

DOIN' TIME

STAFFERS' RIDES



ARRIVEDERCI!

PHOTOS: Caroline Carrithers & Fran Kuhn

DUCATI MULTISTRADA

WRIST: Tim Carrithers
MSRP (2010): \$19,995
MILES: 9390
MPG: 39
MODS: Shad SH50 top case, Michelin tires

It didn't look like much from a distance. Just a little high-desert rainstorm. Enough to moisten El Mirage Dry Lake and cool things off toward the end of a long, hot, meandering ride home from Palm Springs. About 15 minutes later, however, that "little" storm was firing a 40-mph slurry of rain, sand and gravel across the road, along with visible lightning strikes and squadrons of low-flying tumbleweeds. As El Mirage Road looked more and more like a river, it seemed like the previously unsinkable Duc was about to drown. Things were under some sort of control for the moment, but a fair amount of the storm

had already worked its way into my personal space. If it moistened the Ducati's extensive electronic central nervous system, I was looking at a long swim home. No shelter in sight? Press onward and pray!

An hour-and-a-half later I rolled into the garage, mud-splattered and saturated, but otherwise unscathed thanks to God, Bosch, Brembo, Ducati and Michelin. Especially Michelin. The Multi plowed through windborne water, sand, gravel, unidentified flying flora and the axle-deep water without a hiccup. Michelin's new Pilot Road 3 radials (\$215.95 front, \$325.95 rear; www.michelinmotorcycle.com) refused to slip, generating more traction in the wet than any other tires I've tried. Enough for a celebratory second-gear wheelie once the worst was behind us. This pair showed no discernable wear after more than 2000 hard miles. The dual-compound 2CT design performed as advertised, providing plenty of cornering grip while preventing the squared-off center that comes with too many freeway miles. Bottom line? They're brilliant.

The Multi's vital systems had proven themselves 100 percent watertight, but I wasn't sure about my new Shad SH50 top

case (\$418 complete with passenger backrest and mounting kit; www.shades/en/shad-usa). It went on easily enough prior to the deluge, the Spanish maker's 50-liter trunk swallowing up to 17.6 lbs. of cargo, including two full-face helmets. And thanks to a secure locking latch and a genuinely waterproof seal, a weekend's worth of kit came out the same way it went in: bone-dry. The whole thing clicks off in seconds when you're traveling light. The 48-liter Ducati Performance top case carries 22 lbs. of gear, costs around 50 percent more and is arguably less attractive. So? Pack 4.4 lbs. lighter, live with one less Ducati logo and spend the difference on a sporty-touring weekend out of town.

Go as long and hard as you like. I did, and if this bike is any indication, Ducati reliability is miles from the expensive oxymoron it once was. I've ridden from one end of California to the other without breaking anything more than a \$4.60 shifter-pivot bolt and one burned-out taillight LED. I've changed tires and brake pads once, the engine oil and filter twice and



While Ducati doesn't market the Multistrada as a personal watercraft, it does just fine if you should stumble into a small yet determined high-desert toad-choker.



The Shad SH50 top box proved at least as watertight as the motorcycle beneath. It swallows a pair of full-face helmets or a weekend's worth of kit with equal ease.

oiled/adjusted the chain a half-dozen times. That's it.

Looking into the chronically blurry rear-view mirrors with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, I could've and probably would've made this trip without the Sport model's Electronically Adjustable Everything. My right wrist usually does a decent job of matching throttle position with available grip. With the stiffer Öhlins shock spring in place and both ends dialed in, I can go from Sport to Touring mode and back without electronic assistance. I tried the engine's nutted Enduro and Urban settings for maybe 10 miles. It's been parked in full-power Sport mode ever since. Why pay for features you never use? Okay, even at \$14,995 for the unadorned model, the Multistrada isn't cheap. But aside from that one broken bolt, it's been fast, agile, dependable, practical and comfortable enough to make me look forward to any ride, regardless of the destination. On top of all that, the Multistrada never let me or anybody else in the immediate vicinity forget that it's a Ducati.

FRESH MEAT!



PHOTOS: Gron4 Photography

SUZUKI GSX-R750

WRIST: Aaron Frank
MSRP (2011): \$11,999
MILES: 984
MPG: 33 mpg
MODS: Suzuki valve stem caps



Big Piston Fork and Brembo monobloc radial brakes, was better than ever before. I knew before exiting the pit lane that I was riding my next long-term test bike.

I finally took delivery of my 2011 GSX-R750 tester—with just 1.3 miles on the odometer—at Sportland 2 Suzuki in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, last September. First stop was a NESBA track day at Road America the very next morning. Break it in hard, the pros say! Raising the fork tubes 7mm and adding compression damping at the back improved the sluggish steering, but room for improvement remains. We'll shim and re-spring the

I've had a special connection with the GSX-R750 ever since attending a press launch at Suzuki's Ryuyo, Japan, test track in 2004. Small as a 600, strong as a literbike and ridiculously easy to ride fast, that motorcycle was a revelation. Later that year I did something free-loading motojournalists rarely do—I spent my own money and bought a GSX-R750. I rode that bike for five years, until a Polish black marketeer made me an offer I couldn't refuse (true story). My GSX-R was relocated to Warsaw, and I've missed it every track day since.

Riding the new-for-2011 GSX-R750 at Barber Motorsports Park last spring brought memories of my all-time-favorite sportbike flooding back. Only this version, weighing 20 pounds less and upgraded with Showa's



These valve stem caps, shaped like tiny pistons with Suzuki's S-logo cast in the crown, have been on my desk for years, waiting for another Suzuki to appear in my garage.

rear shock to add more ride height and squat resistance, or maybe replace it outright with a more adjustable aftermarket alternative. On the dyno it made 127 bhp—identical, incidentally, to '04—but the air-fuel ratio was horrendously lean. Remapping will unlock plenty of useful power, once we figure out how to use EFI Editor

software to reflash the factory ECU. We're off to a good start.

Seven years later, the GSX-R750 still fits me like a familiar, sweat-softened glove. It's too soon to say for sure, but my garage might permanently house another Gixxer by this time next year.