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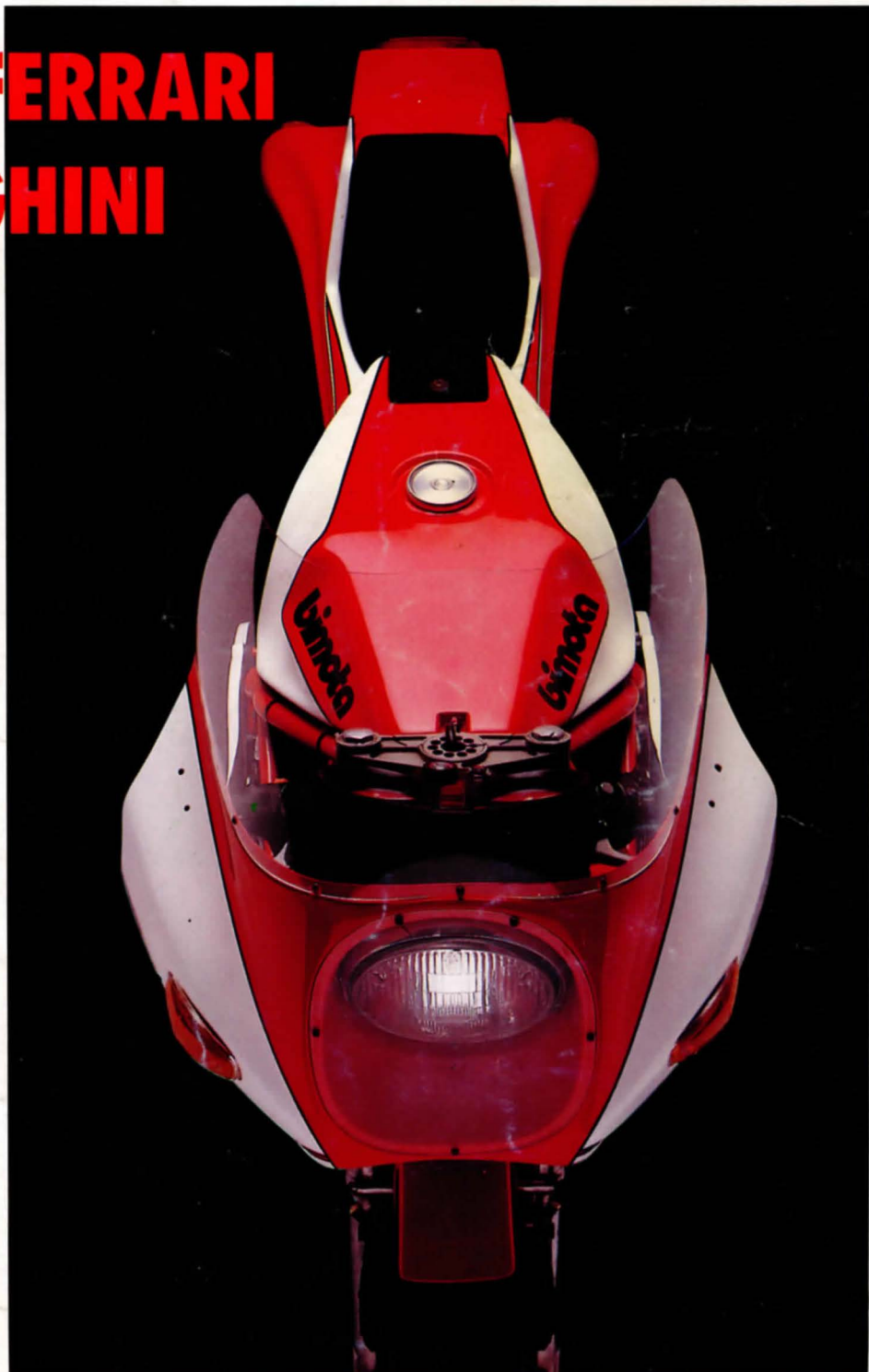
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