

# Looco Motos

FUN DOESN'T ALWAYS RELATE TO SPEED,  
AS THESE THREE BONKERS BIKES PROVE

WORDS: SIMON 'ROOTSY' ROOTS PICS: MARK MANNING



**O**n two wheels, we firmly subscribe to the bigger bore is best philosophy. But when it comes to crazy, smaller sizes can come up with sensational surprises. While the big boys in the naked classes cream off all the plaudits, there are a handful of bikes with more modest motors that leave miscreant mayhem in their wake. There ain't no replacement for displacement, but the trade off between capacity and audacity is a balancing act that can occasionally find favour in bikes beyond the norm.

The right surroundings, like a decent track or open countryside, will always see the usual suspects hit the front, but the wrong environment is what these bikes are all about. So, if you were to find yourself on a grippy go-kart track with the rest of mid-Wales to play with, the wish list of machinery to take to task changes considerably.

With only 210bhp to boast – between the three of them – this line-up of truly loco motos has to rely on guile rather than guts to shine.

The puniest of the lot, KTM's 690 Duke is the epitome of the class. The big single is small fry when it comes to outright numbers, but the Austrian machine proves that power ain't nothing like but a number as the 654cc motor punches well above its weight. Like any cornered animal, get it into a tight situation and it'll come out fighting. Fitted with an array ace components, the Duke's spirit is noble.

With no natural rival, the Aprilia Dorsoduro can be easily overshadowed by bigger rivals and overlooked by beginners, but the techno heavy supermoto clone can deliver balance in unstable situations. No wonder it's Aprilia's best selling machine of the mo'.

Then there's the new boy, Ducati's Hypermotard 796. Taking all its styling cues from the 1100 and pinching the plucky motor from the Monster 796, the mini 'motard seems like an Italian styling exercise that by pure coincidence matches its looks with dynamic ability. But knowing Ducati and its intimacy with form and function, this is no accident.

## AND YOUR TESTERS ARE



**Simon 'Rootsy' Roots**

Only gets on the go-kart track on the occasional stag-do, Rootsy struggles big time in the power to weight ratio department. But not as much as Al!



**Benjamin 'BJ' Kubas Cronin**

Couldn't get BJ off the track. He found a groove and stuck in it all day. Went for the knee down option rather than the foot out, so marks off for poor style there.





IT MAY BE A CYLINDER DOWN BUT ITS PISTON GETS THROUGH A TITANIC AMOUNT OF WORK



Find an open road and stretch that throttle cable. The lil' Duke will thank you for it

# KTM 690 DUKE

If medals were awarded for bravery, this little KTM would have one proudly protruding from its orange chest. It may be a cylinder down on these rivals, but its single piston gets through a titanic amount of work and is only caught lacking at anything above 100mph.

The Duke is part of KTM's royal family – and rightly so. While other manufacturers have gone down the easy route and opted for either more capacity or more cylinders, this third generation Duke proves that you need neither to entertain. At 654cc, it's massive for a thumper, and so long as you're graduating up from a smaller machine, you won't be disappointed. The LC4 mill revs hard and fast, pulling like a mule from low, but with just 5,000 revs to play with (all you get below 3,000rpm is judder) you'd better get that left foot tapping to give the bike a chance. Delivery can be changed through its mapping system for the fiddle freaks out there.

Find the right environment, like a 900m kart track, and the only thing that can touch it is a WSS rider training on his CRF450 'motard. Here, the Duke makes complete sense – although the 690SMC is even more logical. The lightweight motor means the ancillaries strapped to it don't have to be made from anything too substantial – although the 690 feels



## BENJAMIN'S OPINION

Despite the impressive spec list, I could never see myself wanting a bike like the Duke. In this company it's got no hope; its little single-cylinder does out enough fun on a go-kart track, but unless you constantly travel via back lanes, it gets boring really fast, and uncomfortable. And then there's the price, which is about £3k too much in my opinion. For only a few quid more you could buy the best supersport bike in the world, or a host of other such impressive machinery. But KTM continues to make it, so somebody must be buying them, I just don't have a clue who. Let us know if it's you!

