

2001 Cagiva Raptor



Hybrid, Thoroughbred

By [Glenn Le Santo](#)

Dank Cyber-Bistro, August 11, 2000 -- There was a time when the Japanese could make a powerful and reliable engine but struggled to build a good handling chassis to compliment it. In those days only the Italians or the Advertisement British could make a bike that handled properly. However, they found it almost impossible to make an engine that could match the best coming from Japan. Today, only a complete bigot would claim that the Japanese haven't got the handling game down to a pretty fine art. So where does that leave the Europeans? According to the Italians it leaves them taking care of style.

To an Italian, style is everything. Form and function follow style, they do not precede it as in the Japanese culture. When Cagiva decided to launch a new superbike -- the MV Augusta F4 -- they spent a small fortune developing their own motor. They wrapped it in exquisitely styled bodywork and ensured that all of this was complimented with class-leading handling. The problem was that it lead to a sticker price that would have the average motorcyclist leaving the showroom -- pronto. What Cagiva needed was something that was equally stylish but with a more down-to-earth price tag. Their solution was the Raptor (and the V-Raptor). Both have stunning looks but lack a price tag that leaves you equally stunned. How did they do it? Simple, they went back to a tried and tested formula; they let someone else build the motors.



In some ways the Cagiva Raptors could be called the new Rickmans (these were superbikes built in the UK in the Seventies that used a trick frame, made from Reynolds tubing). These tasteful frames often housed a breathed-on Japanese motor pirated from a CB750 or a Z1. They worked because they matched proven engineering with an in-house ability to build a chassis that worked.

There's no doubt that Cagiva can build a working chassis, and the donor motor from Suzuki's TL1000, is already well-known for power and reliability. Cagiva has arguably out TL'd the TL by adding some sensational Italian styling that works well on the eye. Actually, the styling was done by none other than Miguel Angel Galluzzi, an Argentinean. If the name seems familiar its because he's the same bloke that penned Ducati's original Monster and then persuaded management to build it. We all know the Monster story; good on the eye, good for the soul and good on the street. So, how does the Cagiva recipe work

on the road?

The 90 degree V-Twin, liquid-cooled engine was an inspired choice since Cagiva wanted to out-do Ducati, the company they had recently sold. Cagiva needed an engine that would square up to Ducati's brilliant eight-valve liquid-cooled Vee which they knew would be in the Monster chassis before too long. The Suzuki engine is a perfect choice. The motor is narrow like a Ducati and also powerful like a Ducati. Cagiva was hoping that the Japanese heritage would add reliability, a point that is sometimes questioned with the Ducati option. The 98 x 66mm 996cc and 105 horsepower engine certainly delivers the poke you'd expect from a big V-twin and it seems to be reliable enough, at least when fitted in the Suzuki TL range. Get the needle up to around 4,000 rpm on that wacky triangular analog tach and the engine is ready to rip up the pavement. Suzuki claimed 120bhp from the same motor, so where's the missing 15bhp? The answer lies in the method of measurement, with Suzuki running the Dyno off the crank and Cagiva taking a reading at the rear tire, where it matters.

Whatever the output, when combined with only 192 kg (423 lbs) of weight, that power leads to performance, and lots of it. As for the torque, we didn't have the bike long enough to get it to a dyno, but rest assured there's loads of the stuff. Wind the needle on from a lazy 2,000 rpm or hold onto the throttle all the way past the 10,300 rpm redline and you'll be rewarded with loads of go. This is a brilliant motor, make no mistake. Whether you're flying away from the lights, blasting past a row of cars or punching out of a slow corner, this little baby smokes 'em. The feeling is so good you'll keep slowing down just to wind it on again and revel in that satisfyingly fat power band.



The gearbox -- a six-speeder -- was generally well-behaved during our test although there was the occasional missed shift from first to second when the engine was cold. The cable-operated clutch was light and progressive but it bit very late on our test model. I like it this way since it means that just a small dip of the clutch lever is all that's required when changing down. Other than that, the clutch behaved perfectly with no screeching, rattling or grabbing -- very un-Ducati-like. You also couldn't fault the digital fuel injection. At any speed, even trickling through traffic, the motor was properly fed its fuel with no hunting, surging or hiccupping; just perfect metering and no amount of heavy handedness with the throttle grip could fool the mapping. Brilliant!



Power is no good without control, or so the saying goes. Lucky, then, that Cagiva wrapped the motor in a Ducati-inspired (or is it Rickman inspired?) steel-tube, trellis-type chassis. The inverted 43mm Marzocchi front forks did feel a little hard in bumpier corners which led to a tendency for the Raptor to shake its head exiting corners on less than smooth pavement. This front-end nervousness is exaggerated by the handlebars

which are traditional steel tube type with an upward and rearward bend in them. You need to get your weight down and forward over the front wheel to calm things down a little. At the rear, the Sachs damper (adjustable for spring preload only) never gave a murmur of trouble; it just got on with the job of digging all that punch deep into the road. This is a fun bike that makes you want to ride it. Park one of these in your

garage and you'll constantly be finding excuses to ride it, and those five minute hops to the local store will soon turn into fifty mile scorching rides up and down the local canyon.