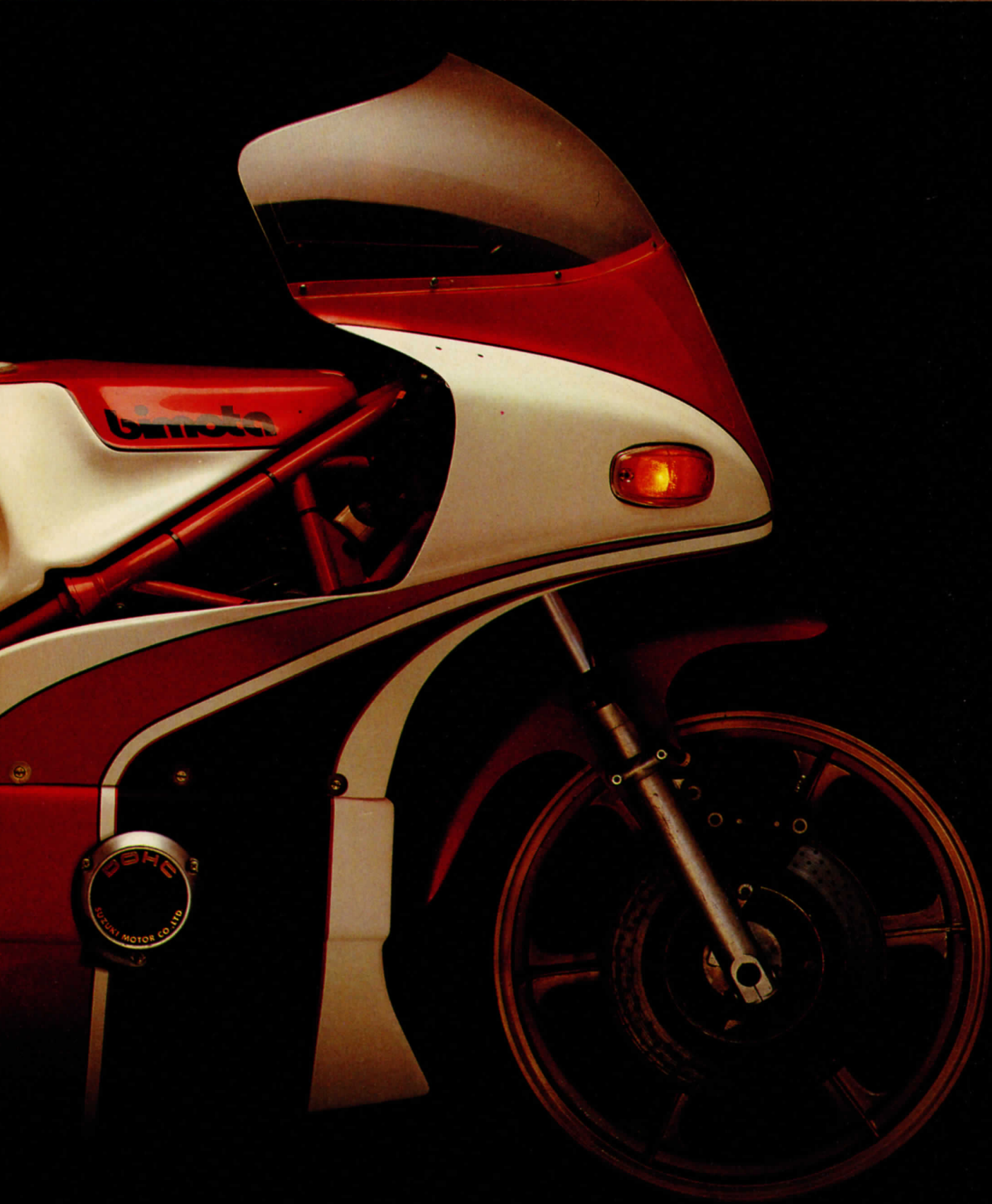
If one Bimota is heaven, what does that make two? Hell — if you have to give them back . . .

