

Despite being designed, developed and engineered by an illustrious manufacturer, MV Agusta's lightweights were built to mobilise the masses. It was a role they performed with style, says ***Richard Rosenthal.***

Mobilising The Work Force

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARTYN BARNWELL



Rosey and Gordon Hallett take respite from the heat to discuss the merits of the Turismo Lusso.

A year ago I visited Gordon Hallett's garden shed to view his latest purchase. The subject was an MV Agusta in kit form. Looking near complete but seriously dismantled, Gordon claimed he'd have it ready for a TCM feature within a year. Although neither of us knew anything of the parts, situation for older MV Agusta singles, or even the mechanical state of this one, I 'booked my ride.'

In March last, as Britain was climbing out of one of the wettest winters I can remember, a call came from Mr Hallett. "MV's ready, just waiting for the completion of the licensing documentation, when are you coming?" Less than nine months start to finish, time which included work, a trip to the IOM, seasonal breaks and the maintenance of a small fleet of tasty motorcycles. Not a record but not bad either. "Tried it?" I asked. "Yes." "And?" "At best, average," came the reply. " Still, you can judge for yourself."

The MV Agusta kit arrived on these shores from France about two years ago in semi rebuilt trim. It was yet another motorcycle for which much of the hard work had been completed, but the project had faltered at the final hurdle. The wheels had new rims and spokes, the engine purported to have been overhauled and all the paintwork was fresh. Unfortunately the poor little motorcycle had been transported and stored without a care for its well being. With a lot of TLC the kit would have made an acceptable, but tatty, motorcycle. Another choice was a second full rebuild to return it to gleaming condition. Gordon enjoys restoration as much as riding so a scruffy roadster was not an option.

Initial research indicated that the 175cc engine included in the kit was probably not the original and Gordon feels it had never been fitted to the machine, but at least it was of the correct type.

Doubtful of the internal condition of the engine despite the claims of a rebuild, Mr Hallett took the lid off. The ohv 175cc unit had been rebored, some valve work undertaken and was very tidy inside. The gears and clutch worked well and the bottom end whether original or renewed was in tip top order. Other than cosmetic work the unit was re-assembled as it was.

Sadly the wheels were another story. The hubs wore the grime and marks of years of toil on dusty Italian roads and



Beautifully restored Dell 'Orto carburettor was a lucky autojumble find.



It doesn't look too bad, but close inspection revealed plenty of work would be required to bring the kit of parts up to owner Gordon Hallett's exacting standards.



The MV's ohv engine is fairly typical of contemporary Italian lightweight practice.



Transfer on tank proclaims MV's string of race track successes.

hadn't been cleaned or polished prior to the 'rebuild' overseas. Damp storage had corroded the new spokes. Gordon carries out his own wheel building so without hesitation dismantled to wheels, cleaned and polished the alloy hubs and rebuilt the wheels using the existing rims but with stainless steel spokes supplied by Central Wheel Components (01675 462264).

No kit of secondhand motorcycle parts is ever complete. Missing fasteners are no problem for new can be sourced – or like Gordon you can make your own. Scrap stainless steel turned, threaded and polished as on this MV will continue to look smart for years to come. But what if a machine like this Turismo Lusso – rare in the UK – has the carburettor is missing? Although Dell'Orto UB 20S instruments may be common in Italy they aren't this side of the English Channel. Contacts in Italy may help, or the owners club might throw up good ideas – or like Gordon you could just be lucky. His was an autojumble find.

Following usual practice the tinware and painted fitments were scraped clean, prepared and painted with numerous coats of cellulose in the home workshop. But a new departure for Gordon was having the frame with its unusual banana shaped rear suspension mounts powder coated.

Paintwork complete, assembly was straight forward, although Gordon would like to record a special thanks for technical help from MV Agusta expert Alan Elderton. After making a replacement wiring harness and control cables the MV was ready for its big day. Certainly, I've no major dramas to report here except that the gearchange takes some getting used to.

