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Fire It Up makes Ducati an entirely different beast

ECU Flashing and re-mapping is definitely the latest craze when looking at ultimate bike performance and trying to get the most out of your pride and joy; so much so, that our in-house journalist, Dave Cilliers, has tested and reported on the process on more than one occasion.

By Clifford Ogle 11 Apr 2017

The first time was on his very own Super Ténéré, and more recently on a Triumph Thruxton which was tune by Craig Langton at Fire It Up. The feedback in both articles was interesting and to be honest with you, neither of those motorcycles in his article are motorcycles that I would ever consider tuning to improve the performance – but Dave's report was positive, and it really got my cogs turning.

Being part of the local racing fraternity, I am always looking for any aid or performance part to try and shave off a few tenths and move my way up the grid in the Bridgestone Thunderbike racing series (any mediocre racer can testify to the "throwing money to go a little faster" technique). So, it really wasn't long until my Ducati was loaded onto the trailer and on her way to meet Craig Langton at Fire It Up in Fourways.

"Pay-as-I-go" racing approach

Now, when it comes to race bikes, my Panigale doesn't have a very long grocery list of go-faster parts, mostly due to my "pay-as-I-go" racing approach. In my first season with the bike we only changed the air filter for better breathing and fitted a Termignoni slip-on – I don't think it really makes much more power, bu cosmetically it does the job and hopefully shaves a few kilogrammes off the standard system.

On arrival at the Fire It Up showroom, I chatted to Langton, who would be the man involved in getting the best out of my Ducati. He likes to understand where you would like the bike improved so that the bike's file can be built accordingly.

From pride and joy to predator

The man is not only knowledgeable about tuning motorcycles but also very passionate in turning your two-wheeled pride and joy into a predator. I found it very interesting how heavily restricted European bikes are

out of the factory because of their Euro 4 emission laws. They seem to be most restricted in the first three gears (right in the meat of the mid-range) which is what makes a Ducati a *Ducati*. This is possibly done to keep less experienced riders safer as the mid-range is where they probably spend most of their time on th road.

On a race bike that is designed for performance, it seems criminal. I also found out that my bike development strategies on my previous race bikes might have done more harm than good, because more power, heat, and airflow can actually confuse the lambda sensors and create a snowball effect, resulting in more restriction and making the bike's performance "snatchy".

Throttle and timing maps

So the game plan was to derestrict power in the midrange, it is crucial to get the throttle and timing maps spot on to unleash the Ducati's torque throughout the rev range. Getting the fuelling right at altitude was als something that needed to be sorted, as my bike was running 5% too lean, and racing in the Northern Serie you would want your pride and joy running optimally at altitude.

Collection day finally arrived and it was time to see if having the ECU flashed would live up to the hype. Wi the race weekend fast approaching, my first time out on the bike would only be on Monday's free practice session before Race day on Tuesday.

I was advised by Langton to take it easy, almost as if I was running a new bike. He also advised that I run a few different gear variations around the circuit allowing the Lambda sensors to build up some valuable dat The Lambda sensors are always gathering new or additional information, which updates the ECU, making the bike stronger without any threat to its reliability. This means that every time the ignition is switched on a off the bike's ECU is updated with new information to ensure that it runs optimally

Rapid, but smooth

After I put in a few sessions during the Monday practice, the bike really started coming into its own – the Ducati was a entirely different beast. The power was instant from the smallest twist of the wrist at roll-on, a the throttle lag was gone as I twisted towards the throttle stops. The most noticeable thing was how rapid, but smooth, the power was through the first four gears around the tight part of the Zwartkops Circuit. That horrible "Panigale flat spot" at 6,000rpm was gone, making the bike much more stable with no front-end di

when accelerating out of the corners.

The bike is silky smooth throughout the rev range and, in my opinion, smoother is always faster. Because the tight nature of Zwartkops Raceway, I can't say I got close enough to top speed to notice a difference (would take a really brave man to try and find out), but I would imagine the top end to be the same, although you get there quicker. However, we will find out when we go to longer circuits like Phakisa and Kyalami.

Top end wasn't my main area of focus but If that is something you would be looking to improve in your bike am sure it can be set up to suit you.

In conclusion, I am really looking forward to getting more seat time – the smoother, sweeter Ducati drone like the purr of a contented cat and the power is much more usable throughout the mid-range and right up the limiter. I have been converted into a flasher for life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The "racing bug bit" Clifford Ogle when he rode an old Russian bike on the back roads many years ago. Dues paid, he now takes on the Sub 10 and Thunderbike field on his sleek Ducati Panigale with the number 95 emblazoned on the front, in the tank and tattooed proudly on his arm. To quote the great Ricky Bobby, "I wanna go fast". Looking to go fast on whatever comes his way whether on a pit-bike or Big horse powered Superbike it's all fair game! Lights on..... Lights off.....join him and the racing fraternity on their exciting adrenaline rush season.