**BJ's verdict** 5/10

KTM 690 DUKE £7,651



### ENGINE

The 654cc lump has an overhead camshaft operating four valves. 46mm throttle bodies fire the juice in. The EPT (Electronic Power Throttle) is electronically controlled and manually closed. An adjustable map switch with three settings is included. There's also an APTC 'anti-hopping' clutch to reduce rear wheel chatter, with 30 per cent softer springs. The other LC4 motors have different tunes, aiming less at top end.

### CHASSIS

The thin-walled steel trellis frame weighs just 9kg, and carries a one-piece aluminium die-cast swingarm with a pro-lever linkage that houses a fully adjustable WP shock. 48mm WP forks look after the front, with a Brembo radial caliper. Decent Dunlop Alpha Tens tyres grace the wheels. The racy SMC is pared down by 9kg. It has a smaller tank, higher seat, and it uses spoked wheels not forged.

### Highlights

- ▷ WP Suspension
- ▷ Adjustable mapping
- ▷ Slipper clutch
- ▷ 654cc
- ▷ 148kg
- ▷ 65bhp

### TRACK

So long as it's a small 'un

### FAST ROAD

Needs tight confines

### HOOLIGAN

Stunning stunter at slow speeds

### NEW RIDER

Never too intimidating

### DESIRABILITY

Good looking – if you like orange

solid. The frame is light and purposeful, the swingarm industrially sparse, the can is made stumpy and set low to aid balance, and if there's no need to stop the bike from 170mph then why have two calipers?

As soon as it rolls into this racy setting, the Duke becomes a toy through and through. Even with the strange geometry making the bike feel as if it's already pointing upwards (we pointed the finger at the shock set-up), the bike still pings between turns like a mosquito eyeing up Al. Gas hard out of a turn in first gear and the rear Dunlop Alpha-10 slips, grips and then continues turning on its shoulder. Brake hard and it obeys in an instant, with downchanges executed easily and with as much or as little fuss as your style demands thanks to the balanced APTC slipper clutch. Its rivals are ultimately faster, but overtaking the Duke is a mighty, almost suicidal, task.

Turn out of the arena and onto the open road and the tables are reversed – although not to the degree you'd think. Of course, speeds are down on the Duke (and vibes are up), but if you think you're going to breeze past

the plucky KTM on your Hyper' or 'Duro, then you'd better get serious.

So long as you're not knee deep in corner, the Duke works well turning positively despite the lack of weight over the front. The WP suspension is top notch, even if the rear's set too low. The potential is enormous. Riding hard on unknown roads is perfect, the Duke giving you a fine view of what's to come and not needing to be lent over too far makes it a perfect recce bike. But if you should come across longer, smoother turns, or know a road inside out, you'll find the Duke isn't as happy as the front tyre scrabbles for purpose. It works on track because of the dramatic weight transfer. In less pronounced situations it's more of a problem.

And then there's the price. You'll need to properly fall in love with this bike, live in the middle of Wales and have a kart track on your doorstep. £7,600 is simply massive money.

## Verdict 6/10

The single configuration is alive and kicking. And wheeling, and a hell of a lot of fun

- ➕ WEIGHT, DIMENSIONS, TYRES, BRAKES
- ➖ REAR SHOCK, PRICE, MOTOR'S LIMITATIONS

**DON'T BE FOOLED BY**  
Spending over £7,000 for a single. It's a cracking bike in tight turns but we'd want another cylinder for that money



# Ducati Hypermotard 796

**W**hy didn't Ducati come out with the 796 as the first in its range of off the hook Hypers? With this as the starter, we could only look forward to bigger and badder things for our main. In its own right, the 796 version of Ducati's styling exercise is a laugh a minute – considerably more on the right roads. But now we've stuffed our faces with the 1100 version, the prospect of downgrading the entertainment levels is like ditching the pay per view porn and being left with the ten-minute teaser.

