DUCATI CUCCIOLO

It's a long way from the Cucciolo to the Desmosedici RR, but the little clip-on engine that got Italy moving after WWII got Ducati on the road to success. There's big fun to be had from the little pup

THE CUCCIOLO is a 49cc four-stroke engine that bolts to a bicycle. It doesn't sound very exciting, but there are two reasons why you might want to put one in your garage. Firstly, if you're a Ducati obsessive this is where the legend began, so you'll want to have one in your collection. Secondly, there is massive entertainment to be had from mopeds, autocycles and motorised bicycles, and the Cucciolo (little pup) is the best and most desirable machine on which to join the fun.

Lots of 'clip-on' bicycle engines were made in Europe after WWII, but while most of these engines were two-strokes with a single gear and direct drive to the rear tyre via a friction roller, the Ducati was a cut above. The four-stroke engine clamped below the cycle's bottom bracket and so provided excellent weight distribution, and it had a two-speed gearbox.

And it wasn't just more sophisticated. It was faster too. A Cucciolo could travel at over 40 mph. Which is quite quick enough if you're relying on bicycle brakes to stop you. With a 39 x 40mm bore and stroke giving a capacity of 48cc and a 6.25:1 compression ratio it was capable of delivering 1.25 bhp at a giddy 5200 rpm.

Operating the two-speed gearchange is one of the arts of Cucciolo riding. It's a pre-selector gearbox and the position of the bicycle pedals dictate which ratio you get when you pull in the clutch. Left foot forward for low, right foot forward for high, left foot down for neutral. But remember that mechanical disaster will result from pulling in the clutch while pedalling.

The engine drives via the bicycle chain, so a wheel with a freewheel means there's no engine braking. You can also combine the two-speed gearbox with a three-speed hub gear to provide six ratios, impressive hill climbing ability and lots of "er... what gear am I in?" confusion.

The quality of the Cucciolo meant that they were more expensive than other cyclemotors when new, and they still are. Around 400,000 were built between 1946-56, and plenty were imported into the UK, but the survival rate is low. Even so, finding one for sale isn't hard if you're patient. The scarcity of spares means that it's worth taking your time and getting a good one rather than trying to restore a mismatched collection of worn-out parts.

LOOK FOR

- **CHECK THE PEDAL CRANK** is present and that the internal gear teeth are in good condition, they're alloy and can be worn or cracked.
- **IT'S COMPLETE**; they should have the correct-shape fuel tank and Weber carburettor.
- **IGNITION POWER** should come from a flywheel magneto, not constant-loss battery.
- **SMOKE AND RATTLY VALVE GUIDES** – fitting new guides or valve seats in the blind head is very awkward.
- **DECENT FRAME** – a flimsy frame will fall apart.

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FACTS

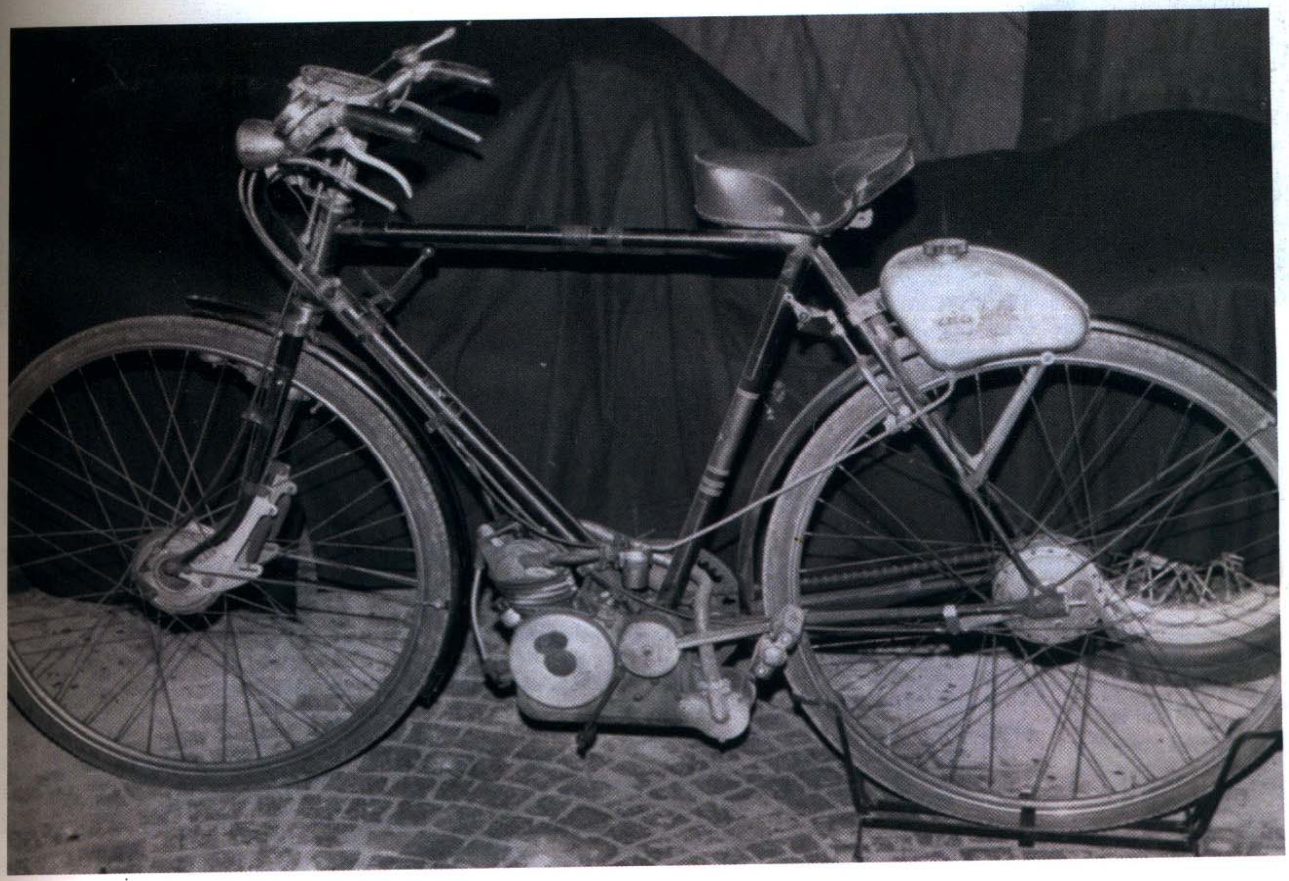
WHAT TO PAY

£750 (Needs work)
£1250 (MoT'd & taxed)
£2000 (Mint)

SPECIFICATION

ENGINE 49cc four-stroke single
POWER 1.25bhp
WEIGHT 45kg (100lb)
CRUISING SPEED 35mph

MAINTENANCE
EASY LIFE — SHED LIFE

PARTS & SUPPORT
AS MUCK — HEN'S TEETH

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