CLASSIC DRIVER

Ridden: Ducati 848 Streetfighter

Lead
The new 848 Streetfighter recently joined the existing 1098cc Streetfighter S in Ducati's model line-up, writes Tom Stewart. Aside from engine capacity, the two bikes are very similar, at least on paper, but let's start by having a brief recap on exactly what a 'streetfighter' is.

In a nutshell, it's a hooligan's motorcycle – at its simplest, a full-on, race-style superbike with fairing removed and racy clip-on 'bars replaced by a conventional one-piece handlebar.

The origins of the genre date back to the 1980s, when cash-strapped British kids who'd crashed their Japanese sportsbikes and couldn't afford to replace the damaged fairings simply did away with non-essential bodywork, thus revealing more of their machines' impressive multi-cylindered engines, not to mention their own tough-guy credentials.

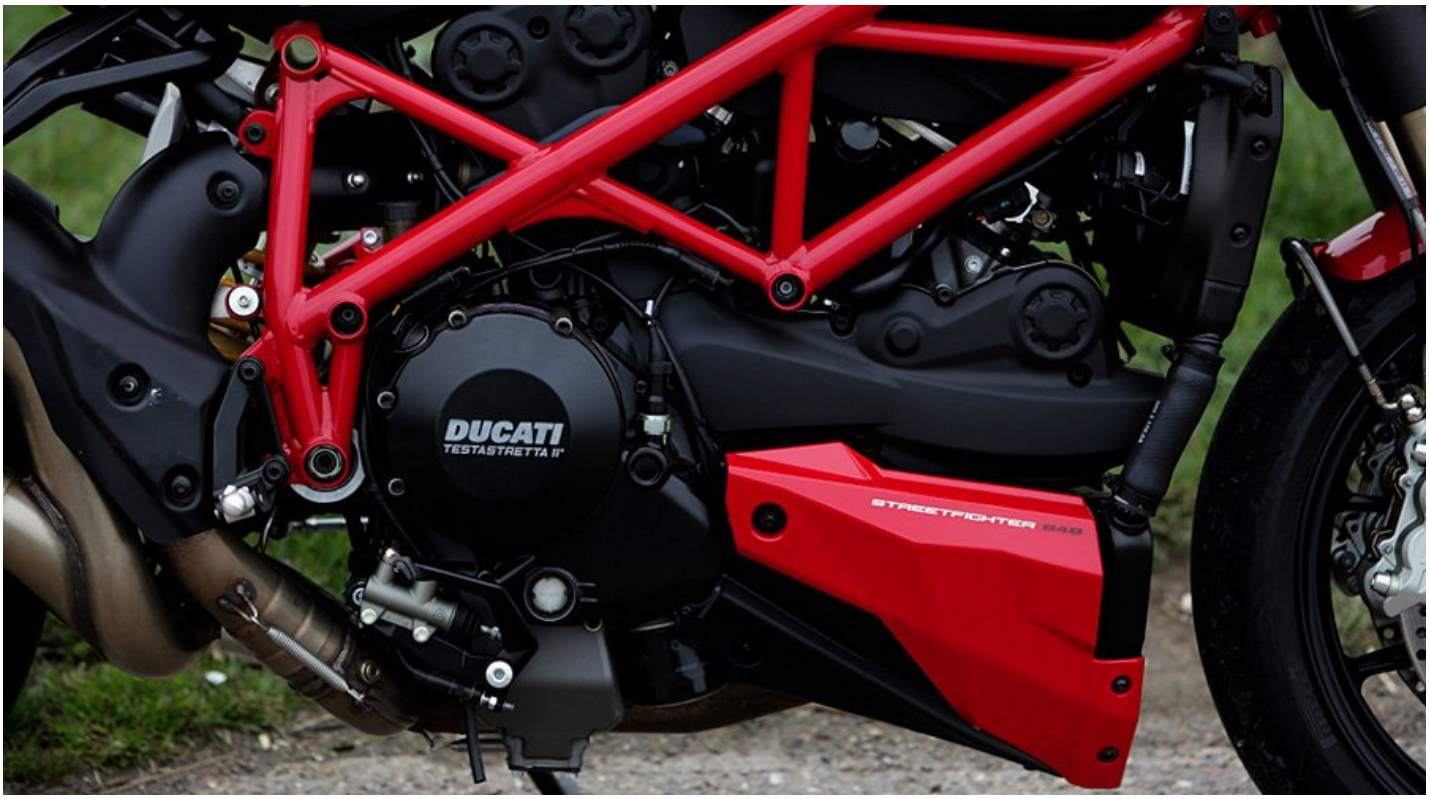



DUCATI



In tandem with the rise in the popularity of stunt-riding, streetfighters gained momentum, and naked purpose-built machines soon became a significant part of the alternative biking scene on both sides of the Atlantic. Then, by the mid ’90s, manufacturers with a watchful eye on street culture spotted the market potential and started developing their own. Arguably the first and most authentic production streetfighter was the 1997 Triumph Speed Triple, but first to market with a Streetfighter with a capital ‘S’ was Ducati – with the aforementioned 1098cc model of 2009.

