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## **BIMOTA VDUE**

If it doesn't blow up it'll be a bloody miracle

# Over here and oh, Vdue

Crippled by appalling fuel injection, Bimota's two-stroke GP-replica 500-Vdue sank the firm in 1998. Now it's back, it's on carbs and you can buy one...

**A**s special motorcycles go, there aren't many more inspiring than this, a Bimota 500-Vdue Corsa. It's a 499cc liquid-cooled two-stroke V-twin knocking out 105bhp at nearly 10,000rpm. Weighing the same as a Aprilia RS250, but with twice the power, there's no denying this machine its place in the *Big Book Of Bastard Quick Bikes*.

The original Vdue was launched back in 1998 as Bimota's first ever own-engined motorcycle. For the troubled firm it represented a final gamble, a make or break business venture that tragically brought the company to its knees. With environmentalists lurking behind every rulebook, the Italian company's only hope for mass-producing such an obviously insane motorcycle was computer-controlled Direct Injection (DI – fuel injection for two-strokes). While the groundbreaking technology let the bike slip through the emissions net, DI meant the bike couldn't be ridden hard. "Opening the throttle on the original Vdue was like playing Russian Roulette with one empty chamber," says former *PB* editor Kev Raymond. "It was either all or nothing, and you had no control over it."

But despite the disappointing reality, there's no denying an all-Italian two-stroke superbike still holds one hell of an attraction. Which is why the new owner of this bike paid £11,000 to an Italian he'd never met, who didn't speak English, then got in a van and drove to Milan.

"I really, really, really wanted this bike," confesses enthusiast and successful

businessman Paul Bridgland. "That's the only way I can explain why I transferred 15,000 Euros to an Italian bank account on what in hindsight was blind faith. I'd been told he'd got 60 Vdues, factory-fresh and never run, I just had to have a punt at getting hold of one."

But how does one man get hold of 60 of the rarest superbikes in the world?

"This bloke is a real enthusiast," says Paul. "And he's bought everything and anything to do with the Vdue. If it says Vdue on it, and it was in the old bankrupt factory, he's now got it in his warehouse. He's even got a container of fresh bikes shipped back from Japan. He bought the rights to everything Vdue from Bimota's receivers. But he's not just got the dodo-style injection bikes, he's got the carb-fed machines that Bimota never had the chance to sell. And I just drove 1700 miles in 68 hours to get mine."

That word 'just' is quite significant too. Because right now we're sat in the paddock of Donington Park, Paul smiling nervously as his carbonfibre-clad Vdue is examined by a pair of gobsmacked officials. Only a few days after picking the bike up, he's handed it over to *Performance Bikes* for its inaugural thrash. And after being sat dormant and un-used for nearly five years, I've just donated 24 hours of my life to getting the bike ready.

Fresh from Paul's van and after years in a warehouse, dust had accumulated in the carbs, the tyres were rock solid, and everything to do with the petrol lines had perished. ➔

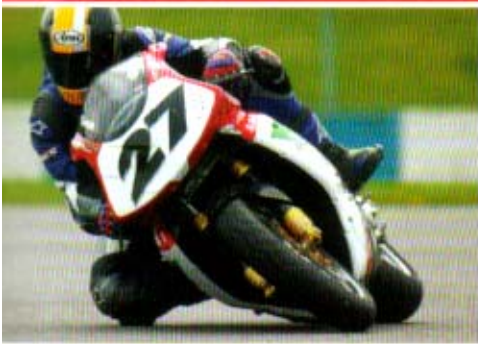
**"A 499cc liquid-cooled two-stroke V-twin knocking out 105bhp"**



■ The 500-Vdue brought beauty, and bankruptcy, in equal measures...

## A BLUFFERS' GUIDE TO VDUES

There are three models. The Strada is the lowliest of the bunch: they've got quiet pipes and are perfectly road-legal, but are fitted with DI and are completely unrideable. Stump up £6800 and you can get one tomorrow (see over page). Next in line is the Evoluzione. It's alleged when the DI bike flopped and Bimota ran out of Suzuki TL-powered SB8Rs to placate disgruntled customers, somebody important said "bugger it" and started putting carbs and race-pipes on the Stradas and asked customers to "promise" not to ride them on the road. These can now be had for around £9550. While this was going on, Bimota reckoned a one-make race-series would shift some units and they came up with the Corsa. Carb-fed, with a carbonfibre monocoque subframe/seat, digital clocks and a built-in quick-shifter. They have no lights and cost £11,000. And it's what we rode here. They're all supplied on '98 or '99 Italian number plates, so as long as you only travel through EC countries (not Switzerland) you won't have any VAT or paperwork problems.



Time: 10.17am May '03.  
Place: Melbourne Loop,  
Donington Park, UK.  
Event: A Bimota Vdue  
runs in flawless form - for  
a whole 15 seconds...



