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ICON BIKE BIMOTA 500 VDUE



Carbon-fibre end cans (bottom left) and detailed engineering (left) show that this is no mass-produced nail



BIMOTA VDUE

This bike: 1997
Price new: £14,500
Top speed: 155mph
Power: 110bhp



BIMOTA 500 VDUE

The flawed genius that should have been the ultimate race replica but instead brought Bimota to its knees

WORDS STUART BARKER PHOTOS OLI TENNENT

BIMOTA'S FAILED GRAND Prix replica Vdue may seem an odd choice to feature as an icon bike. But TWO salutes the innovative thinking and bravery displayed by the now defunct Italian company for trying to make the closest thing ever to a road-going Grand Prix motorcycle.

The Vdue may have been beset by fuel injection problems to the point where it was

withdrawn from sale, but it was a courageous effort and there was still much to celebrate about the 500cc two-stroke V-twin. Things such as a dry racing clutch, a six-speed, side-loading cassette gearbox, a carbon-fibre rear seat unit and carbon end cans, alloy wheels, an Öhlins shock and fully adjustable Paioli forks. The list goes on but you should already be getting the impression that this was no ordinary mass-produced motorcycle.

Bimota's roots were in racing but in 1977 Massimo Tamburini produced his first complete road bike utilising the engine from Suzuki's GS750. He called it the Bimota SB2. Incidentally, the name Bimota came from combining Tamburini's surname with those of his two partners, Bianchi and Morri.

Bimota's speciality over the next three decades was in marrying Italian chassis and suspension expertise with the proven reliability and power of Japanese engines. The result was hand-built exotica that handled beautifully and offered serious exclusivity. But the Vdue proved to be a step too far.

Launched in 1997, the bike had been in development for six years because Bimota's R&D department consisted of fewer than 10 members. The original idea was to build a 500cc V-twin engine for use in Grands Prix since there was much talk in the early 90s of the favoured V-four configuration being outlawed. When this came to nothing, Bimota decided to use its new-found two-stroke engine knowledge on a road bike and built the Vdue.

Emissions laws had previously hampered any firm's plans to release a 500cc two-stroke and a fuel injected two-stroke is tricky because fuel needs to be injected directly into

Right: highly specced Vdue includes alloy wheels and fully adjustable Paioli forks



"DESPITE FLAWED FUEL INJECTION, THERE WAS STILL MUCH TO CELEBRATE IN THE VDUE"

Left: who else would produce a fuel tank of such beauty? Italians do it better, obviously...



ICON BIKE BIMOTA 500 VDUE

"THE VDUE'S POWER WAS COMPROMISED BY THE FLAWED FUEL INJECTION SYSTEM"

OWNING A VDUE

BIMOTA VDUE OWNER Paul Bridgland has a very simple explanation when asked why he loves his bike: "Because it's a 500cc, two-stroke V-Twin. Enough said."

The Vdue does indeed mark the end of an era with the demise of the 500cc GP class so they're always going to be considered special. "A lot of people buy them just to put on show or to keep as collectables and it's easy to understand why. They're certainly not for riding to work on, but I love two-strokes because you have to work at riding them. Imagine riding a bike with twice the power of an Aprilia RS250 and you'll get some idea of what the Vdue is like. My Vdue runs on carbs but owners of the fuel injected version have altered the position of the ports in the cylinders and it runs better.

"The position of the ports is critical on a two-stroke and because Bimota had its barrels machined out of house, they were slightly off – enough to throw the whole bike out. But a Vdue finished second in this year's Italian Open championship against Suzuki GSX-R1000s and tuned R1s, which proves what they can do when they're sorted."

500CC TWO-STROKE VDUE: WANT ONE?

THEN CHOOSE BETWEEN three different versions as Bimota is selling them off.

The original injected bike costs just £6500 but that's really only aimed at collectors or those with enough technical know-how to get the thing running.

A carburetted model – dubbed the Evoluzione Strada – costs £10,500 but is the best option if you actually want to ride a Vdue on the road.

And if you want to relive the glory days of 500cc GP two-stroke racing there is a Corsa track model which retails at £11,000. As you'd expect from a track-only bike, the road tackle has been ditched and the engine's been tweaked to produce a little more bhp. The Corsa also features neat underseat exhausts and a quick-shifter system.

The choice is yours. Contact Paul Bridgland, www.rsvr.net, (01306) 628030.



Above: perforated fairing and (right) Öhlins shock add to Vdue's racing pedigree and exotic appeal

the combustion chamber, leaving little time for the fuel to atomise properly. Even the mighty Honda had binned the idea of a fuel-injected stroker, but Bimota went ahead to create the direct fuel injection Vdue – and it was serious fuel injection problems that hampered the Vdue and led to it being withdrawn from sale just one year after its release.

The Vdue's liquid-cooled, 499cc, two-stroke, V-twin engine may have made 110bhp at 9000rpm but unfortunately riders couldn't use that power because of the flawed injection system. TWO's own Chris Moss – who was the only journalist to test a revamped version of the Vdue on behalf of Bimota – calls it "the worst bike I've ever ridden. It had a powerband of just 1500 revs and on part throttle it would just hunt and misfire. The thing was totally unrideable; if you wanted to get rid of it £14,500 you could either chuck it down a drain or buy a Vdue."

The black art of direct injection that eluded both Honda and Bimota has only recently been mastered by Aprilia. One problem with the Bimota seemed to be the injectors not being placed deep enough into the cylinders. When they were repositioned in 1998 the bike worked better, but by then the Vdue's reputation had suffered to the extent that most potential owners were looking to spend their



cash elsewhere. Bimota's original plan was to build 500 Vdue's which, given that the firm only made 1500 bikes per year, represented a huge investment. However, the bikes were recalled before the first production run was completed and customers were offered the choice of having their Vdue's injection system tweaked or swapping the bike for an SB&R.

Despite offering a carburetted version and trying to start a one-make race series for Vdues, Bimota had thrown too much money at the project and was declared bankrupt in 2001. It has now been bought over and will unveil its new 1000cc, DB4-based naked Draco later this year. But you can still buy a Vdue as Bimota has bikes left over and enough spares and facilities to build a further 80 models [see panel].