Still, the teaser often gets the job done, and the same is true with the 796. Ducati has fallen in and out of love with its middleweight motor, but now the air cooled lump is back in favour. It offers a decent spread of power, not too far off the 1100's stock output. It's one of those engines that can be ridden every which way, so town work is straightforward, it offers a hearty punch to dart in and out of traffic, then it loves being thrashed in a suitably confined environment.

With no wind protection worthy of the name, skirmishes above 100mph are bound to be limited, thus the spread of power metered out by the punchy twin works well, although it lacks the ultimate zing of the Aprilia, the lazier delivery and longer gearing better suits more



## BENJAMIN'S OPINION

I really dig the wee Hypermotard, even if others don't as much. What I really like about it, and what it holds over its bigger brother, is that it's a peach to tool around on. Not only is it stylish, but it's genuinely nice to ride in nearly all arenas, offering a plush footing with just enough excitement in reserve. I say this, because it isn't anywhere near the tool the new generation 1100s can be, and for some this may be a disappointment. The 796 motor does its job, can even pull a wheelie or two, but ultimately it won't blow you away one bit. As a first Ducati, though, it's ace and well worth a test ride.

**BJ's verdict** **7/10**



DUCATI HYPERMOTARD 796 **£6,995**



### ENGINE

The 803cc L-twin motor is a new Desmodue unit. The crankshaft is designed around a lightweight 848-type flywheel. The oil cooler is similar to the 1100's. 848-style crankcases save weight and knock nearly 2kg from the motor. It breathes through a revised airbox intake duct and is fed by 45mm throttle bodies. A 2-1-2 catalytic exhaust uses an efficient pre-silencer configuration with twin lambda probes for superior fuel mapping.

### Highlights

- ▷ DDA data Analyser
- ▷ Sachs rear shock
- ▷ Brembo brakes
- ▷ 803cc
- ▷ 167kg
- ▷ 73bhp

### TRACK

Relies on brains, not brawn

### FAST ROAD

Gutsy, but too ultimately slow

### HOOLIGAN

Weird wheelie call stops fun

### NEW RIDER

Gentle enough to consider

### DESIRABILITY

Looks lush, cheap Italian exotica

### CHASSIS

The 796 weighs just 168kg, due to the lighter engine and the redesigned top and bottom fork clamps and an improved chassis layout that eliminates almost all forged elements used by the 1100. The lightened frame retains its torsional strength, while Enkei 17" wheels keep unsprung weight down and improve agility. The fork is a 43mm nonadjustable item, though still Marzocchi, and the rear shock is from Sachs.

settings. Being from Hypermotard stock, wheelies should be second nature – and they are, so long as you can circumvent Ducati's weird anti-wheelie electronics that cut the engine if you rev the bike hard and engage the clutch. This prevents slipping one up in second at higher speeds, although it'll stand to attention in first as if Sergeant Major has just walked in. For those fearing the flip, rest assured, the 796 needs coaxing up and in all other regards, it displays exemplary manners.

From afar, it looks like it's shrunk in the wash, but once perched on top the diminutive feeling fades, although you start looking for suspects to the stolen front end. Except for a small set of clocks, there's nothing there. The bars are set wide, wider still with the car-clipping fold out mirrors, but it's unlike its big bro', the bike has a more regular feel to it, rather than the freak show feel of the flat and unfeeling stock 1100.

Being, for Ducati, a budget bike, the 796 doesn't get anything in the way of suspension adjustment. For all but the most demanding roads, this isn't much of a problem because the

cut-price combo of a 43mm Marzocchi front and Sachs shock do the business well. They're helped by the bike's lack of weight and modest power, but together with the Bridgestone BT-016 tyres fitted, the combo work to make seemingly inappropriate speeds entirely apt. Naturally, the wide bars aid corner entry with loads of leverage to get the

bike to turn (but with not enough steering lock for tight town work), but they magnify bumps when your path through a turn is set – heightened by damping that needs better control. Stopping, sponsored by Brembo, is smart. It's powerful enough to be truly effective, but never becomes overwhelming.

Like its forefather, the Hypermotard 796 is seen by the cynics as a simple styling exercise – and it certainly works as that alone. But the 796 is more than an aesthetic implement, it's a dynamic one, too.