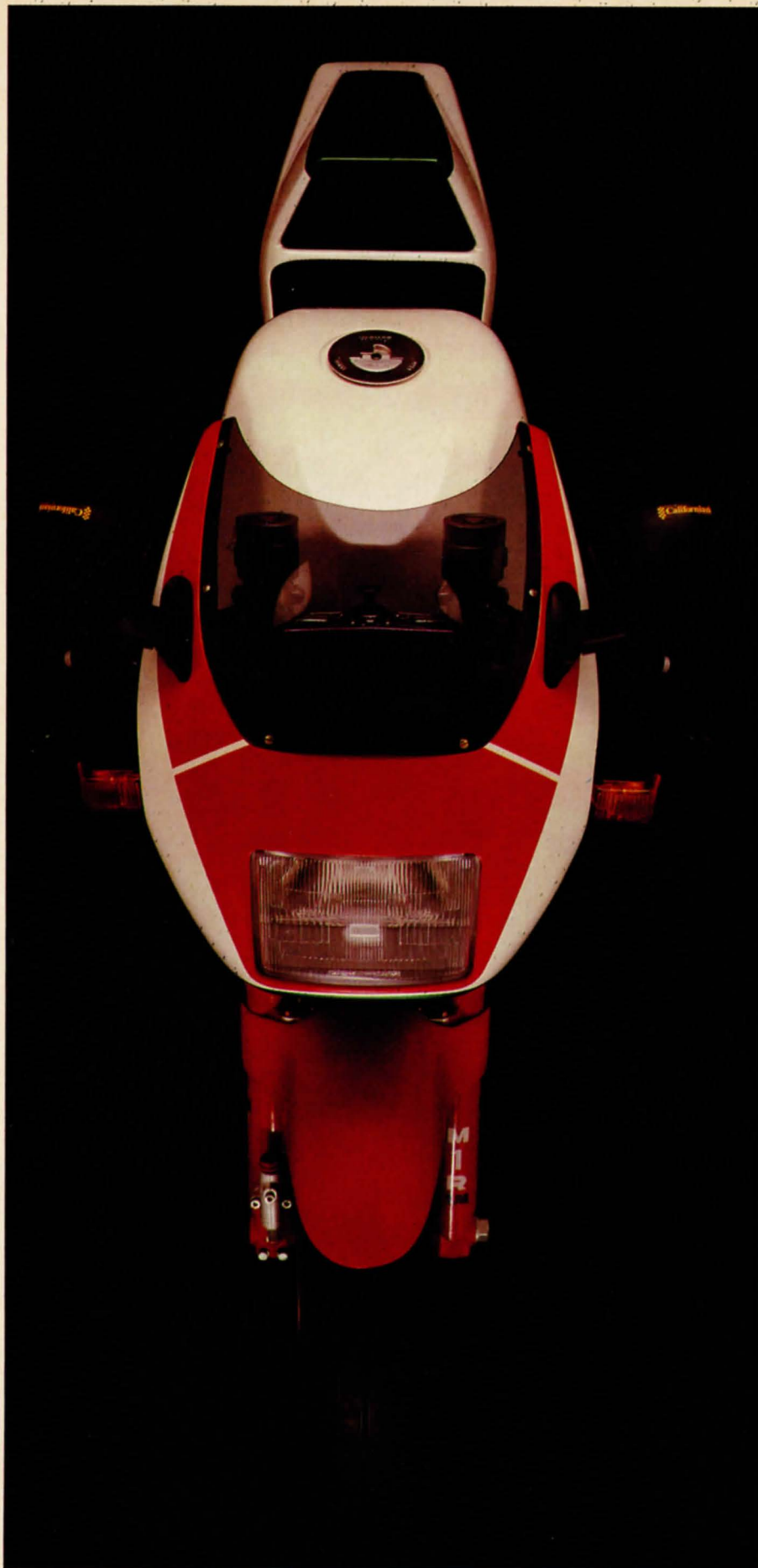
DAMIEN KINGSBURY



► GOING BI







If motorcycling is first and foremost about having fun, a Bimota is the most utterly entertaining machine. There may be a small handful of machines which can keep a Bimota company in the amusement stakes, but most would be other Bimotas.

It has been so since the company put its first street legal machine, the SB2, on the road and remains so ten years after with its most popular model, the DB1.

It was therefore the greatest of good fortune that an example of each model was made available for a roort around Melbourne's nearby hills.

True to typical Bimota form, both of the machines were modified from standard. If a Bimota chassis is arguably the finest of its type then the engine must at least give a semblance of not being totally overshadowed.

With the SB2, not only was the chassis the finest of its day, it was and possibly still is the most outrageous looking motorcycle ever to roll out of a factory gate. At a time when bikini fairings were the hot item, the SB2's fibreglass challenged the onlooker to define taste. The SB2 runs up to the edge of being totally over the top, but poises there with its flowing lines caught in suspended animation.

The DB1, by comparison, is diminutive and expresses the bare aesthetic minimum. Both, however, are sublime examples of the concept of form following function. Clip-on handlebars, single seats and full bodywork are integrated in each case with frame technology more commonly associated with Formula One vehicles or aircraft.

The SB2 had the frame which redefined what frame technology was all about on a large modern motorcycle and could still today, ten years later, be used as a benchmark to measure other manufacturers' achievements. Where else do you find three-point joins or a swing-arm pivoting adjacent to the front sprocket?

The SB2, one of only two in Victoria, began life in the late 1970s as a rich person's plaything and while not abused as such it was not looked after in the manner to which such bikes are usually accustomed. Its last owner looked after it much better, but between working in a sweat shop and entirely rebuilding a 900SS Ducati, it still tended to languish.

Last October's stock market crash saw this owner somewhat bereft of funds so the Ducati went on the market, soon to be followed by the SB2. As a present to its next owner, the SB2 received a general tidy up

Bimotas may change, but they're always at the forefront of design.

by Victorian Bimota dealer and Italian bike specialist Barry Jones of Italcycles.