A full rebuild of any motorcycle uncovers some interesting manufacturing details and procedures. Although the telescopic inverted front fork legs are commonplace today they look unusual for the period, but the design is even more so. To save money only one is damped while the other simply has a compression spring but no machining for oil seals or even the filling of damping fluid.

The electrics take a little understanding too. A flywheel magneto supplies the sparks and charges the battery, which in turn operates the side/parking lights – ideal for town use, the owner's handbook claims. But the headlight is powered directly by separate lighting coils incorporating, 'chokes,' which increase in resistance as the engine runs faster and the voltage rises. It's an unusual – and probably unnecessarily complicated – arrangement but, when I tested the set-up, it worked fine.

"Your turn first," announces Gordon as we ready ourselves for the road. "I want



Upside down forks are only damped on one side, yet work fine.



Despite Gordon Hallett's protestation that the little MV is "...average at best," it looks an absolute treat. Italian style is hard to beat.

CHALK AND CHEESE

Mention MV Agusta to any 30-something motorcycle enthusiast and their minds will flash back to the glamorous days of the dashing red fire engines of the Grand Prix circus. Giacomo Agostini always seemed to be World Champion on his multi cylinder four-strokes – before he defected to Yamaha. Remember Phil Read's heroic stand against the rising two-stroke onslaught in 1973/4. Or Mike Hailwood's four consecutive 500cc titles in the Sixtie. The common denominator? MV Agusta of course.

Cast your mind or imagination back another decade. Englishman Cecil Sandford set MV Agusta off on the World Championship trail with his 1952 125cc crown. Carlo Ubbiali and John Surtees were the big players of the period while Tarquinio Provini chipped in with the 1958 250cc title. As Surtees moved to car racing the door was opened, albeit briefly, for Rhodesian Gary Hocking to become a double World Champion in 1961, before he too attempted to pursue a four wheeled racing career before losing his life.

In the space of less than 30 years, MV Agusta motorcycles won over 4000 national and international races.

Yet apart from the aero operations MV's bread and butter trade of road going two wheelers, were, until the late Sixties, almost divorced form the GP world. The very manufacture of these, often attractive, commuter motorcycles, scooters and three wheel vans by MV Agusta almost defies belief. For if we are to believe all that we're told, the company was controlled and run as a hobby rather than a serious commercial enterprise by the titled, wealthy Agusta family.

A hobby MV may have been – and certainly Count Domenico had a passion for and certainly felt at home within racing – hard cash counted too. Agusta (MV Agusta) along with Macchi (Aermacchi) and Caproni (Capriolo), were big Italian companies who had supplied all manner of aviation goodies to their national government during WWII. At the end of the war, these companies were on the losing side. Their aero business had gone and they needed work. Motorcycles were a way forward and the masses of Italy needed mobilising.

Based in the small village of Verghera from where the company took its name – Meccanica Verghera – MV Agusta exhibited motorcycles for the first time at the first post-WWII Milan Show in December 1946. The initial 98cc two-stroke model, was followed in a year later by a 123.5cc version. MV had taken a long hard look at the DKW RT100 made by Europe's leading two-stroke manufacturer.

Racing and especially 125cc racing was popular in Italy. Logically, MV developed sports and racing versions of their 125cc two-stroke and they enjoyed many national successes including in the legendary Milan-Taranto races of 1950-2. Attracted to the glamour of racing, Count Agusta entered 'works' machines and riders in the 125cc World Championship class, which started in 1949. The dohc FB Mondials were a class apart from the MV two-strokes. Count Domenico didn't enjoy being second best and set about upping the game. It was a move, which led to two separate channels of development within the factory – road and racing.