## Verdict **7/10**

Forget the Monster range, the Hypers are where it's at. Massively impractical but you won't care

- LOOKS, FUEL INJECTION, WILLING STUNTER, MPG
- MOTOR FEELS FLAT, TANK, INSURANCE GROUP

### DON'T BE FOOLED BY

The insurance group. It's down as group 15, but this is one of Ducati's more modest offerings.



The eyes have it. The mini 'Motard produces enough speed that you have to concentrate. Hard





You put your right knee in, your right knee out, in, out, in, out, shake it all about

“ THE DORSODURO PROVES THAT SMOKE AND MIRRORS CAN BE AS EFFECTIVE AS GRAFT AND CRAFT ”

# Aprilia Dorsoduro

You've got two ways of making a supermoto. One is the purists route, making it lightweight, punchy and fun. Let's call that the KTM way. Option two is to mould an existing bike into a supermoto style and hope it all works out. This seems to be the way Ducati and Aprilia roll. But as the Dorsoduro proves, based as it is on the Shiver, smoke and mirrors can sometimes be just as effective as graft and craft.

Even though the Noale factory has the pure-bred SXV motards to base a bigger bike on, Aprilia looked to restyle its onroad option, hoping to appeal to a wider audience. It was right. The SMV 750 differs from the Shiver in its longer travel suspension, beefier brakes and supermoto styling. The effect of this transformation turns it into a completely different machine - heavy for a supermoto, but packed with aggression and purpose.

After flinging the other two bikes about like they're your bedroom gymnastics partner, the Dorsoduro feels big. Aprilia opted for substance in the size stakes and you can't help but think that they went for the wrong option - especially as the sharp throttle can make the bike feel even bigger in tight turns. But that size shrinks the longer you ride the SMV, and within ten very short laps round the Kinsham Raceway, the



Imagine a pack full of these racing. Imagine no more. Go to Italy and watch it in the flesh.

## BENJAMIN'S OPINION

When we put this test together, I had no doubt the Aprilia would romp it. There's so much I like about the smart-looking Italian, including the ingrained attitude that endears itself to me in ways the others can not. It's worth pointing out that if we threw it against tougher opposition, as we have in the past, it wouldn't fare as well. For me, this is mainly down to a choppy and unadjustable suspension setup and woeful ride-by-wire throttle, which I still hate. It has gotten better, granted, but has a way to go before I'll trust it completely. The new Factory is even better. Otherwise, bellissimo!

**BJ's verdict** 8/10



APRILIA DORSODURO £6,799



### ENGINE

The four-valves-per-cylinder 749cc V-twin is highly over-square, and is run by a complex engine management and fuelling system including a Ride by Wire throttle. It uses a 90-degree configuration to reduce vibrations. Fine atomising injectors, along with two plugs per cylinder, offer more powerful and cleaner combustion. A remap gives the lump 3bhp over the motor in the Shiver.

### CHASSIS

The Dorsoduro's top steel tubular trellis (using thinner tubes than the Shiver) is connected by side plates and extra strong bolt for rigidity and weight saving. The aluminium-reinforced swingarm is designed specifically for the asymmetrical stresses that a side mounted cantilever shock produces. The shock has adjustable spring preload and hydraulic rebound. The new Factory version has added carbon.

### Highlights

- ▷ Switchable maps
- ▷ Ride-by-wire
- ▷ Radial calipers
- ▷ 750cc
- ▷ 186kg
- ▷ 78bhp

### TRACK 8

Change tyres and crack on

### FAST ROAD 7

Tuck in and gas hard

### HOOLIGAN 7

No as radical as it looks

### NEW RIDER 5

Ride-by-wire hinders

### DESIRABILITY 7

Trick and mean looking

Aprilia had gone from a bike with issues to a toy to misuse.

750cc isn't the key capacity that it once was. No-one sticks by the rules anymore, and the Aprilia finds itself in no mans land here. It dicks the other two bikes easily, using its liquid-cooled motor ruthlessly to outgun the KTM single and air-cooled Ducati, but then it struggles against the big boys in the class above.

