

HUMBLE MOTORCYCLE BEGINNINGS

The Ducati 60

Story and photos by Dave Ryan
Dedicated to John C. Ryan

Ducati celebrated its 90th anniversary as a company in 2016, releasing a commemorative book and updating its museum. An arguably more important milestone (at least to readers of this magazine) happens in July 2019 — the 70th anniversary of the first complete motorcycle to roll out of the Borgo Panigale factory: the Ducati 60.

An abridged version of the genesis of these bikes follows — thanks to the works of Ian Falloon and information from Bruno Ducati written in a forward to *Ducati: 50 Golden Years* by Luigi Bianchi and Marco Masetti. More resources came from the book *Il Cucciolo, un Gigante* by Giuliano Musi, photos of a “CCC” owned by Alan Moseley, and Ducati’s historical information (a large part of which seems to have been deleted from its website). I must also mention the Ducati Pushrod Singles group and the wealth of information available from its various sources. A couple of members stand out for the help they provided to me: the aforementioned Alan Moseley, and John Henry. Their vast knowledge (and thirst to add to it) were valuable assets in my journey for understanding this history.

Founding Ducati

When founded by Antonio Cavaliere Ducati and his three sons (Bruno, Marcelo and Adriano) in 1926 as Società Radio Brevetti Ducati, the focus was on the then-growing radio industry. Their first product was a capacitor; and over the years they expanded into complete radios, one of the first electric razors, a very early intercom system, and a leading edge small camera. Ducati prospered and grew during this period, built a large factory in the Bologna area and changed its name to Società Scientifica Radio Brevetti Ducati. World War II saw Ducati become a supplier of electronic equipment to the Axis. This had the inevitable result of the factory being destroyed by Allied bombers.

As Italy emerged from the war, the need for efficient and inexpensive transportation became clear. A lawyer and engineer named Aldo Farinelli designed a 48cc 4-stroke pullrod engine that could be clipped onto a bicycle frame — produced by



Italian automaker SIATA. SIATA, however, didn’t have the needed assembly capacity. As Ducati was rebuilding and looking to expand their reach, a deal was struck for Ducati to manufacture the engines — known as the “Cucciolo” (Italian for “puppy,” due to its distinct “bark” from the exhaust). “Cucciolo” was written in script on the exposed flywheel, and Weber carburetors were employed. Production of the clip-on engines by Ducati began in 1946 and ended in 1955 (eventually dropping the “Cucciolo” name) with total sales topping 100,000 units. Along the way, Ducati improved the basic design through five versions.



Concurrently, Gian Luigi Capellino (technical director at Shell in Genoa) put together a bicycle frame with a rear suspension under the seat to better handle the rough roads of the day in Italy. Necessity being the mother of invention, he designed this frame after moving his family away from Genoa for their safety at the beginning of World War II. His only means of visiting them was via bicycle. His frames started to gain notoriety and when Shell closed in Genoa he patented and started to sell them. Soon they were being made by Aero Caproni (the famed aircraft manufacturer and maker of the first Italian airplane).

The Capellino-designed Caproni bicycles proved quite popular matched with Ducati power, and before long the CCC (Cicli Capellino Caproni) was being made with a Cucciolo engine. The final CCCs were apparently painted green and sported a ram with wings as the tank logo and "CCC" emblazoned above it. Beyond the color, the "CCC" markings and a set of pedals, they are a dead ringer for the Ducati 60, almost akin to a prototype. (A ram was used by Caproni as the logo for its airplanes at times.)

Ducati tried to lure Capellino away from Caproni, but was



Engine: 59.57cc air-cooled 4-stroke overhead valve pullrod single, 42mm x 43mm bore and stroke, 8:1 compression ratio, 2.25hp @ 5,000rpm
Top speed: 37mph (60kph)
Carburetion: Weber 15MFC
Transmission: 3-speed foot shift, chain final drive
Frame/wheelbase: Tubular steel/45.5in (1,156mm)
Suspension: Telescopic front fork, cantilever rear suspension, friction shock
Brakes: Front and rear single drum brakes
Tires: Two Pirelli 1.75 x 22in
Weight: 98lb (45kg)
Fuel capacity/mpg: 1.3gal/164mpg
Cost then/now: 143 lire (\$4.71)/\$3,000-\$12,000



While many small displacement motorcycles of the day were 2-strokes, the Ducati 60 was a 2.25-horsepower, 4-stroke powerhouse.

unsuccessful. (They were thankfully much more successful tempting “Dr. T,” Fabio Taglioni, away from Mondial in 1954 — starting in motion what would become the Ducati we all know today. But that’s another story.) Ducati worked out an arrangement with Caproni to supply frames and began mating them with an evolution of the Cucciolo engine (punched out to 60cc) in July of 1949 — thus creating the Ducati 60, their first complete motorcycle. These retained the same Caproni “ram with wings” tank logo as the CCC, but instead topped with “DUCATI 60.”