Unfortunately, the comfort runs out before the fun does. I found the sloping forward saddle a real pain in the nuts, my first experience on the bike being a painful meeting with the petrol tank when I first applied the brakes. I found myself sitting well forward, motocross style, in the saddle. This aided control in the twisties but did nothing for the safety of my vital organs. This upright and forward stance also meant that most of my contact with the bike was via the saddle; there's very little weight on the bars or the slightly rearward mounted footpegs. This soon led to discomfort, about fifty miles into any ride my butt would start to snooze. Fortunately, when given loads of stick, the petrol tank would be demanding more fuel via the flashing warning light on the funky console after as little as sixty-five miles! Use the throttle a bit less and the 18 liter (4.7 gal) tank lasts much longer.

The able chassis and capable suspension are backed up by a good set of brakes. There are twin Brembo 4-piston calipers up front that grip a pair of 298mm discs. These are backed up by another 298mm disc at the rear, this time with a twin-piston caliper. The rear brake is well balanced and powerful, but not so sensitive that it locks at a mere touch. The front brakes require quite a bit of lever effort to get them really working, since they don't bite hard and immediately like on some sportbikes. Given that this bike might appeal to the less-experienced rider, this isn't necessarily a bad thing. Use them properly and they'll give a useful combination of power with plenty of feedback. Unusual for a modern bike, I found that attempting to perform stoppies for the amusement of the local car drivers led to a sliding front tire. I couldn't be sure if this was down to the Bridgestone BT56 tire or the slightly over-stiff front suspension set-up. Interestingly, when the bike was launched in Europe earlier this year many of the testers complained that the front end was too soft on the pre-production bikes. Maybe Cagiva have gone a little too far in rectifying this and that might explain why the front gets nervous on bumpier surfaces.



At high speed (this bike will do 145MPH flat out) you're going to have trouble holding on. Without even the bikini fairing fitted to the V-Raptor there is a load of wind force at speed trying to remove your head and helmet as one unit. At speeds above 125MPH the front end doesn't feel as planted as you might desire at such velocity. This is a backroad blaster; a real roadster, not a hyper sportbike, so such considerations like ultra high speed handling are academic. If I owned one I'd be tempted to re-valve those forks and maybe fit a steering damper. If you don't ride it on the edge, you will not be troubled by any of this.



The bike is light, with the weight centered low. This, and its small physical size, means it's an easy bike to manage even if your body isn't held as far off the ground by your legs as you'd like. For this reason, and the low 770mm (30.3 in) seat height, it would make an excellent choice for the *girls*. Wheeling it in and out of the garage is a doddle, aided by the upright bars and low center of gravity.

For me, the proof of any bike is how I feel when the time comes to surrender the test

machine. On the morning I was due to return the Cagiva, I felt blue. I really didn't want to hand the keys back. I found every excuse I could to delay the return by a few more hours and I spent them all riding the bike. With too little luggage room and not enough comfort, it's not a great bike for touring. A well-ridden sportbike will trounce it on both handling and absolute speed. But point it down some twisty back roads and it'll return you to home with a huge smile and a burning desire to go back for more. Roll it slowly through your neighborhood and it'll turn heads. The styling may not be everyone's cup of high-octane fuel but it does it for me and it gets loads of attention when parked.

Verdict? A good combination of Japanese engineering and Italian flair. A good choice if you want a roadster that shouts, "I'm different!"

Specs

Engine: Liquid-cooled 90° 4-stroke V-Twin
Valves: 4 per cylinder, DOHC
Capacity: 996cc
Bore x Stroke: 98 x 66 mm
Comp ratio: 11.3:1
Intake system: Digital fuel-injection
Clutch: Wet multiplate
Transmission: 6speed, chain final drive
Ft Suspension: 43 mm inverted Marzocchi, 120 mm travel
Rr suspension: Sachs damper, preload adjustable
Front brakes: 2 x four piston Brembo calipers,
2 x 298 mm discs
Rear brakes: twin piston Brembo caliper,
220 mm disc
Front wheel: 3.50 x 17 cast aluminum
Rear wheel: 5.50 x 17 cast aluminum
Front tire: 120/70 x 17 Bridgestone BT56
Rear tire: 180/55 x 17 Bridgestone BT56
Rake/Trail: 25.2°/110 mm
Wheelbase: 1440 mm (56.7 inches)
Seat Height: 770 mm (30.3 inches)
Fuel capacity: 18 liters (4.7 gallons)
Dry Weight: 192 kg (423 lbs)
Instruments: Digital speedometer and scrollable
digital readout for coolant temp, odometer, trip
mileage (x 2). Tachometer, warning lights for neutral,
high beam, turn signals and low fuel.

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