The fly-by-wire throttle aside (not the worst we've ever tried), the Dorsoduro offers ever progressive power, topping out at the wrong side of 130mph. For a naked 750cc twin this is no mean feat and puts the Dorsoduro firmly in contention in any B-road battle. But you can't help think that there are more flexible and fun motors out there. And the technology employed, like the ride-by-wire throttle and three-mode engine management system seems so over the top on a bike that should just be fruity and fun. Rant over.

The Dorsoduro's components culminate in a cracking package. The suspension, though not the most sophisticated or adjustable you'll ever find, does a grand job of getting the

bike to where you want it to be. This isn't as easy as it sounds on a go-kart track, and is praise indeed when the turns come thick and fast. The brakes work well and anchor the bike hard, although the weight transfer forward and subsequent down change gets the rear loose - entertaining, if you're into that sort of thing.

One limiting factor is the tyres.

Ducati and KTM manage to put its bikes on racey rubber, but the worthy Michelin Pilot Road IIs, are on the wrong application here. The 180-rear also feels like overkill, slowing the bike's sharp steering.

Aprilia has just kicked off the Dorsoduro cup in Italy, and this promises to be one of the sights of the season. For as much as the Dorsoduro has proved to be a neat and ruthless town bike or back road baiter, it really lets rip on track, taking full advantage of its power, chassis and brakes. How often it will find itself here is quite another matter.

## Verdict 8/10

In the right environment proper good fun. Good fun everywhere else

- ➕ MOTOR, SUSPENSION, STUNTS, LOOKS
- ➖ FUEL INJECTION, TYRES, WEIGHT

**DON'T BE FOOLED BY**  
Those mean looks. It's a nice cuddly Shiver underneath. Or is the Shiver a toned down Dorsoduro?



# TECH DATA



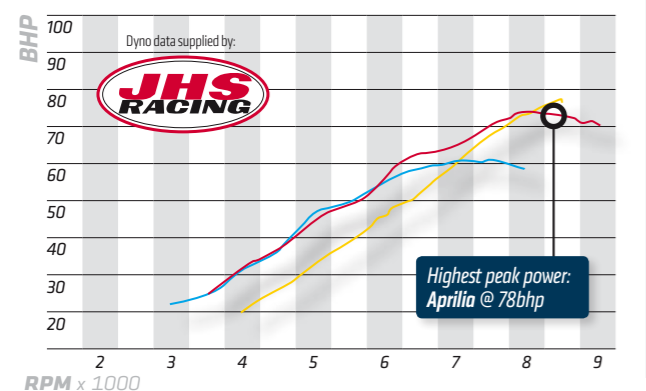
	KTM 690 Duke	Ducati Hypermotard 796	Aprilia Dorsoduro 750
<b>ENGINE</b>			
Type	690cc, liquid cooled, 4v, single	803cc, L-twin, four-stroke	750cc, liquid-cooled, 8v, 90° V-twin
Bore x Stroke	102.0mm x 84.5mm	88 x 66mm	92 x 56.4mm
Compression	12.5:1	11:1	11:1
Fuelling	Fuel Injection	Electronic fuel injection	Ride-By-Wire injection
Tested Power	65bhp @ 7,500rpm	73.7bhp @ 7,800rpm	78bhp @ 8,750rpm
Tested Torque	67Nm @ 5,500rpm	71Nm @ 6,250rpm	62Nm @ 4,500rpm
<b>CHASSIS</b>			
Frame	Steel trellis	Tubular steel trellis	Steel trellis and ally plate
F Suspension	43mm USD WP fork, fully-adjustable	43mm Marzocchi usd fork	43mm usd fork, preload & rebound adj
R Suspension	WP monoshock, fully adjustable	Sachs Monoshock, adjustable	Monoshock, preload & rebound adjustable
Front Brakes	Four piston radial caliper, 320mm disc	Four piston calipers, 305mm discs	Four piston callipers, 320mm discs
Rear Brakes	Twin single caliper, 240mm disc	Two piston caliper, 245mm disc	One piston caliper, 240mm disc
<b>DIMENSIONS</b>			
Wheelbase	1,472mm	1,455mm	1,505mm
Seat Height	865mm	825mm	870mm
Dry Weight	148kg	167kg	186kg
Fuel Capacity	13.5L	12.4L	12L
<b>PRICE</b>			
Price	£7,651 otr	£6,995 otr	£6,699 otr
From	KTM UK 01280 709500 Ktm.co.uk	Ducati UK 08451 222 996 Ducati.co.uk	Wheelpower 0208 5430321 Wheelpower.co.uk



