

2001 Cagiva Raptor 650



Best of Both Worlds

By [Yossef Schvetz](#)

Eastern Hemisphere, January 15, 2001 -- If history is to be believed, those polite and refined Italians -- fine blokes that churn out design masterpieces by the truckload -- were once a rowdy crowd.

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For ages, bloody battles raged between rival Kingdoms. Unfortunately, it seems that serious conflict between Varese and Bologna is once again looming on the horizon. The matter of dispute? The lucrative naked bike market.

Thou shall not take this lightly. The granddad of them all, the Ducati Monstro, brings in close to 70-percent of Ducati's income these days. But Cagiva's boss, Mr. Castiglioni, is not about to let the Bolognese people dig this gold mine all alone. After unveiling the 1000 Raptor at the '00 Milano show, a smaller but no less appealing 650 brother appeared at this year's Munich Show. When you consider the fact that in Italy, the *small* 600cc Monstro is number four in the sales hit parade with 4,500 pieces sold (twice the sales of the 900), it's no wonder why Cagiva came out with a smaller model of their own.



After selling Ducati to American hands, Italian motorcycle industry king pin, Mr. Castiglioni, brought Miguel Galluzzi, the designer of the original Monstro, to Cagiva. In a rather short time he designed a fresh and wild looking bike that took the naked theme quite a few steps forward. Coupled to the Suzuki TL1000S engine, it made for one tough package. The new 650, "baby" Raptor follows its big brother's steps by using the

Suzuki SV650 V-twin's motor.

Just a few weeks ago I had the chance to visit the Cagiva/MV factory in Varese. After drooling over row after row of assembled MV 750 engines that regrettably would not fit under my coat, I was handed the keys to the new 650 Raptor.

Upon first look, I was hard-pressed to detect any differences from the 1000cc model parked next to it. The 650 keeps the exact design of its larger sibling with hard and somewhat ornate lines. The only external clues to the actual capacity (engine externals aside) are the smaller silencers and 20 millimeter narrower back wheel.

Other than that, the 650 keeps the same top-level equipment found on the 1000 model. That means 43 mm inverted Marzochi forks, dual 298 mm front disks, Brembo calipers all around and a Sachs shock.

Cagiva's parking lot is a much nicer place than a crowded exhibition hall for close examination of the endless design details present in the Raptor. Look closely at the pictures and you'll be amazed at the amount of special parts that have been specifically designed to fit with the Raptor's lines: The footrests and hangers, the small covers under the instrument pod and the instrument pod itself all carry those angular and oval design cues. Wherever the eye rests it'll find Galluzzi's touch. No off-the-shelf items. Oh no. It's no easy feat for a small company like Cagiva to resist the temptation of using universal parts in order to be faithful to the designer's vision. This is no committee-designed Japanese bike. Each bike is the result of a few people's dream.



Upon straddling the 650, hand, butt and foot location put your body in a very neutral position. There is a slight cant forward that injects some aggression into the seating equation and the seat-to-footpeg distance is greater than the Monstro's. The Gothic-looking analog rev counter/digital speedo combo is a bit of a shock: Straight off of Robin's Bat Bike! Cool.

After some ignition key twirling and starter button pressing, the SV650 engine responds with a rather polite and restrained exhaust note. First gear engages in typically smooth Suzuki fashion and away we pull, courtesy of that small but torquey V-twin. The first few miles find me splitting lanes while looking for the shortest way to the nearest restaurant. Those MV Agusta engines somehow whetted my appetite.



After a good dish of pasta marinara, I'm off to look for some twisties. Just as it should be, the short and nimble Raptor slashes through city traffic admirably. The straight bars, sharp brakes, upright riding stance and immediate though not intimidating power make the 650 a wonderful city tool. At slow speeds over potholes and train crossings the suspension feels Italian -- taut but not excessively so. The lack of nose diving

under braking is a blessing compared to a standard Suzuki SV650.

As I head north from Varese, the road clears up and it's time to stretch the engine a bit. The V-twin pulls in linear fashion to 9,000 rpm and I did manage to see 205 on the digital speedo (that's 122 mph, Yanks) before a truck in the left lane spoiled my Boneville Flats run. Eventually, I arrive at a nice n' twisty road section. It's here that the Raptor really shines. The flickability that those flat bars bring along must be already known to any naked-bike rider. The fact that the Raptor has 25.5 degrees of rake compared to the Suzuki SV's 30-something degrees must be of help, too. But it's the sure-footedness while leaned way over that really impresses me. The stiff suspension is a bonus here and, considering the fact that this is no sport bike at heart, it feels very planted. From the second sweeper onwards I feel confident enough to really chuck the thing hard at those 90 mph corners.

Direction changes and corrections are a real

doodle with that almost off-road riding position and wide bars. There is an extremely satisfying feeling when you have the Raptor inclined at sport bike angles while you're sitting there, bolt upright, smiling at the world. When the time comes for some serious slowing, the four pot Brembo calipers grip the disks just fine while giving a high and controllable rate of deceleration. Switching from the 650 to the 1000 Raptor



that keeps me company for a few miles is an eye-opener. The 1000 pulls full of steam out of every corner in any gear while the 650 asks you to play around more with the gears -- something that the smooth Suzuki box is more than happy to do. Sure, the "biggie" responds to throttle input a lot harder, but almost in an intimidating way. This is especially nice if you want to play stunts all day. Still, you don't really want to be cruising at more than 90 mph on a Naked bike, do you? While cruising, the smaller motor has a smoother feel to it than its hairy-chested big brother.

When you consider that the 650 has almost the same top-end power of Ducati's 900 cc air-cooled mill (about 70 rear wheel hp) things start getting down to which perspective you look at things from. The 650 Raptor might not pull as strong from down low as the Ducati, but the Raptor makes up for the deficit with its higher revving engine and shorter gearing. Then there is the typical Japanese lack of mechanical noise. Dyed-in-the-wool Italian bike buffs will certainly complain that the Raptor lacks that special mechanical charisma ever so present in any Ducati. Let them talk while you enjoy Japanese reliability wrapped in sexy Italian clothes.



So is it the perfect "small" naked bike? I would install a less cheapo looking sidestand and give up on a few quarts of gas for a less bulbous fuel tank. As it is, it spoils the visual fun a little bit. But those might be the only serious complaints. It is really what an everyday, do-it-all, street bike should be -- with the added bonus of a design that will make you noticed and will stand out even in your local "Italy Day", Ducati- choked

gathering. And just in case you feel a normal Raptor is not special enough there is always the bikini-faired V-Raptor version with its more extreme Star-Wars looks.

OK then, is it a Monstro beater? At a price that undercuts even the much weaker Monstro 750 it should be, although Cagiva has yet to accumulate even a fraction of Ducati's street, race and sales cred. But then, don't be surprised to hear about bad riots between Italian mobs armed with Raptors and Monstros at the halfway point between Varese and Bologna. These guys have a tradition to maintain.

Specifications

Engine:	Liquid-cooled 90° 4-stroke V-Twin
Valves:	4 per cylinder, DOHC
Capacity:	645cc
Bore x Stroke	81 x 62.6 mm
Intake system:	Mikuni BDSR 39mm Carbs
Clutch:	Wet multiplate
Transmission:	6speed, chain final drive
Ft Suspension:	43 mm inverted Marzocchi
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 tire:	120/70 x 17
Rear tire:	160/60 x 17

Rake/Trail: 25.2°/110 mm
Wheelbase: 1440 mm
Seat Height: 775 mm
Fuel capacity: 19 liters
Dry Weight: 180 kg
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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