A part of that tidy up included a paint job, taking the eye-catching machine from its earlier maroon — not a Bimota's best color — back to original. The quality of the art work, for that is what it is, is superb. But then it ought to be with the painter, "Gaz", spending a daunting 110 hours from beginning to end. It was clearly a labor of love.

Along came Allen Mawhinney who spotted the machine at Italcycles and promptly laid out the cash. He took it home and lavished affection, rewiring it with braided lines, rebuilding the Marzocchi forks and fitting a new pair of Brembo discs to its Campagnolo magnesium wheels. The wheels were designed for the race track only, but for some people the race track is in the mind.

The engine of the SB2 originally belonged to a Suzuki GS750. The GS was not at all a bad bike in its day, having a fair turn of speed, handling respectably and braking reasonably, especially if the optional second front disc was fitted. There is, of course, no comparison with that engine fitted into a Bimota chassis.

So as not to be entirely overshadowed, the engine received some attention. It breathes in through a bank of four 32mm smooth bore Mikuni carburetors, has its breath squashed by a set of high compression 980cm³ MTC pistons and exhales through a throaty four-into one exhaust.

Japanese engines generally tend not to be satisfied sitting on a constant speed and those that have been breathed on are less so. The warmish GS engine will hold a constant engine speed but doesn't much like doing it and certainly not at low revs.

Rather, it tends to surge slightly and responds quickly to any throttle input. This encourages an on-off approach to riding, which is fine on winding roads but not marvellous on a longer straight trip or commuting. But then the SB2 was never meant to be a tourer or commuter.

The DB1 on the other hand features as standard such tasty little goodies as Brembo Gold Line calipers and MIR forks as well as a frame which redefines the meaning of triangulation.

Owner Dale Cullen wanted something a little different for his DB1, fearing I suppose that he might somehow blend in with the crowd at the stop lights. Braided steel lines pass the Dot 5 to the Gold Lines while the air box has been junked in favor of freer-breathing aftermarket filters.

For most motorcycle enthusiasts, the F1 Ducati is a very desirable motorcycle, not least because of its engine. The 90 degree V-twin began life as a 500, became a 600, grew to a 650 and then a 750, with attendant changes to crankcases and so on.

While not a radically powerful engine by today's 100 plus PS standards, the F1



engine is no slouch and offers not just reasonable power and good, useful torque but a great deal of presence. But Dale wanted more (as you might expect of someone who would not settle for just an "ordinary" F1 Ducati).

After leaving the Ducati factory, Bimota replaces the clutch and gearbox, conrods and cams, and fits higher compression pistons. Barry Jones constructed a two-into-one exhaust header system to allow the engine to breathe a little freer. This is topped off by a Supertrap muffler. The Supertrap is not loud by some standards, emitting a staccato bark at or just above idle, but it does fairly howl when twisting the tail. The belly pan of the DB1 is currently undergoing surgery to allow for the 2-into-1.

A part of the pronounced bark and definitely a lot of the howl of the DB1 can be attributed to what Mr Jones grinningly refers to as a pair of "silly" cam shafts. What is silly, you may enquire? How about a stated 375 degrees duration on the inlet and 370 on the outlet, with a lift of 12.4 and 10.9 mm respectively? They do add to the character of the machine.

The machine will idle with such cams, a shade high for a V-twin perhaps, but as with the SB2, what it's all about is, how it performs on the road.

The DB1 won't even hold a set engine speed below 6500 rpm, tending to stutter on a constant throttle setting. A quick twist of the throttle puts it straight back into its element. Like the SB2, it is happiest either full on or full off and preferably going into or coming out of bends at the same time.

Both machines are small and light by all standards, having about the same seat height which leaves the legs bent at a standstill, never mind riding. They are both equipped with finely crafted aluminium

It's an interesting comparison in many ways — Japanese engine versus Italian, in-line four versus vee twin, old versus new — but all brilliant.

rearset foot controls, clip-on handlebars and seats with virtually no padding. The SB2 looks the more indulgent of the two, being upholstered in a rich suede but the reality is that neither are what you might call "comfy".

Needless to say, passengers do not come into the equation in any way, shape or form, with even the most appealing of bums on a hypothetical back seat representing nothing more than dead weight.

The tendency is not to notice the comfort or otherwise of either machine, at least not in the short term, with the primary distraction simply being the machine itself. If one was allowed to be familiar with riding either machine it is possible that the question of longer term comfort might come into play.