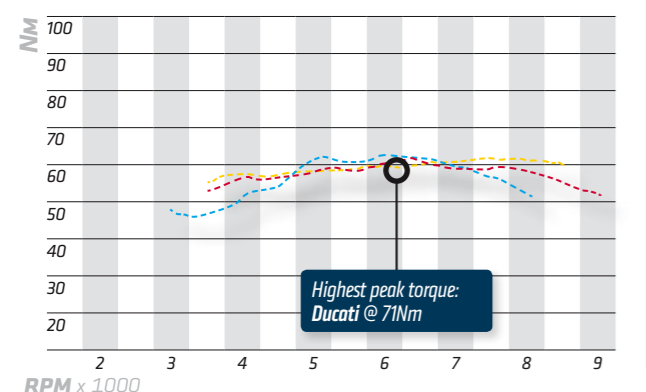
Rootsy remembers that he forgot to pick up his packed lunch on the way out



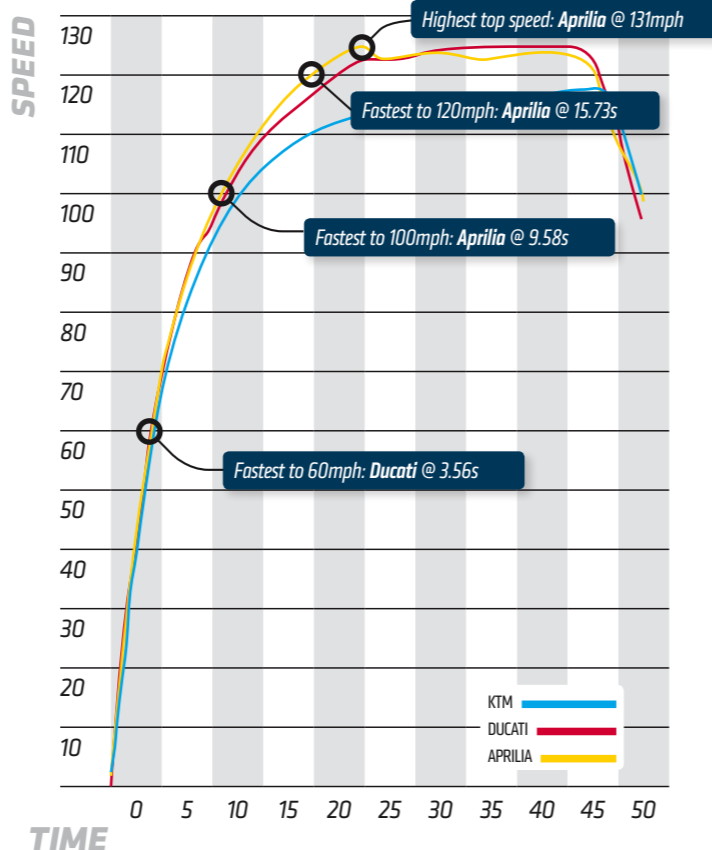
## POWER



## TORQUE



## SPEED DATA



## SPEED TEST NOTES

- 19°C** ☁️ 🌬️ Light
- 🔥 **KTM 690 DUKE**  
The one piston does a manful job of getting things off and away, but speed tails off dramatically when other bikes get into the groove.
- 🔥 **DUCATI HYPER' 796**  
Can be a bit odd if you give it too much gas with the clutch in, with its funny anti-wheelie electronics. Runs out of puff way too soon.
- 🔥 **APRILIA DORSODURO**  
Mans up to the job, and nails this little lot - although struggles in bigger company. Ride-by-wire doesn't come into play flat out.