Unfortunately, the Bolognese firm might have slightly overestimated the UK buying public’s commitment to hooliganism, as the fearsome 153bhp, 165mph superbike-engined beast is more than most can handle. In short, it’s completely bonkers and as a consequence you’ll likely see at least ten post-’08 Speed Triples on the road before you see a single Streetfighter. Something less extreme was called for.


DUCATI
TESTASTRETTA 11°
STREETFIGHTER 848





To the untrained eye, the new 848 looks pretty much identical to its big brother – same aggressive styling with essentially the same superbike-spec trellis frame, swingarm and wheels, but the 848 has Marzocchi forks and a Sachs rear suspension unit in place of pricier Ohlins hardware, as well as 10mm-smaller front discs with non-monobloc Brembo calipers. The 848 also has a gentler 849cc (yes, that's right; 8-4-nine) version of Ducati's 8-valve v-twin Testastretta desmo engine, which delivers a very respectable 130bhp at 10,000rpm, along with 69lb ft at 9,500rpm.

I say 'respectable', but performance far exceeds the merely respectable. Assisted by a sub-200kg kerb weight, the naked 848 is probably good for 0-60mph in 3 seconds dead, 0-100 in under 7sec and something over 150mph, but what I can personally vouch for is that this Streetfighter's acceleration through the gears is premier-league supercar strong. It's electrifying. It'll overtake a juggernaut or two in less than a jiffy, and with the help of the instrument pod's two red flashing 'change up NOW' lights and an intoxicating engine/exhaust noise, the 848 provides a truly life-affirming riding experience.







No complaints about the handling or steering either, which is effectively faultless. It threads through city traffic and devours fast A-roads with equal aplomb. It’s agile, stable, precise, well-mannered and feels planted. The

brakes are spot-on, too, with superb feel and serious bite, but they’re not vicious. (Sissy ABS isn’t even an option on this Italian stallion.) And in the unlikely event that you were hoping for a bone-jarring ride then you’ll be disappointed, as the ride quality borders on being comfy, while the compliant suspension doesn’t get knotted when tested by a bump in a high-speed sweeper.

Should you find yourself on a racetrack, then the eight-level traction control system, not to mention the lap-timer readouts, may prove their worth. However, for my money, race-derived motorcycle traction control systems on road bikes are something of a superfluous indulgence.






DUCATI



The riding position takes a little getting used to, as does simply getting on and off, due to the lofty height of the hump-cum-pillion seat. Simply swinging a leg over ideally requires you to be either leggy or athletic. With its flattish handlebar, the Streetfighter's perch is shorter and less extreme than a clip-on-equipped sportsbike, but it's still a bit like hard work in traffic and initially you tend to feel 'perched on high' rather than 'nestled within'.

The 6-speed gearbox shifts sweetly, but around town the 848 needs to be held in a low gear to stave off premature drivetrain snatch, and this, coupled with a heavier-than-necessary clutch action, means that it's not an ideal mount in heavy urban traffic. Unsurprisingly, it's not an ideal tourer either. The lean-forward riding position makes the motorway far from unbearable, and there's certainly no shortage of power or speed, but the right-hand-side exhaust heat shield interferes with your heel, and the tiny (optional) flyscreen offers zero wind and weather protection. With fuel consumption at around 40mpg you're unlikely to cover more than 140 miles between fill-ups, and I wouldn't volunteer to travel any distance on the tiny, elevated pillion seat, beneath which there's barely room for a credit card.







In keeping with streetfighter custom, the 848 is a highly capable and exhilarating sportsbike, but if you’re really serious about lap times, then a faired, single-seater 848 Evo (or 1199 Panigale) would, in theory, be

quicker still.

There’s no denying the Streetfighter’s stunning looks, though. It’s lean, aggressive, beautifully sculpted and brazenly mechanical – just like a proper streetfighter should be. It’s exquisitely finished, too, and Ducati has succeeded in making this junior ’Fighter a more useable and friendly machine without diluting its hardcore hooligan intensity.



The charismatic 848 perhaps won’t usurp the Triumph Speed Triple as the nation’s favourite streetfighter, as it’s still something of an acquired taste, but it’s a lovely thing to behold and, for the most part, to ride.

Price in UK: £10,495.

Photos: Jim Forrest

Gallery

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

Source URL: https://www.classicdriver.com/en/article/bikes/ridden-ducati-848-streetfighter?language=en-US
© Classic Driver. All rights reserved.