

# "I WON WHAT...? AND WHAT...?"

2006 Best of Show, Ducati Island

**DAN** Bockmeir had all but decided not to go to Laguna Seca for the MotoGP this year. "The traffic was so bad last year," he said. "I thought I'd just take a ride in the San Francisco area and watch the race on television. Then Steve Allen started persuading me to bring the 900 SS."

Allen organizes the annual Vintage Museum on Ducati Island each year, and needed an early Ducati 900 SS to fill out the roster. "I already knew Dan's bike," he said. "His is such a nice example of that model." Bockmeir had actually bought a '77 and an '80 Supersport from the same Boston collector (selling a Moto Guzzi V7 Sport to finance the deal), then sold the more modified '80 to Allen. (Steve, who lives in a place called *bevelheaven.com*, was happy.)

Written and photographed by Tod Rafferty



## MOTO-EURO Concours D'Elegance DUCATI MAGAZINE ISLAND

(above) (l-to-r); Ducati Museum organizer Steve Allen, M-E publisher Larry Williams and announcer Duffy Collin present the Best in Show award to Dan Bockmeir (in absentia). (bottom) The beveldrive Ducati 900 SS ruled the road and track in the mid/late seventies. The design defined the stylish clarity of the quintessential cafe racer.



"I had been looking everywhere for a Ducati single," Dan recalls. "But I just couldn't find a good one. Then I looked at a '78 900 SS and it was rough, but I was smitten. Had to have one." After lengthy negotiations he closed the deal and set to work on the '77, which was missing a few pieces, decals, had a cracked rear fender and the carbs had been painted silver. Nine months later the roadster was restored to the condition shown in the adjoining photos.

The tented retrospective at Laguna Seca was smaller this year in terms of space and numbers (it's a small island), but again first rate in showcasing a good range of Bolognese beauties. Included among them were a '74 750 Sport and a 750 GT, a pristine '78 Darmah, a rare 650 Pantah, an F1, a 500 parallel twin and a whimsical rigid-frame 250 single short tracker.

"I was wandering around and watching the races when they announced the winners," Dan said. "When I got back Steve said, 'Where have you been? Your bike was awarded the *Moto-Euro* plaque for Best Vintage.' I was surprised and pleased, of course. So he let that sink in for a minute, then said, 'Oh, you also got Best in Show.' Well, that really made my day. I only put 'em together to look at and ride, so it's really gratifying when you get that kind of recognition."

Bockmeir's small garage also contains two '70s Norton Commandos, an '82 BMW R100RS, a '96 Ducati 900 SS and a '63 Velocette Venom Clubman project. He says the '77 Supersport actually exceeded his expectations as a rider. "You can hear everything in this engine, from the intake to the exhaust. It's very persuasive and forceful without being brutish, on demand. It's really a magnificent combination of styling, power delivery and handling."

Only about 360 900 Supersports came to the U.S. for the 1976 and '77 model years. Dan's bike, with its Euro-spec fairing, instrument panel and taillight was probably brought in by the original owner. Although it suffered some moderately unkind treatment and a measure of neglect, the SS now looks and rides very nearly like it did 30 years ago. So Dan Bockmeir is a justifiably proud owner.

### The 900 SS

#### Second son of the Imola master

Despite Paul Smart's smashing win at Imola in 1972, Ducati was in no position to



v Euro taillight and plate holder were lighter than the U.S. version. This view of the Supersport, and the drumming thunder of its Conti megaphones, became familiar to other riders of the day. Here ended the Norton era.



bring a 750 desmo Supersport to the production line. The utilitarian 750 GT had to prove the pasta in the showrooms first, followed by the 750 Sport cafe racer. Not until late 1974 did the first "greenframe" 750 SS reach the States. Few among those who got one didn't think it was worth the wait.

When the staff at *Cycle Magazine* undertook a racing program, ultimately winning the 1977 Daytona Superbike race, Taglioni's desmo twin had carved an identity in the U.S. sportbike arena. By then the production engine was an 860 with redesigned side covers, the so-called "squarecase" motors. The 750 was joined by the 900 SS, and the desmo engine also graced the newly-introduced Darmah sport-tourer.

At its debut in '75, the 900 SS was a milder version of the original 750, without its Imola-style tank, right side shift, 40mm carburetors and Conti mufflers. The 900s bound for the States were equipped with left-side shifters, 32mm carbs and Lafranconi mufflers to meet federal standards. (Although the crates included a set of larger carbs and the Contis, at no extra cost.) Grazie, Italy.

By the '78 model year, Ducati had improved the engine's bottom end and electrics. Borrani spoked alloy rims were phased out in favor of cast wheels. Only a few 750s were built, now in its final year, and the 900 inherited a black-and-gold color scheme from the Darmah. Minor color, trim and styling changes followed the SS through its production into 1982, when it was supplanted by the Mike Hailwood Replica.

The Supersport concept, a racing motorcycle for the road, has served Ducati well in the ensuing decades. The styling has changed of course, but that's what style does, comes and goes. And while the belt-cam V-twins may lack that elegantly creamy thrust of the bevelhead engines of yore, the spirit is still in place. And, with the appearance of the new SportClassics and the forthcoming Hypermotard, maybe more of that original substance is returning. Perhaps it really never is too late to have a happy childhood. 