# THE VERDICT

On the face of it, this could, and probably should, have been a decidedly underwhelming test. Faced with prodigious power and endless ability, rivals to this rag-tag bunch should wipe the floor with them. But these are truly bikes for Britain, machines that suit bumpy back roads without luring you into massively inappropriate speeds – just massively inappropriate stunts. In the right situation, the KTM 690 Duke, with its paltry piston pumping up and down should have no chance against a new BMW S 1000 RR, but the truth is that apart from on track and through fast, sweeping bends, the Duke proves that guile can be a match for speed.

But it's the KTM that comes last in this list – shockingly so because we love 'em. It's an infectious little machine, buzzing between turns with an unquenchable thirst to entertain. Easy to outrun on a straight, but almost impossible to overtake in the turns, the Duke proves that guile can be a match for speed.

But it does all this at a cost. £7,651 is massive money for a machine that works in such a narrow window. Even spending an extra £200 to get the Duke R (with its extra 36cc and 5bhp) is a crazy notion unless you you're a mountain lift engineer who only works over the summer. Just

think what you could buy for that sort of money... At over £500 less than the Duke, the Ducati Hypermotard is a no-brainer, without suffering much in the way of performance. Indeed, the air-cooled motor is far more flexible than the KTM's lump could ever be – making up for the fact, and more, that the Ducati has to carry around an extra 20 kilos everywhere. With the memory of the 1100 haunting us all, the 796 feels flat, gasping away up top, but the truth is that it still retains enough speed to do damage and keep sportsbike riders honest.

But while there's no doubting the fact that the KTM is the real deal, you



With so much on the menu, the boys struggle to decide what they'll have for lunch



	KTM 690 Duke	Ducati Hypermotard 796	Aprilia Dorsoduro
<b>SPEED</b>			
0-60	3.87s	3.56s	3.65s
0-100	11.31s	9.64s	9.58s
0-120	na	19.93s	15.73s
Stg ¼ Mile	12.74s @ 103.19mph	12.34s @ 108.67mph	12.35s @ 110.10mph
Standing Mile	36.41s @ 117.24mph	34.61s @ 15.78mph	33.70s @ 130.83
Top Speed	119mph	126mph	131mph






**FAST  
BIKES**  
No.1


can't help but feel that this is little more than a styling exercise for Ducati. It's picked up the motard monicker and married it to their version of a supermoto – that's a million miles away from the original French version. And it's not even 'hyper' as it remains cultured and calm, even if you're over excited. But who are we to complain about the name when it delivers as easy as this.

Aprilia is just as guilty as Ducati for robbing the style of supermotos of old for pure marketing gain. If anything, the relationship between its commuter and the radical, aggressive machine you see before you is even closer than that of the Hypermotard and the Monster.

But like the Ducati, you don't hold this grudge against the machine for very long. So long as the journey ahead is packed with possibilities the Aprilia will stand tall, fighting through the carnage. That may mean scything through town, or it could be picking your way from one village to the next. With its tall posture and hearty spirit the Dorsoduro will get you there capably and quickly – with certainly less fuss than a sportsbike. Of course, you can make your own fuss, and the Dorsoduro is a willing accomplice, as happy on either of its tyres singularly as it is with both planted to the floor.

All three bikes are flawed, but little gems nonetheless. Priced at £6,799 to make way for the new higher specced Factory bike to make its appearance, the Dorso' is not only the nutter's choice, but it's also where the sensible money should head, too. Sensible? In this class? Just about, yes. ☐

### Thanks to:

THANKS TO: WHEELPOWER FOR THE USE OF THE DORSODURO. TOP CHAPS, CALL THEM ON 0208 5430321 OR GET ON WHEELPOWER.CO.UK. TA VERY MUCH TO PETE AND CHAZ DAVIES AT KINSHAM RACEWAY. HEAD THERE FOR KARTING FUN, BUT CALL THEM FIRST ON 01544 267006

