

Biker buddies: Here's a fact...

***I'm older than all of you!***

This is actually pretty cool, as this makes me a good "historian". And today we'll chat about the history behind your red-hot-streetbike.

Prior to 1960, bikes were awful. Infant-technology. But in 1962, two bikes hit the streets which completely changed the bike-scape, bikes with two completely different design methodologies, built in two different countries.

Those two bikes were the Ducati ***Diana*** (Italy) and the Bultaco ***Metralia*** (Spain).

Lets' chat about the Ducati...



The Diana was a 250cc (15 cubic-inch) overhead-cam bike driven by a “bevel gear” in the head, in-turn driven by a vertical rotating shaft itself driven off the crankshaft. You can see the vertical cam-drive in the above pic. No oil cooler, no air filter, this was essentially a “race bike for the street” and trust me ***it could fly***. Extremely high-tech for the day. The first “superbike”. The bike was listed at 30hp, likely a conservative number. I owned the “scrambler” version of this bike, with a megaphone exhaust and when I lit it up, the whole world knew. Below is a 250cc Ducati scrambler in far better shape than mine...



Note the Bultaco ***Sherpa*** in the background (not to be confused with the much more commercially-successful ***Matador***), so I'm guessing this pic is mid-1960's.

Not to be outdone, Spain unleashed the technological-opposite of the Diana, a bike equally-fast, equally a good handler, but far cheaper/simpler. This was the Bultaco ***Metralla***.



This bike was as simple as it could get, a piston-port 2-stroke. And no pre-mix either, you mixed the oil with the fuel. But there was a nifty feature, oil was carried in a small tank under the right side-cover, and via a plunger-pump you could pump oil into the gas tank. So if you added two gallons of gas, you might do “3 pumps” and in theory you’d be on your way. Note that this bike did have one great-leap-forward, a **4-leading-shoe front drum brake**. This was amazing not only for the stopping power, but for the complexity of trying to mechanically align all-4-shoes in the drum. This bike was a flyweight, about 220 pounds!

**Which bike was better? Faster? Impossible to tell! These bikes ran neck-and-neck with the Diana having more torque and the Metralla having a slightly better power-to-weight ratio.**

The bikes appealed to either the “4-stroke-crowd” or the “2-stroke-crowd”. I recall I turned down buying a new Diana for \$750 (mistake!) in order to buy a (Spanish) Montesa **Scorpion** woods-bike (“junk” in the pic below) for \$450.



Later I bought (\$650 new) an Ossa Explorer (awesome!). The Ossa and Montesa are both Spanish bikes.



This Ossa was “state of the art” (never equaled for simplicity/maneuverability). It was a lightweight (220-lb), piston-port 2-stroke woods bike. Only “massive technology” (i.e. Japan) displaced these bikes, the death-knell for Italy and Spain both being the Yamaha DT-1 woods-bike...



YAMAHA DT-1 - 1968

Monocylindre deux temps de 246 cm<sup>3</sup> - 18,5 ch à 5 000 tr/min - 112 kg

L'hebdomadaire du cinquantenaire sur [www.yamaha-motor.fr](http://www.yamaha-motor.fr)



**YAMAHA**

*Touching Your Heart*

***Oops! Forgot! This was a story about street-bike-history!***

The Spanish tried to expand the lightweight speedster market, and in the mid-1960's introduced the Montesa ***Impala...***



...and Ossa introduced their **Wildfire**...



The Wildfire had –weird- a 4-speed-trans (all other bikes were 5-speeds). But all Ossa's were, even by today's standards, very reliable. I ran my Ossa Explorer as both street-bike and woods-bike for 2 years (in Connecticut, all-year-round, because I didn't have a car!).

You can see that all 3 Spanish manufacturers (Bultaco, Montesa, Ossa) had similarly-looking bikes. Yes, because the originator of all of them was Senor Bulto (of "Bultaco" fame).

But then came the Japanese... All four brands (Suzuki, Kawasaki, Yamaha, and Honda) came charging on the street-bike scene...

All had bikes which raised performance levels to undreamed-of levels...

Kawasaki had their (2-stroke) 500cc H1 Triple (it also came as a 250, 350, 400, and a mind-blowing 750cc). There was no doubt that the 750cc bike of 1976 was the King of the Dragstrip.



Suzuki had their X-6 Hustler...



Yamaha had their RD-250 (the disc-brake was a much-later addition to the bike). This bike also came in 350 and (most successfully) the 400cc bike. My buddy Jamie had a 350, and I rode it only long enough to holler “Holy S\*\*t!” as at 1/4<sup>th</sup> throttle it was faster than any dirt-bike I ever drove.



YAMAHA RD250 - 1973

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**YAMAHA**

*Touching Your Heart*

It is important to note that all three of the above Japanese bikes were 2-stroke's. Simple, powerful.

Point-to-point, any of these bikes were likely faster than the Triumph Bonneville 650cc (as “rolling art”, perhaps the greatest bike of all time). But a “technology exercise” it was not, reliability was terrible, and by the mid-1970’s Triumph was dead.



But the King Kong of embryonic superbikes was the great-leap-forward made by Honda and the amazing **Superhawk** 305cc street-racer of 1962-‘67. This bike was far ahead of its’ day, having performance unequaled even by other Japanese bikes for another 5 years. Incredible! Here it is...



So that's it...

Italy's Ducati (Diana) and Spain's Bultaco (Metralla) introduced "superbikes" in 1962-'64. By 1967 the Honda had set the new performance standard and launched the original "horsepower war". By the mid-1970's it was all over, the Japanese having wiped out the Europeans in the Superbike game (until Ducati came back strong in 1998). But by any standard, the Granddaddy of all superbikes remains the Honda ***Superhawk***.

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Thanks for reading along, thanks for giving me a chance to relive a part of history, and to say **I was there!**

P-Ski



