

NEW PRODUCT PREVIEW BY CHRIS MAIDA

NIGHT DRAGON

An impressive new tire from Pirelli

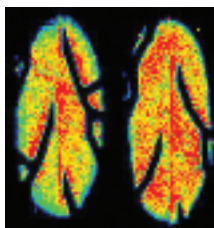


I VE GOT TO ADMIT, WHEN I WAS TOLD PIRELLI was going to put a bunch of journalists on bikes so we could test its new performance tire during Daytona Bike Week, my first thought was “I’m sure the party’s going to be great, but where the hell are we going to find some turns?”

My second thought was “They know what they’re doing, so I guess they’ve got something up their sleeve.” (Okay, my real second thought was “Hey, not my problem!”)

Thankfully for all of us, the Pirelli team really did have an ace up its sleeve. No, they didn’t build a track full of twisties for us. Florida’s still only got on and off ramps as far as turns are concerned. The ace is that even without twisties to ride, you can feel the difference between the stock Dunlops that H-Ds come with and Pirelli’s Night Dragon line of performance tires. Having just ridden to Daytona from Connecticut on a stock Dyna, the feel of Dunlops on lots of different road surfaces (bumps, dips, holes, and steel-decked bridges) was still fresh in my mind (over 1,300 miles will do that, you know).

During the party, we were given an in-depth presentation by Senior Vice President Guglielmo Fiocchi detailing the research and technology that went into designing and producing this new line of tires. We were also told that Pirelli’s aim with the Night Dragon is to offer an aggressive performance tire for the H-D market. Pirelli knows there are lots of H-D riders who like to push their bikes as hard as they can, and they need a tire that can stay with them. During the presentation we also saw a video that showed how well the Dragon channels water away from the tire’s contact patch. Pirelli had its test bikes ride over a thick section of glass, so they could film from underneath to show what happens. (A still shot is to the right). But as impressive as all that was, I was reserving judgment until the next day when we



hit the road, and I could feel for myself how the Night Dragons performed.

My first series of tests was to hit every bump I could find, which had me thinking that the Dragons did feel better than the Dunlops. But maybe I was mistaken. Maybe I was not being objective enough. What I needed was a bump in the road that I knew was the same as bumps I’ve hit many a time on a stock H-D. That’s when I saw a row of road reflectors. Having run over many of these when just screwing around, I knew exactly how they felt on Dunlops! After rolling over a few rows of them, I was positive the Dragons absorbed road irregularities much better than the stock rubbers.

The next test was to whip the bike from side to side in my lane, since I had no turns to blast through. Here again, the Dragons felt much more sure-footed than the Dunlops.

The last test was the clincher for me and a number of other test riders: a steel-decked bridge. Anyone who’s been riding for any length of time knows how a bike gets squirrely on this road surface. Not so with the Dragons! The Pirellis handled the bridge so well I was tempted to take my hands off the bars and see what the bike would do. Not being a complete idiot, I didn’t do that. But the bike was very stable on the Pirellis, especially compared to stock H-D rubber.

At this point, I guess I could tell you about the technology involved in making these tires, but you can find that and much more on Pirelli’s web site (www.PirelliMoto.com) if you’re interested. As I see it, other than eating free food, my job after this launch is to tell you what you can’t get via a web site or advertising: these tires really do handle road irregularities much better than the stock Dunlops.

Now I’ve just got to get a set of them out on some Connecticut twisties! AIM