On the road, the rear suspension of the SB2 feels as though the springing was designed for a masochist. It is harsh and is soon to be softened slightly.

But this does not seem to affect the bike's handling. It punts around tight corners as if on rails, squats under acceleration and simply goes much harder through a given bend than you have ever been before. That is, until you go through on the DB1.

Both are superb, rock steady high speed handlers, holding a line as though they were on rails. Both are eminently flickable too, although the DB1 being slightly lighter and narrower is a shade easier. Both are dead neutral until taken to a far point at which they exhibit a slight tendency to power steer. Utterly controllably, of course.

► GOING BI

With its high compression pistons and hollow carbs, the SB2 howls in a traditional multi manner. It will motor along at lower revs, thanks to its displacement, but above 5000rpm she really picks up her skirts and flies to somewhere above 9000rpm. Riding within the power band, using the strong brakes and taut handling allows very fast point to point riding.

The DB1 on the other hand has a very lumpy V twin feel to it between about 3500 and 5500. It is a primary vibration feeling that is not at all unpleasant and which I particularly like. From there on the cams come in and it moves very smartly, launching out of corners and streaking up

straights, happily running to redline at 9000rpm where out of respect for the owner I kept it rather than allowing it to go beyond where it wanted to be.

At 9000rpm in top gear, the DB1 pulled 210km/h and felt very happy doing it. Too happy, in fact, and I was under no illusion that too long in the saddle of the DB1, or the SB2, would leave me bereft of a licence in short order. For greater top speed on the DB1 to take advantage of the engine modifications the gearing would need to be raised.

In terms of top end riding, the biggest difference between the machines is the apparent width. The DB1 feels small, although actually it is not much smaller than the SB2. Its fairing offers reasonable protection at speed, although I am left feeling that riders are rarely taken into account in wind tunnel testing. At 200 plus km/h the DB1 really could do with a fuller screen.

The SB2 has such a screen and offers great protection at high speed. In some respects this is not that important, as the average amount of time spent above the old "ton" is really negligible no matter what sort of fibber you may be. But for bikes with high speed work as a priority, I would have expected more from the DB1.

The DB1 may be a case of Italian flair for style dominating its more practical applications. Or maybe, not unrealistically, the designers expect the rider to be permanently glued flat on the tank, where wind protection is better.

If both machines have an outstanding characteristic in common, it is that the harder they are ridden the more they feel to be in their designed element. To say

they inspire confidence is an understatement.

For example, if you go through any given corner at say double the posted advisory limit, both Bimotas will go through the same bend at three times that limit. And the remarkable thing is they don't feel at all fussed in doing so. The margin usually in reserve is far more than the great majority of riders would ever tap.

Braking matches all other aspects of the bikes' performance, although the SB2, being older and slightly heavier, is not quite as sudden in slowing down as the DB1. Both bikes' sets of Brembos exhibit heaps of feel and progression, as one would expect.

The other thing about these bikes is they attract an inordinate amount of attention.

Riding one of these things and hoping not to be stared at is an impossible dream. Being shy is to die on a Bimota. But some motorcyclists like being stared at, having their ego stroked by curious, admiring and impressed stares.

Of the two, the SB2 probably attracts the most attention. It is pretty eye-catching and does demand it. The DB1 by comparison still pulls the crowds, but only after the SB2 has been thoroughly ogled. The DB1 is subtle standing side by side the SB2, but it is not at all subtle standing by itself. It is just that the SB2 is such an attention grabber.

Complete strangers wave, motorists toot their horns and children press their faces against windows as the bikes go by. One almost feels obliged to perform a stunt or two to get the most out of the road going audience.

The biggest problem with the amount of attention they attract is an owner would be in danger of constantly needing to shop around motorcycle accessory places and forever laying out the hard earned bucks for increasingly larger helmets to fit the ever swelling head. Fortunately the owners of these two machines are in other respects somewhat modest people, so this has not yet presented a problem.

Riding a Bimota is a rare and privileged experience, a taste of which lingers as a particularly fond and cherished memory.

Like the greatest of experiences, thundering through a series of mountain bends on either of these machines leaves one in a state of awe and exhilaration. And a feeling of undeniable, unadulterated pleasure.

For those who are interested in such hedonism, the DB1 is for sale. Enquiries can be directed to Barry Jones of Italcycles at 5/6 Davis Street, Ferntree Gully, Victoria, who also graciously fettled and arranged the loan of the bikes. ●

LEFT: Braking technology has changed considerably over the time represented by these bikes . . . BELOW: . . . as have frames.



**Photography by Sholtz,
motorcycle photography specialists of
Rear, 1 Newry Street, Fitzroy, Victoria.**