikes weep from every gasket. You are kept fully aware that it will bite if not respected and it is deceptively quick, even though the bike is now

“If you get 'scanned' by a camera - they might get a pack of ciggys.”

eight (MotoGP) seasons old. Letting the rev-counter display 9-11,000rpm while squirting past a dithering boy-racer with a loud (ha – call that loud?) pipe and twiddling knobs on his stereo as I went past, the sound was frantic. The noise he was struggling with wasn't an imploding amp after all but he just about made his jeans ride even lower as the Ducati made his door panels quiver with sheer internal combustion roar. Laughing out loud in my helmet, it was on to the tighter section of road and getting a handle on the gas-charged Öhlins (the rear shock is inverted to lower the CoG.) that grace both ends. That and the brick-subtle brakes. Not designed to simply 'modulate road speed' these puppies are straight from the track, so you don't need to risk applying too much pressure to the proprietary lever that was designed just for this bike (and cost US\$650 to replace) to rapidly reduce inertia.

Not designed for pissing about on, the suspension is best described as firm, really firm but still compliant in that top-shelf way. As with any bike designed with one thing in mind, it's focus is narrow, so braking hard and tipping in fairly hot rewards you with great feedback, a stable motorcycle and rapid progress, accompanied by the raucous din. The combination is quite intoxicating as it looks, sounds and feels different to any other bike. It feels less like the poorer Ducati cousins than I imagined and also totally different to the obvious comparison – Aprilia's RSV-4.

The closest thing to compare involves a bit of imagination; like chaining a couple of 1098s together. There is a similarity but it's vague, although that's possibly a closer theme than the Aprilia, as the power delivery and feel are worlds apart. The fact that the Desmosedici is basically a limited edition road legal (almost) motorcycle and the RSV-4 is a production unit that costs less than half the tariff, leaves you feeling that it's irrelevant. The Aprilia is a much 'better' road bike and will outlast the D16RR if you were in a position to want to wear out the





exotic Italian and pay for the now unobtainable new parts, but that, again, is not what a GP-replica is about.

Does it make you go MMMMM? Only if you still have a pulse. It's the most un-PC of them all, a one-fingered salute to conformity and will never be affordable to many. As a road bike for cruising with your mates on, it's virtually useless. But with only one year's production of 1500 made, it's already getting more exclusive. There are very few (although I know where one is...) that regularly get track use; most are collectors' pieces that rarely roar and as time goes by, the odds of seeing one on the road will go from buggie-all to SFA. It is simply one of the most charismatic motorcycles enough money can buy.

DESMOSOPRETTY

Aesthetics are only carbon fibre and Kevlar deep, I know, but even those hand-crafted pieces of shallowness are as pretty as they are expensive to replace. The D16RR has panels that leave no gap down the edges of the fairings. Not a new concept, the aero-type theme has been done several times in recent motorcycling history. The difference is Ducati made it look good, really good, where many of the rest had aesthetic scores that ranged from nice enough to Naff. When was the last time you looked inside a belly-pan and went 'oooh, that's right nice, that is'? Carbon fibre warp and Kevlar weft makes for a tasty and factory-trick look that oozes from the exotic alloy and fibres of the whole shooting match, as it should. At \$100,000 of Uncle Sam's finest, Ducati lost money on the project, lots of it. As a marketing experiment it was a shining success that the accountants never want to see again.

WHY A BARCODE?

Ah, the barcode. Well, just as Marlboro (as in cigarettes) were laying their fat chequebook on the tables of Ducati and Ferrari, the sponsorship rules changed. No longer was it cool to have tobacco branding for sports, it created a small (billion dollar) problem that needed some creative thinking to overcome. In some countries, for a while anyway, they simply swapped between the soon to be totally forbidden cigarette sponsorship to... the barcode for the same product for use in EU countries. The bikes and cars still resembled the packaging of the now 'evil' product but didn't break the rules, despite howls of protests about subliminal advertising. I've never smoked but found that hilarious as well as ingenious. If I ever get a Ducati Desmosedici of my own, I'll have to see if the barcode works. If you ever see me with a cigarette in hand, it means my horse has come in... oops, gambling is outlawed too? I'll never light one but I wouldn't mind having an unopened pack on the seat of a Desmosedici in my lounge.

IN FROM THE COLD...

So, I got to ride a Desmosedici; I suppose now I'll have to withdraw my hate message to Glen, I owe him a huge thanks instead. I'm not sure if Julie knew of our cunning plan, so it'll have to remain top secret for now... ■■■

GLEN WILLIAMS STOKED OWNER LIVING NEXT DOOR... TO ALICE

From the moment I first read about the proposed release of the Desmosedici D16RR and then later when I heard one howl past me on the road, way back in 2008, I decided I wanted one.

The Desmosedici V4 is one of those few elite class of bikes that the manufacturer had no intention to commit to an on-going production after the initial run. Unlike so many 'specials' out there which are often simply powered-up existing models, or have lightweight parts fitted or an extra 'R' added to make a difference, the Desmosedici was a one-off model run and it was very closely based on the companies MotoGP machine of the time, and trust me – there is a big difference between a MotoGP based machine and a World Superbike based machine.

For me little compares to the Desmosedici, - It is a bike that I struggle to categorise as similar to any other road-going sportsbike or even sports Ducatis that I have ever ridden. All of its hand-assembled parts exude quality and nothing has been forgotten.

The engine, for me, is the defining factor, with its 'agricultural essence'. It has a brutish flat power curve that starts at just 5000rpm and carries on to 14,000rpm. I didn't expect the engine to feel like that before I rode it for the first time and I assumed that it would be a little angrier and even peaky but the off-set firing order created by the 'big bang' style crank used gives unbeatable throttle to wheel feel. The bike as a whole is an experience to ride, and I now also understand why many owners never ride them and simply park them up inside their homes to view as art, as the styling is again like no other Ducati model.

I for one am very pleased that Ducati cocked a finger to the other manufacturers and built what I consider to be one of the most un-PC roadgoing machines that money can buy. I will leave Kevin to elaborate on the noises that emanate from its various orifices.

Exclusivity has its problems though, with parts becoming ever scarcer and many parts now unable to be ordered from the factory, this machine demands tender care (that's a hint for Kev...).