The Ducati Museum’s display of a Caproni-framed 60 proclaims it “La Prima Motocicletta,” The First Motorcycle. The last of the Caproni-framed Ducati 60s was screwed together in May 1950, likely as Caproni decided to make their own bikes (under

the Capriolo name). This forced Ducati to design their own frame for the following version of the 60. I have yet to find anyone (including Ducati) that has production numbers on these first-ever Ducati motorcycles, but it stands to reason that they are relatively rare, as they were built for only 10 months. Ducati came under government control in 1949 and was split into two distinct concerns in 1953 — the electronics side under the Ducati Elettronica umbrella (now Ducati Energia), and motorcycles under the familiar Ducati Meccanica brand. Therefore, these pre-split bikes still carry the “SSR” logo of the initial combined company, typically cast into the engine cases.





Finding the 60

The pictured Ducati 60 came into my stewardship due to serendipity, my passion for Ducati and my interest in history (and, according to my wife, my eBay addiction). It was pure happenstance that I was looking at Ducatis on eBay in January 2016 (ahem) when I spied this Ducati 60 for sale by a collector in California. He said it was a last-minute addition to a shipping crate of motorcycles he had brought over from Italy, but he had no documentation with it at all. Incredibly original and unrestored, it was right up my alley! I subscribe to the “it’s only original once” credo, and this thing had the paint that was put on it in Bologna when it was born. I announced to my wife that I had to have it, and I wasn’t going to lose the auction. I got the usual eye-roll and yawn in response. She now affectionately (at least that’s what I tell myself) calls it “the hunk of rust.”

Initial research landed me on Phil Aynsley’s excellent website with his renowned photography. He mentions there were some differences between early (Caproni-framed) 60s and those

produced later in the run. He indicates the first group have the gas tank mounted differently, along with a different chain guard (and some foot control deviations). This was the first time I noticed these distinctions, but the few photos I’ve seen do seem to show these items grouped together. Based on his information, this bike belongs to the first series. (Interestingly, the Ducati Museum display houses a restored example from the second series which looks to be painted the wrong shade of red — not to be critical.) I took a shot in the dark and sent an email to Mr. Aynsley to see if he could help me with further research. He pointed me to an online club for owners of these early Ducatis — the Ducati Pushrod Singles group. This may sound like a fringe dating site, but it is really a great source of information (with quite a group of knowledgeable, helpful folks). The information gleaned from these sources, along with the Vintage Motor Cycle Club in the U.K. leads to the following conclusions:

The definite non-original items on the bike as it sits are the muffler, the wiring and its routing, the headlight lens and one or



Original Radaelli seat (above). Worn Caproni “ram with wings” logo on the small 1.3-gallon fuel tank, with original paint.

The details on such a basic bike are amazing. The “ducati” script on the shift lever cover mimics that on the iconic Gio Ponti-designed Ducati radio of the 1930s (RR3404).



both fork gaiters (they don't match). Missing are the tire pump (which would mount under the main frame tube) and the tool kit (consisting of a spark plug wrench and a 10/8mm open-end wrench, which would be housed in the box beneath the seat). I can't imagine that the tires are original, but they do appear to be the correct Pirellis (although the front tire should likely have ribbed tread). The rack over the rear wheel was apparently an available accessory, and is actually sprung in the tubes attached near the rear axle (a pad could be added for a rear passenger). Another accessory was a rather large fairing sort of apparatus that served as weather protection for the legs — almost scooter-like in appearance. Also, there were two versions, the standard model with black headlight ring and handlebars, and the high zoot variant with those parts in chrome. According to the seller and the VMCC, this particular example was turned loose to the world sometime in 1950.

My first communication with noted motorcycle author and historian Ian Falloon was while investigating a purported “Marianna” racer for sale (Mr. Falloon confirmed it to be a replica). Who better to go to with such questions? His authentication reports are gold for collectors. I brought up my 60 and my thoughts regarding the story of the beginning of Ducati motorcycle manufacture. He was gracious enough to review my ramblings and confirm their accuracy. He also agrees that there seem to be two distinct series

of these Caproni-framed Ducatis and believes this to be a very early example. Further, he feels it was born in early 1950, and says the “ML” frame number prefix shows it to be a Caproni number.

Since arriving in my garage it's been treated to an oil change, new spark plug, new fuel line and a cleaning of the chain. It does run as I confirmed after putting some ethanol-free gas in the tank and kicking a few times. I also replaced the muffler that was on it with a correct appearing reproduction (I guess everyone swaps out the original exhaust on their bikes!). That muffler and a more correct headlight lens (along with some reproduction fork gaiters) were purchased for me at the Reggio Emilia swap meet by John Henry. He also sent me a copy of an original brochure-like document and copies of two original ads. It's hard to imagine being that willing to help someone he has never met — what a guy! I have since found an original warranty certificate and an owner's manual, along with a rare, original “Ducati Servizio” porcelain sign (with the “SSR” logo). Maybe I do have an eBay addiction ... My plans for the little 60 are to merely preserve it as the interesting and historical artifact it is, and maybe exercise it a little, here and there. *Thanks to Ian Falloon for his help with this story. MC*



The place of honor in the garage. Mounted above the 60 is a rare, period-correct “Ducati Service” sign.