

# DUCATI

# MONSTER 796 & 696

By Ken "Hawkeye" Glassman



I missed the chance to ride the new Monster 696 last year when it came out, and I've been wanting to get on one ever since. I was not a fan of the previous 695, mostly because I felt it was geared too high. When riding around town and making turns in the 30 mph range, second gear was so sluggish that you could be passed by bicyclists coming out of a turn. Or, you'd have to be in 1st gear to be in the power band, which made for some tricky throttle control, especially for newbie riders for whom the bike was designed. So I wanted to see if the 696 was any improvement.

When I called Geoff Melenger, of MCC Cycles in Villa Park to ask if he had a 696 for me to ride, he told me that not only could I ride the 696, but that he had the new 796 to ride as well. How can you pass up a "two-fer" like that?

When I arrived at the dealership the 796 was the first bike they had ready

for me. It's a good looking ride with its single sided swingarm showing off a Y-shaped 5-spoke, 5.5" – 17" light alloy wheel. There's a 4.7" wheel up front. The 796 uses the same trellis frame as the 696, and except for the swingarm, it's pretty much the same set up as the baby Monster.

The seat height is an inch taller, but it was OK for my stubby legs, and with a dry weight of 369 lbs ( 34 more pounds than the 696) it was an easy bike to hold up. There are ABS versions of both bikes and that adds only 4 pounds to the weight of each.

The powerplant of the 796 is 803cc L-Twin, 2 valve per cylinder air-cooled Desmodromic motor. The extra displacement is due to a longer stroke than the 696 and the middle size Monster gets an oil cooler as well. The engine puts out 87hp@8250 RPM, and 58 lb. ft. of torque @ 6250 rpm. The

red line is 12,000 rpm. By contrast, the 696 puts out 80hp@9,000 rpm and 50 lb-ft. of torque @7,750 rpm.

So the 796 has good power, and enough to get the front wheel pointing skyward on a quick launch, but it's a bit tricky to launch the bike smoothly when riding normally. You need to spool up the revs to about 3,000 rpm before letting out the clutch slowly for a clean getaway from a stoplight. So while this bike may be a fun track day tool, its mission will still be to spend most of its time in traffic duty and with a rider who probably looking for ease of use. You really need to keep the revs up with this motor, which like the old 695, means a lot of low speed turns will require the rider to be in first gear, where a steady throttle hand will be required to ride smoothly. And the folks at MCC had already exchanged the 15 tooth front sprocket for a 14 tooth one, to aid in the low end tractability.

The 696, on the other hand, seemed to be an improvement over the 695 in the gearing department. Stop light launches were easy to pull off, and at a lower rpm, which will make this model easier for newbies to ride smoothly. Also, slower turns can be done in second gear. While there will be some power lag coming out of a slow 2nd gear turn until the rpm's spool up, I'm sure most riders will appreciate the lack of twitchiness that the same turn in first gear would produce. With either bike, I'd make sure you shop at a dealership that you can work with to get you the proper gearing for your own personal riding style and requirements.

The 796 has a new, lighter 2-1-2 exhaust system that not only is emission friendly and helps to boost the horsepower, but it also puts out a nice low growl at idle and

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when accelerating through the gearbox.

Both models possess the famous Ducati handling characteristics. Both have a 24-degree rake, which means light, quick, effortless steering inputs. Both bikes are well balanced, and ride on the same 57.1" wheelbase. Non-adjustable Showa 43mm inverted forks up front and a Sachs monoshock, adjustable for preload and rebound out back are also the same on both bikes. For some reason, however, the 796 felt a bit more harsh over the bumps and sent more shivers up my spine on square edged road irregularities.

Lean angles on both bikes are generous, and it will be hard for most riders to even take advantage of all there is to offer. Grip on the 796 comes in the form of a 120/70 ZR17 Pirelli Diablo Rosso in front, and a 180/55 ZR17 on the back. On the smaller 696 you get a Pirelli Angel ST 120/60 on a 17" wheel in front and a trimmer 160/60-17" tire in back. Both sets of rubber

do their job nicely on each of the bikes.

The brakes on each bike are also identical with dual 320mm discs, and 4-piston radial calipers in front and a single 245mm disc with 2-piston calipers in back. Both are capable of producing stoppies (in non ABS form) if desired, and both offer the rider excellent bite and feedback. The brake lever on the 796 is adjustable for reach, as is the clutch lever, but not on the 696.

The 6-speed gearboxes on both of these Ducati's are the same, as are the gear ratios. An APTC wet clutch gives a 'slipper-type' action, while not actually being a full back-torque-limiting unit. It also quiets the overall engine noise and provides a lighter clutch lever pull. They both shift smoothly.

Surprisingly, the mirrors on both bikes are rider friendly, and set on stalks long enough to allow the rider to see a lot more than his own shoulders, and for the most part are steady at speed.

Riding position on both bikes are on the aggressive side of standard. The pegs are set a bit high, and the handlebars are positioned so that the rider is always in a forward lean position – certainly not as radical as clip-ons would require, but you still have a lot of weight resting on your wrists. The gas tanks, however, are so nicely sculpted that the rider's thighs can grip them so as to take some of the pressure away from the arms and shoulders. The 796 feels a bit roomier due to the higher seat height and handlebars.

Both bikes offer the rider plenty of information from the digital gauge package behind the mini bikini fairing, although I prefer round dials for the tach and speedometer to the digital graph for the tach and digital speedo readouts. But you can toggle through dual tripmeters, lap timer (with memory), clock, and easily see the array of warning lights.

The Monster 696 lists for \$8,995 while the Monster 796 lists for \$9,995. Add \$1,000 for the ABS models. Both models will give you that famous Ducati heritage with crisp handling and Italian flair. But both bikes like to be kept in the upper ends of the rev range, which often makes them more difficult to ride every day. When I brought the bikes back to the MCC showroom, it was hard not to look over at the Triumph Street Triple sitting on the floor, which puts out about 20 more horsepower than the 796, and sells for a grand less, and wonder if perhaps going British might be a better choice than Italian.



## Note to our Readers:

Ken "Hawkeye" Glassman can be reached at [KGcyclefocus@aol.com](mailto:KGcyclefocus@aol.com). Send him your thoughts, comments, critiques, and suggestions for what you'd like to see in the magazine. We want to make Cyclefocus YOUR magazine, so your comments will help us shape the future issues.