

Maserati MC12 Makes \$1m

| 165 Collector Cars Analyzed

Keith Martin's
Sports Car Market
The Insider's Guide to Collecting, Investing, Values, and Trends

Bad Boy

\$1.3m for the Ultimate Track Toy



Profiled: '70 Alfa GTA Jr. at \$93k

'63 Carrera 2 at \$318k, '58 AC Ace at \$195k

Superbird vs. Daytona: Which is the Market Winner?

Ducati 851: Right, Out of the Box

The bikes had numerous wins, and Raymond Roche and Doug Polen won three World Superbike titles on 888s

by Ed Millich

The 851 marked both the emergence of the modern Ducati Superbike and a critical mass of racing fortunes for the Bolognese manufacturer. Ducati's Massimo Bordi spearheaded the 851's design, building on the steel trellis frame and air-cooled 2-valve engine of the Pantah series. Bordi's 4-valve desmodromic (*desmoquattro*), water-cooled cylinder head—developed with insight from Cosworth—and digital fuel injection modernized the Ducati twin powerplant and made way for Ducati's many subsequent design and racing successes.

Along with the 92 x 64 mm (bore x stroke) 851, the 888 and SP/SPO variants were homologation-special 851s with 2-mm larger bores, special racing components such as Ohlins forks, and a better combustion chamber shape. While extremely handsome and capable racing machines, some purebred 888s are barely rideable on the street, with a narrow 7,000–11,000 rpm powerband.

Early 851s used the popular 42-mm Marzocchi M1R forks. These later gave way to an inverted Showa front end, the first appearance of upside-down front forks on a production Ducati. Rear suspension was via a monoshock with linkage. The 851's dual 4-piston Brembo front brake calipers were also a first on a production Ducati. Wheels were modern 17" (3.5" F/5.5" R). The 851 thus provides a fairly modern package, not to mention a thrilling ride. Early 851s used the Pantah dry clutch cover on the right side of the engine, which later changed to a slave cylinder/pushrod arrangement on the left side.



888 in 1990, and Doug Polen won two World Superbike Championships on his 888.

Four-valve Ducati desmo heads require some experience to adjust properly and they respond to ineptitude with rapid and catastrophic failure. Note that there are 16 valve shims to adjust on each bike, a time-consuming proposition. Also, some early valve shim keepers were stainless steel, making typical magnet-aided keeper extraction moot. As with used Ferrari purchases, you may want to check typical service costs with your mechanic beforehand, as it's easy to drift into four-figure service costs.

Limited editions command the most

The 851 was produced from the 1988 model year until 1994, when it was eclipsed by the masterpiece Ducati 916. Earlier 851s, particularly with the visibly dated Marzocchi M1R forks, are merely used vehicles at this point, and have been spotted for as little as \$4,000–\$5,000. Some limited-edition 888 models—notably the SP5 with Doug Polen replica graphics and #1 tail section replica—are desirable and can command five-figure price tags. Prices for limited editions and 888 variants vary dramatically with condition, equipment, history, and use, but are generally \$8,000 and up. All of these bikes have performance beyond the skills of 75% of riders.

As with any used Ducati purchase, service history and the owner's attentiveness are paramount. Many 851 and 888 parts are rare and unavailable outside of eBay, so be advised before you make a purchase. Once you pull the trigger, perform all scheduled maintenance such as cam belts and valve adjustments as recommended. And if you have a good Ducati mechanic, make darn sure to keep him on your Christmas card list. ♦

Perfect 851 owner:

- Satisfied with only 100 hp in a Ducati
- Wears red underwear and socks
- Gives number designations to progeny instead of names

Rating (★★★★★ is best):

Fun to ride: ★★★★★

Ease of maintenance: ★★

Appreciation potential: ★★★

Attention getter: ★★★★★

Years produced: 1988–94

Number produced: Under 10,000 for 851 and 888

Original list price: \$10,900; Tricolore race version, \$20,995

SCM Valuation: \$4,000–\$20,000, for limited editions

Tune-up cost: \$200 DIY to \$1,000-plus at the dealer, including valve adjustment

Engine: 4-valve/cyl, water-cooled 90° twin, 851 cc/888 cc

Transmission: 6-speed

Weight: 420 lb (street edition)

Engine #: Engine top, behind rear cylinder

Frame #: On steering head

Colors: Red, Tricolore

Clubs: Ducati Desmo Owners Club

More: www.usdesmo.com; www.ducati.com

SCM Investment Grade: B

A few 851s reached 100k miles

According to Ducati North America Hall of Fame member and tuner Bruce Meyers, the 851s and 888s were a good package right out of the box. Early bikes to 1990 had oddball 1.5-mm diameter valve shim keepers, which were later updated to 1.7 mm. Early dry clutch slave cylinders could leak or fail, and replacements are no longer available. Alternators were slightly undersized and occasionally failed. Head gaskets could sometimes fail, as could waterpump seals. Hinges on the aluminum gas-tanked models could sometimes fail, too. In all, though, 851s were fairly rugged, and a few examples have been observed with 100k miles.

The early Weber-Marelli P7 computers were both weak and hard to tune for induction and exhaust changes. Later P8 computers can be substituted for the P7s, though. Some of the Weber's FI system components, two decades old at this point, can be cross-referenced with Weber's automotive offerings, too. Doug Lofgren of Minneapolis is the go-to guy for 851/888 FI tuning.

The 851 and 888 had numerous racing successes, beginning with Marco Lucchinelli's 1987 Daytona Battle of the Twins win on an 851 prototype. Raymond Roche won the World Superbike Championship on an