

CLASSIC DRIVER

Ridden: Husqvarna Nuda 900R

Lead

'Nuda' means 'naked' in Italian, writes Tom Stewart, and both the Nuda 900 and the higher-spec 900R tested here are the first of a new generation of motorcycles from Husqvarna.

The originally Swedish Husqvarna brand is now owned by BMW, while the Nuda has Italian styling very much influenced by the French-conceived supermoto machines – they being hard-core off-road motocross racers re-specced for road or track. The Nuda is also manufactured in Italy and it's now on sale in the UK, so it's nothing if not thoroughly European.

But what else it may be is a little harder to define. The company says the Nuda was developed as “a crossover between a supermoto and a naked bike”, that it's whatever you want it to be and that it “doesn't feel it can be shoehorned into any specific category”. And with that I'd have to agree. Trouble is, this means that there are few if any production bike benchmarks to compare it with, and so the only way to assess the Nuda is simply to take it as it is.





Despite some members of my family reckoning that “it looks stupid and ridiculous”, to my eyes – and those of other seasoned bikers – it looks terrific. Husqvarna trots out the usual automotive designer-speak about the Nuda being ‘minimalist’, ‘athletic’ and ‘having a sense of dynamic tension’, and that may be so; but despite the peculiar paper dart-shaped object on the front mudguard, it looks raw, exciting and more than a little bit menacing.

Swinging a leg over and planting both feet on the ground requires that you be of above-average height. Once there, the tall seat (875mm minimum on the 900R, under which there’s zero storage) and wide flattish ‘bars give it a purposeful, lean-forward riding position that would be comfortable, were it not for the seat’s granite-like padding.







The engine is a BMW F800 vertical twin that's been quite heavily re-engineered in Nuda guise with a longer bore and stroke, a revised crankshaft with different firing intervals, a new high-compression cylinder head with bigger valves, plus lumpier cams and so on.

Thumb the starter button and the 898cc 103bhp vertical twin barks into life. The upswept Lanfranconi silencer is loud but just short of anti-social, and its staccato snarling sounds more v-twin Ducati than vertical-twin Triumph.





Like the engine, the frame is also from the F800, but it's been tweaked for added strength and greater agility. The Husky 900 and 900R share many of the same major components and, apart from a few carbonfibre trinkets, the R also boasts top-spec Brembo front brake calipers and adjustable suspension – Sachs front and Ohlins rear.

The 900R is certainly involving. With a very quick-action throttle, response in high-power mode is instant bordering on aggressive, and given sufficient twist – easily done – this is accompanied by fierce standing-start acceleration. This might explain why there's switchable two-stage engine mapping, the low-power setting providing a less frenetic response – preferable while riding in town. There's also heaps of mid-range stomp, and keeping the throttle wound wide open till the red lights start flashing at around 9,000rpm seems almost insane, at least on the public road; but by any standards the Nuda motor is a gem.





Top speed is claimed to be 'over 200km/h' (124mph+) and that I wouldn't dispute, although with no wind protection, not to mention the Law, exploiting this bike's high-speed potential isn't tempting. Although it can sprint to three-figure speeds without drawing breath, cruising at speed on the 900R is far from relaxing as its low final gearing (lower than the 900's) makes it feel very busy. On a run, and due in part to the hard seat, you'll want to stop for a break sometime before the 13-litre (2.86gal) under-seat fuel tank runs dry.

On that note, the Nuda is pretty frugal. The R is claimed to achieve 65.7mpg at a constant 56mph, or 47.5mpg at a constant 75mph. While on test I averaged a surprisingly parsimonious 56mpg over one week of cut-and-thrust city riding with the occasional out-of-town blast. Not bad at all.





The Nuda's quick steering and sharp handling might take a bit of getting used to, especially if you're not accustomed to supermoto-style riding. And the ride quality, at least on the R suspension's default settings, borders on the firm. On the road there's noticeable front-end dive during even quite gentle braking, and it doesn't feel quite as planted and stable as it might, at least initially. But after a day or two's riding and confidence-building, the Nuda proved to be both highly capable and very entertaining, both in a straight line and in turns. And if you fancy doing the odd short-circuit track day, then I doubt you'll be wanting for more cornering clearance. Or braking power.

The 900R's monobloc Brembo calipers are better suited to racing superbikes, for which they were intended, than slim 195kg (wet) road bikes like the Nuda. The R's front brakes are viscously powerful and require only the very gentlest one-fingered touch on the lever, unless it's an emergency when two fingers and no more will suffice. And there's no ABS safety net either. The 900R's brakes alone would steer me toward the more sensibly-calipered Nuda 900, which as a bonus also has that more relaxed final gearing and is some £1,300 cheaper than the 900R.



So, if your riding is done in fair weather and involves short jaunts on rural A and B roads with maybe the occasional and not-too-competitive short-circuit track day, then a Nuda could be for you. Unless you're some kind of anarchic stunt rider, then 898cc and over 100bhp is more than a little OTT for purely urban use, but a Nuda would provide a touch of spice and variety for those with an assortment of machines. As a sole motorcycle, however, I suspect most will opt for something a little more practical and less experimental.

Price in UK: £9,475 OTR. See [Husqvarna Motorcycles's website](#) for more details.

Photos: Jim Forrest

Gallery

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