

# Ducati Panigale V2 S

Less power, less weight, variable-valved engine, more comfy. The new Panigale is one for the people... right?

'It's just not wowing me,' sulks a clearly disappointed Carl Stevens – on a busman's holiday from his deputy editor duties on MCN – of the V2 S. Only an hour ago he was bouncing about like a child high on sugar at the prospect of trying out this new toy. 'I expected it to excite me, engage me, make me feel special. But so far it's missed the mark.'

Witnessing Carl deflated by a new sportsbike is unexpected, so his words cut deep. Maybe it's the 'Panigale' badge causing his confusion. This isn't the fierce, track-focused weapon its moniker suggests. Although considerably lighter than its opposition (176kg wet, minus fuel, compared to 195kg wet for the R9) and bedecked with tech wizardry in S spec, its all-new 890cc V-twin is 35bhp down on the old 955cc Superquadro. 'It feels more SS than Panigale,' continues a disgruntled Carl.

Perhaps young Stevens is the one who's missed the mark. Barely out of adolescence, he's not this machine's target buyer. That'll be someone who's greying around the edges, creaking in all the wrong places. Someone like 916-owning Jon Urry.

'I like the Ducati,' he says, right on cue. 'Fitting the bars above the yokes is a stroke of genius. This bike is aimed at middle-aged riders who still want the sportsbike experience, just without the discomfort, so in that respect it's right on target. The only thing causing me pain is the price.'

At just over £17,000, the V2 S is spicily priced. Yamaha's equally fresh R9 is £4917 cheaper, and Honda's CBR600RR a whopping £6172 easier on the wallet. You could save two grand by kissing goodbye to the S's Öhlins suspension, launch control system and pit lane limiter, opting instead for the slightly less flash V2 model, but you'd still be several thousand quid in the hole compared to its Japanese rivals.

But on paper it's right where it needs to be, pumping out a claimed 120bhp and just shy of 70lb.ft – bob-on for the new-look Supersport class. It's rapid too, able to keep the R9 in check and thumping out of turns on midrange grunt that'll make CBR owners wither with envy.

Most importantly, however, it's easy to ride briskly. Accessible power lurks everywhere from 5000-10,000rpm and the motor's all-new Intake Variable Timing system, which alters intake valve timing over a 52° range, gives the 890cc lump predictable, linear torque – so usable drive is never in question.

But despite its lack of mass (the engine is 9kg lighter than the previous Superquadro unit) and trick tech the motor lacks the drama and character synonymous with Bologna twins. That's Carl's point. Ducati have engineered the personality out of this engine. And that's a shame.

So too are the bike's odd behaviours. Having experienced it cut out unexpectedly under hard deceleration (several times),



Above: It looks the Doocardy part, no question. But £17,171? Gulp



Left: Where most of extra £2k goes compared to base V2



Below: Predictable, usable, but misses that desmo character

## 'Aimed at middle-aged riders who still want the sportsbike experience'

watched its TFT dash randomly throw up more flashing red lights than an M25 tailback, then try to spit me off while pulling away from a stop – the rear wheel locked solid without warning – I can only hope these issues are confined to our test bike. Other riders had it die on them (perhaps the result of ultra-lean fuelling to meet Euro5+ targets?), so there's clearly an issue. That alone would put me off taking it on track; cutting out into a hairpin or tight turn? No thanks...

That's a tragedy because the chassis rocks. Light, precise, and able to slice up any back road with ease; it's deserving of the Panigale name. But for all its handling prowess, ease of use, thoroughbred styling, fancy suspension and inbuilt practicality (servicing is every 9000 miles and valve clearances don't need checking until 18,000), every conversation about

the Ducati quickly returns to the same thing: price.

'Why am I having to pay extra for cruise control, heated grips, turn-by-turn navigation and Ducati's DMS infotainment system on a £17k bike?' moans Carl. 'They should be standard on the S.'

Even Jon, who's made no secret of his admiration for this new Bolognian middleweight, falls short in his praise due to the price divide between the V2 S and its Japanese rivals. 'I like the Ducati, a lot. But not at that money.'

Says it all...