## SPECIFICATION

### ENGINE:

Bimota 499cc liquid-cooled two-stroke V-twin. Direct Injection removed, now runs two Dell'Orto 39mm CV carbs

### EXHAUSTS:

Handmade stainless steel Bimota Racing expansion chambers with carbon cans

### FRAME AND SWINGARM:

Aluminium oval-section twin-spar with handmade ally internally braced swingarm

### WHEELS, BRAKES AND TYRES

Antera alloy three spoke wheels, with Brembo Goldline 4-pot front calipers on 320mm floating discs, a single-pot rear on 230mm disc and stainless braided lines all round

### SUSPENSION:

Fully-adjustable 46mm r/w Paoli front forks, with horizontally mounted fully-adjustable Ohlins rear

### BODYWORK:

One-piece pre-preg carbonfibre tail and subframe, glass-fibre fairings

### TRICK BITS:

Built-in quickshifter, Pegase dash

## HOW DO I GET ONE?

Paul Bridgland, being a happily re-mortgaged business fellow, has taken the liberty of putting his name to 20 of these machines. "After I met the bloke, got my bike and came home, I thought: 'Shit, would anybody else have been so daft?' " Indeed Paul. "So I've told the Italian guy that I'll help other Brits buy and collect 20 of the remaining 65 examples. You need to put 2000 Euros down, then transfer the balance 14 days before you're due to pick up the bike. Serious people can phone me for more info (01483 599995) or contact me through my website, [www.rsvr.net](http://www.rsvr.net)."





▲ We had no idea whether the thing would run right, seize or maybe just explode.

Resident *PB* two-stroke racer Bruce Dunn stripped and cleaned the carbs in the time it took me to ask him the question. One grovelling phone call to Pirelli and a set of all-Italian, shit-to-blanket Diablo Corsas wing their way to our lock-up, while I scrounged tools, know-how and O-rings off a beleaguered Mark Brewin at BSD.

All of a sudden, Paul's logic-defying optimism and enthusiasm had infected me, and getting the Bimota ready for Donington Park became the only priority in my life. So imagine the tension in the air as we pull the choke out, re-connect the quick-release Acerbis fuel-tank and nervously hit the starter button for just the third time ever...

The instrument lights dim, and nothing else happens. After a panic-riddled second the penny drops. Battery.

Within moments there are three bystanders behind me ready to push. The enthusiasm bug is spreading as we freewheel past bemused trackday-types, all craning to see the Vdue badge on the tail. Everyone wants to see it run.

It only takes two attempts before the thing crackles into life in a cloud of blue smoke. The harsh sound obviously carries well this early in the morning. We're shoulder deep in a rapidly-forming crowd before the digital temperature gauge has climbed past 30°C. By 45°C I'm explaining what it is for the third-time (*"two-stroke 500, weighs nothing, no I can't wait to ride it"*).

As the LEDs climb past the 50°C operating temperature, the klaxon sounds for the first ever track session of this particular bike's life. Nice timing. I've been told the carbs work fine and it'll handle like a GP bike. Everyone's watching and to make matters worse I have to repeat the mantra *"one-up, five-down"* all along the pit-lane. That's right, it's an upside down gearbox – a first for me, in front of a 200-strong audience.

The scream of a 500cc two-stroke in the pit-lane hasn't been heard for at least a year. There's no power below 4000rpm, and there doesn't seem to be much above it either.

One lap in and my nerves are still ragged, nothing's making sense. Even worse, nobody's overtaking me. They're hanging back like vultures, waiting to see the journalist chase the two-stroke dream around the Donington GP circuit. But this journo is nervous...

Three laps in, the Pirellis have warmed nicely and the suspension feels good. The quick-shifter won't turn off though, and an ignition-cut time of 1.5 seconds is hardly quick. It's on factory default, and I have no idea how to change it. I pull in, smiling insanely to myself as I detach every plug I can find leading to the quick shifter.

Second session is better. I discover the powerband is vicious (7500rpm to 9500rpm), braking points are nearly as late as a racing 125 and the cornering limit is the ill-designed fairing. That said, I can lean the Vdue over further than any other bike I've ridden. The quick-shifter's still fooked on the third session, every wrong-way-round gearshift is zero-throttle, clutch in. Get it wrong mid-corner and you're sailing grasswards on a sea of silence. Plus it's got fasteners made of cheese, does just 12mpg plus two-stroke oil, and is likely to be as reliable as a paper-yacht in a monsoon. But the drug-like buzz from keeping the beast in its R6-beating powerband throughout a lap is easily enough to make up for it. I learn more about cornering in three Vdue-mounted sessions than I've learnt in my life.

There are 20 more to be bought and collected from Milan, and if you're rich and mad (isn't that eccentric?) I heartily recommend you do so. ★ Now, if not yesterday.

**"It only takes two attempts before the thing crackles into life"**



■ No clutch cover on this factory racer



■ No ordinary swingarm - it's a piece of history



■ Acres of ally, carbon and a quality spring



■ Skeggy seafront by night; 50p = 2 PLAYS



■ Brembo Goldline 4-pot calipers grace 320mm discs



■ Obviously they didn't anticipate the Lomas arse...