

CLASSIC DRIVER

Five questions to Gabriele del Torchio, CEO of Ducati



At the EICMA 2011 in Milan, Ducati presented its new superbike, the 1199 Panigale. Classic Driver caught up with Ducati CEO Gabriele del Torchio to discuss the new model, Chinese *Ducatisti* and vintage motorbikes.

Mr. Del Torchio, what are the new models you are presenting in Milan?

First of all, the EICMA is very important for us. It is the largest bike show in the world, but at the same time we are in Italy. We are at home. So we take the opportunity to present some brand-new bikes. First of all, the new baby, the Ducati 1199 Panigale. It's probably the best superbike that was ever built by Ducati. It is a huge investment for us – and I am sure that this bike will become an icon in the superbike industry for various reasons.

It has a brand new engine with 195 HP – another in-house record. Also, the frame is very modern and it fulfils our objective to reduce the overall weight, which is now only 164kg – 10kg less than its predecessor, the 1198. We have also put many more technological innovations inside it that will make the life of our riders more exciting and even safer. The bike is presented in three different configurations: a 'base' version, an S version and the *Tricolore* – a tribute to Italy and the 150th anniversary of the Italian state.

How has the business developed in 2011, and what are you expecting for 2012?

Despite the economic crisis in Southern Europe and despite serious problems in the market, we have been able to grow and 2011 will be the best year in Ducati's history. We are expecting an increase of around 20 per cent over the previous year. This is mainly due to a tremendous boost of sales in the United States and Canada. We have grown there by 44 per cent and Northern America is now our biggest market. And our bikes are becoming more and more popular in Europe.

And there's obviously the Far East, the fastest developing part of the world, where we have sold in excess of 70 per cent more than last year. So the company is financially strong and ready for the future. Our plan is to grow further in 2012, and with the Panigale, the Diavel and all the other Ducati models this should be possible.



How are you approaching the Asian market, especially China, and are the Asian Ducatisti different from the European or American ones?

We established a base two years ago in Shanghai and are currently developing a distribution network. In China everything is possible, but we have to be passionate. Frankly speaking, I believe that the Chinese market will give us a lot of satisfaction, but this will not happen tomorrow. You should know that in the major Chinese towns, motorbikes are not allowed. Also on the Chinese highways, motorbikes are not allowed. It is not easy to work with this kind of limitation.

But we are growing well in Malaysia, Indonesia and in Thailand, where we have recently opened a Ducati Monster assembly plant for the Asian market. Obviously, all our customers from the world share the same passion – of course there are different situations and the Asian *Ducatisti* are not yet as experienced in the bike industry. But they are new and enthusiastic guys and they want to be part of the family – and of course a Ducati is very much a status symbol.

Last year, you teamed up with Mercedes-AMG for a new partnership. What are the connections between the two brands and what can we expect next?

The relationship with Mercedes and AMG in particular is quite natural as we share the same values. They are very much interested in performance, in lightness, in design and in style – and so are we. They are an icon of 'Made in Germany', we are an icon of 'Made in Italy'. So, we are going quite well together – and we decided to pay a tribute to AMG with a Diavel in an AMG configuration. I had the pleasure of introducing this version earlier this year at the Frankfurt Motor Show – that was quite exciting, being just in front of all the newly introduced models of Mercedes in the centre of the stand.

In the future, AMG might also do something co-branded with Ducati. In addition to that, they are sponsoring our MotoGP race team. And allowing us to use their logo on our products also means that we are a solid and trusted company.



Ducati has a very long and rich history. How important is the brand heritage to what you do today - and which classic Ducati is your personal favourite?

For us, heritage is one of the key elements because we have a long tradition and we are proud of our roots. For instance, the new Diavel Cromo that you see here in Milan carries the historic logo of Ducati Meccanica because we want to cherish the ideas of the founders of this company. Also, keeping the relationship with the collectors and the older fans of Ducati is very important because it keeps the dreams alive. This is the mission of our museum curator.

And regarding my favourite Ducati of all time, I have a dream: there are only two 1960s Ducati Apollos in the world. We have identified one in Japan and we tried to buy it because we wanted to bring it to our museum as it is the only bike missing from our collection. But it was impossible. So if you could help us to identify where the second one is, I would be grateful.

Interview & Photos: [Jan Baedeker](#)

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