

REVIEW: DUCATI HYPERMOTARD 1100

REVIEW BY HEIN JONKER

Ducati's latest is so high-strung it should run on Ritalin. It's called the Hypermotard -- "hyper" because the 1,078 cc L-twin is a twitchy little torque monster, and "motard" because its slim profile, slick Pirellis and tall bar-stool seat are pure supermoto.

But take this baby off road, and the neighborhood bar is exactly where you'll end up. The Hypermotard 1100 S may look like a dual sport on steroids, but it's really just a high-end superbike with radical dirt looks. It's pretty bold to make a dual sport that shouldn't be taken off road, but that's exactly what Ducati's done. If the new Hypermotard proves anything, it's that success breeds eccentricity. And this Italian manufacturer has had a string of successes with its drool-worthy sport bikes. The Hypermotard is likely to continue that trend.

Never mind that the model name sounds like a developmental disorder. It's a Ducati, so it's high-

functioning. It may not be a dirt bike, but in spirit, at least, this four-stroke encapsulates the bullish and snorting two-strokes. The first time I threw a leg over and twisted the grip, I was G-forced back in the saddle. The Hypermotard isn't about horsepower, which is a mere 90bhp at 7,750 rpm. It's about torque. The cylinders' wide 98 mm bores and relatively short 71.5 mm strokes crank a whopping 103Nm at 4,750 rpm. In fact, the bike has such an unforgiving throttle and is so quick off the line that it's almost impractical in traffic. Pray that you're behind a Porsche when the light goes green because anything else moves too slowly. Why Ducati didn't swap the horn for a voice box that yells "Get out of my way," I don't know.

The Hypermotard wants to climb up and over whatever has the misfortune of being in its way. The Hypermotard can also go between the cars, of course, but only if you collapse the clamshell mirrors. With the mirrors extended, it has an eagle-esque wingspan of 122cm. Collapse the mirrors, however, and the bike is just 97cm's wide, which makes lane splitting as free-flowing as water over rocks; the downside is you can't see what's coming from behind. The rear-view mirrors are one of the most innovative features of the new Hypermotard, and I found myself having a love-hate relationship with them. As with a dirt bike, the grips have hand guards. Unlike on a dirt bike, those hand guards incorporate the turn signals and also serve as mounts and housing for the mirrors. Unfortunately, they force you to make a choice. Either you flip the mirrors out and are too wide to split lanes, or you tuck them in and blind yourself to the perils all around. It's a major trumping of form over function, especially since the Hypermotard isn't meant to go off road or even to race, as its dual sport styling may indicate. Fuel injected and catalyzed with an electric start, rather than a kick, the 177kg Hypermotard is too heavy to be a contender. Its displacement is also twice as big as a real supermoto racer. Ducati's decision to air-cool the bike wasn't so much to lighten the load, as it would be on a true race bike, but because the associated plumbing would have been an aesthetic nightmare. And ugliness is anathema to Ducati, which with its Hypermotard has elevated dirt-bike basics to high art with elegant trademark touches, such as the trellis frame, under-tail exhaust, single-sided swingarm and enough Italian components to have you singing "That's Amore."

The premium, S version doesn't name-drop as much as I was expecting because the base model is already pretty Italian-ed out. Some of the fiberglass body work's been swapped for fancy carbon fiber, the monoshock's switched from Sachs to Ohlins and the Marzocchi fork tube sliders are coated with diamond-like carbon to reduce friction and increase responsiveness when the front-end slams to the ground from a 120km/h wheelie. At 50 mm in diameter are better to take the abuse from whatever stunts Hypermotard riders are sure to try. The Hypermotard is capable of 205km/h, but you'd be a fool to take it that fast. Travel much more than 140 and it feels like some fat guy is shoving you in the chest because of the lack of a windshield.

So if it isn't for off road and it isn't the ideal commuter, what is it? It's a Ducati -- it doesn't really matter. If Ducati made a can opener, people would rush to buy it. The twisties are where this Hayabusa of a "supermoto" bike belongs. That's where the Hypermotard best lives up to the first part, at least, of its name -- throttle wide, leaned over and running wild.

PRICE

Standard: R119 500.00 Incl. VAT

"S" version: R139 500.00 Incl. VAT



DUCATI DURBAN

Ridgeton Towers, 6 Aurora Drive, Umhlanga Ridge

Tel: (031) 566 5464