

Superbikes revv up as India readies for high-powered rides

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When Italian sports bike maker Ducati recently announced that it would launch nine new motorcycles and open two new showrooms in India this year, it begged the question: Has the domestic market matured enough for superbikes to go big on it?

After all, Ducati, which makes motorcycles that are known for high performance and big engines, is not for everyday commuters. Not only do these bikes achieve speeds that are comparable to sports cars but they are also as expensive.

A Ducati bike starts at ₹8.89 lakh (for the Scrambler 800) and goes up to ₹69.99 lakh (the Panigale V4).

That's not stopping enthusiasts from buying them.

Ducati registered the highest revenue turnover for the company over the last five years globally. In India, sales in 2022 grew by almost 15 per cent over 2021 — the second best growth percentage for a Ducati subsidiary across the world (Australia was the first).

So, what's driving the demand and manufacturer confidence?

Bipul Chandra, managing director, Ducati India, says that the big-bike market (>600 cc) is continuing to grow at a steady pace, with brands launching new models every quarter.

"The trend for superbikes is definitely on the rise, which is what led India to mark its debut on the MotoGP calendar this year," Chandra says. MotoGP is getting ready to take on the Buddh International Circuit, as the Grand Prix of Bharat.

Gurpratap Boparai, CEO, Mahindra & Mahindra's European Automotive Businesses, adds that the growth of biker clubs and fraternities in smaller categories, which include 150 cc bikes, is ironically one reason for the increasing potential of superbikes.

"The number of these clubs and riders across the country is



The Ducati Diavel V4

growing," says Boparai, himself a biking enthusiast who rides lifestyle bikes such as Triumphs and Ducatis. "What happens is when younger riders grow and move up the value chain, they eventually migrate to expensive machines with larger output."

Ducati's official club, called Ducati Owners Club (DOC), is, for instance, open to owners and also anyone who is passionate about the brand. There are five DOCs in India: Mumbai, Pune, Bengaluru, Kolkata and North India.

Chandra agrees. "Popular superbike clubs and festivals, like India Bike Week, and the rising popularity of MotoGP have all helped."

India also has a large number of riding trails from coast to coast and the mountains. And the resurfacing of these roads would give a fillip to high-performance sports cars and bikes, Boparai adds.

Riding into India, meanwhile, are these nine models that were unveiled at the Ducati World Premiere 2023: the Panigale V4 R, Monster SP, Diavel V4, Streetfighter V4 SP2, Multistrada V4 Rally, Scrambler Icon 2G, Scrambler Full Throttle 2G,

Scrambler Nightshift 2G and the Streetfighter V4 Lamborghini.

The growth of the mid-range or premium biking scene, which is below the Ducati high-performance segment, is also responsible for the demand.

Markus Mueller-Zambre, vice president of BMW Motorrad, says 2022 was a year of high growth for the brand. BMW bikes, too, cost a neat ₹20 lakh to ₹24 lakh.

Domestic players are taking note. Sources say that Hero

MotoCorp is in the advanced stage of its first middleweight (300-550 cc) premium motorcycle that it is co-developing with Harley-Davidson.

A competitor to Royal Enfield, this motorcycle is likely to be launched before the end of fiscal year 2024.

According to sources, both Hero MotoCorp and Harley-Davidson will sell this motorcycle under their respective brands and there will be several variants developed by both the companies on the same platform.

Additionally, Hero MotoCorp is gearing up with a war

chest of new products in the premium segment, which will cater to an increasingly discerning and evolved young customer profile.

Hero MotoCorp did not comment on the developments.

One high-profile rider who declined to be named says that there's also a select group of riders that doesn't use its bikes on public roads. Instead, these bikers organise camps to go riding in professional circuits, such as the Buddh International Circuit.

"These bikes are not for road usage," he says. "Because of their high speeds, these are not very comfortable for roads; the pipes on exhaust can go very low; the seats get very warm in traffic and so on."

That said, the allure of such machines is growing.

"India will play a major role, especially in my vision, which is focused on Asia Pacific. If you run the numbers, this region was selling around 40,000 units," says Mueller-Zambre. "So, it's a big market. India is actually the second biggest market we have (after China)."

BMW Motorrad has posted a 35 per cent growth in India with the sale of 7,000 units in 2022 compared to 5,191 units in 2021. And while the brand has launched 300 cc bikes, it is looking to also roll out 500 cc bikes in the future.

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