

The Sachs monoshock rear-end is quite firm but still compliant

combine to take up so much room you can only get to the outside half the peg. It's fine if you have your feet flat but not if you're wearing race boots and like to ride on the balls of your feet. I'd be looking for some alternatives for sure.

Leaving the garage in a flurry of pleasing metallic rasps from the pipes, I pulled cleanly into the traffic-filled lake. I was immediately impressed by the smooth and seamless pickup from the stone cold engine and the lightness of the clutch and gearbox. Perhaps less so by the restrictive turning circle, which nearly caught me out as I hit the lock-stops earlier than expected when threading through the traffic.

Even bumbling along at low speed I quickly found myself in top gear simply because of the amazing spread of power and torque from this gem of an engine. Even with as little as 2500rpm on the clock, which is just about bang on 60km/h in sixth, the Brutale will pull cleanly and strongly. From there the power just keeps on coming in a seamless and linear fashion until dropping off abruptly just before the rev limiter steps in at about 11,500rpm. Thanks must go to the Magneti Marelli 5SM engine management system because it's so flexible and easy to ride – not something old Brutales would have said of them. This really is one of the nicest engines I've experienced for a while.

Although initially the suspension felt pretty firm, its low-speed damping handled the worst of the rain-filled potholes with ease. A couple of times I tensed up expecting to get a jolt through my arms or my backside, only for the Brutale to soak it all up.

Although the seat height is not particularly tall at 825mm, it is a useful 15mm more than a Monster Evo and helps gives good vision in traffic. To be honest I was beginning to think the 920 was turning out to be a pretty useful commuter, and dare I say, even a relaxing

ride.

About the only thing I wasn't totally happy with was the braking package. The Brembo four-pot radial calipers actuated by the conventional Nissin master cylinder, and biting on 310mm discs, were certainly not lacking in outright power, but used gingerly in the soaking conditions they felt a bit wooden and lacking in feel. In the dry they were easily powerful enough to howl the front tyre using two fingers, and gave bags of feedback, so perhaps it was just down to the utter soaking they'd had, or brake pads better suited to dry conditions. Luckily the rear was exactly as I wanted both wet

and dry. Not too fierce but perfectly effective to help hold a tight line in the dry; or slow down without fear of locking up in the wet.

By the time I got home I was soaked to the skin but seriously impressed by the Brutale and gagging to find out what it was like in the dry.

Thankfully, despite its great low-speed manners, the Brutale hasn't been neutered: it's still a beast of a motor when you pin it,

making the most of its claimed 129hp (96kW) and 95Nm of torque.

Nail it through the box (the clutch is redundant at this point) and the thing blasts off like a rocket with an addictive howl from the pipes. Hold onto first gear and the front wheel will gracefully lift itself off the deck as peak torque turns up at about 8000rpm, whereupon even the most cack-handed can ride it out to the limiter before the tyre comes back to earth with a pleasing chirp. Fan the clutch instead and it rears up practically from a standstill. Scream up to a bend and stand it on its nose whilst banging down a couple of gears and you're hooked.

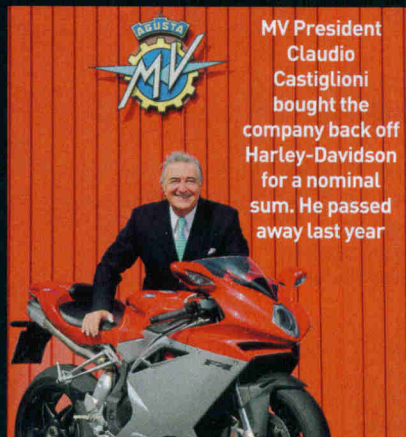
Strangely, when I switched to the "not Sport" engine map, the fuelling and throttle response was so much worse that I never went there again, making it somewhat

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HARLEY'S INVOLVEMENT

The Brutale has been around in one form or another for nearly a decade. Starting life as a 750, it's grown in various stages to 1090 and now, for 2011, back to 920 (the 1090 remains) due to a smaller bore, but retaining the same 55mm stroke as its big brother (in fact both engines use the same crank).

During that time, MV was fleetingly bought by Harley-Davidson in 2008, in what was likely an attempt to use the existing European dealer network to sell Harleys alongside MVs, only to be sold again in 2010 at the bottom of the GFC, back to former MV president Claudio Castiglioni, for about five bucks. During that time H-D had financed the R&D for MV's current model line-up including the F4 and F3 upon which the latest Brutales are based. Nice work if you can get it.



MV President Claudio Castiglioni bought the company back off Harley-Davidson for a nominal sum. He passed away last year