MV Agusta secured the services of Piero Remor and Arturo Magni from Gilera and they were given a two-fold brief. Firstly, to design and develop a 500cc four cylinder racer and then a 125cc version – which was in effect one cylinder of the four. Success wasn't immediate but in 1952 Cecil Sandford turned the tables in favour of MV. Soon private owners demanded pukka 125cc racers and MV obliged, but with a sohc version instead of copies of the works dohc models. The over the counter racers were good but not as good as the factory racers – just how Count Domenico wanted it

On the road going front, MV Agusta added four stroke models to the range. They were attractive, well built, reliable and like rival machines ,were adequate performers. But they bore little resemblance to the race motorcycles nor could they be converted to perform like a factory racer. Again, just as the Count wished. Prompted by the retirement (for family business reasons) of nine times World Champion Carlo Ubbiali in 1960, MV Agusta withdrew from the 125/250cc classes of racing. The machines were retained by the factory and 'works' dohc MV lightweights never raced again in the theatre of World Championship racing.

When John Surtees won his second 500cc World Crown in 1958 he started an MV stranglehold on the 'Blue Riband' Championship which remained unbroken until former MV star Giacomo Agostini and his Yamaha two-stroke wrested the title away from Phil Read's MV Agusta.

From the late Fifities, MV Agusta began to lose its share of the utility motorcycle market and many felt the company was being kept alive with help from the aero division. However racing success was a good advert for MV's engineering prowess. The company was reluctant to build larger road going machines, partly due to expense and partly some felt because the Count didn't want 'wannabe' racers buying a road model, converting it to racer trim and giving the works MVs a run for their money.

When the company finally relented, the first offering was not a sports motorcycle but a 600cc four cylinder shaft drive tourer and it was not until 1970 that the first sportster, the dohc four cylinder dohc 750S was launched – again with shaft drive! Well you can't be too careful can you? A succession of superb, but oh so expensive, transverse dohc four sports machines followed in a move which, for the first time, indicated the race and road paths were finally getting closer.

Unfortunately although the machines sold despite their high price, they were neither selling quick enough, nor being produced at a high enough volume, to make any real profit. A new generation of smaller twins fared no better. With the death of Count Domenico in 1971, the acquisition of a controlling 51 per cent share in the company by the Italian government – who regarded MV Agusta as a leading defence contractor due to its helicopter production – and the end of GP race team in 1976, things didn't look healthy on the two wheel front. Motorcycle production ended in 1977. New models were available until 1981 from stock, but none of us would ever find out how close to a racer the road models could become and sadly the 'Superbike' racing arena of the big four-strokes hadn't quite arrived. ■



Beautiful castings and detail work mark the MV as a quality product.



Rosey reckons performance is roughly on a par with a well sorted Cub.

to know your first impression of it." Petrol on, flood carburettor and insert headlight mounted key to make the ignition circuit. One kick and the MV spins into life – clean, crisp and with an exhaust note rival manufacturers would kill for. The rest of the motorcycle may, as I had earlier been warned, be 'average' but easy starters are always a winner with me. The MV never disappointed on the starting front during my day with it.

If starting the Turismo Lusso is easy then operating the gearchange pedal isn't. Worked by a rocking pedal with a span far greater than even my size tens, it exhibited a novelty I had never before encountered. When changing up or down, the lever rotates marginally forwards or backwards, never coming to rest in the same position twice. This apart the change is secure and crunch free, while clutch action is light and smooth.

As we venture onto twisting country lanes, thoughts of lop sided fork action and dodgy handling due to the apparently unbalanced damping arrangements flood my mind. Never, ever, form an opinion before you try! The inverted front fork steers quickly and precisely, absorb all the bumps Hertfordshire roads can muster and inspires the sort of confidence any good Italian lightweight can. The rear end follows the front as if on rails.

There's nothing startling to report on the braking front, both work well and have no nasty habits. Soon, I'm at ease with the stopping power available and promptly forget the brakes – always a good sign. I certainly remember all those which grab, creak or leave you with the 'go faster' sensation – often as wake at night in a cold sweat.

Although this is a small motorcycle, at six feet tall I don't feel out of place or cramped, but wouldn't enjoy a 200 mile ride on that seat – it's far too narrow!

Mechanically quiet, the engine isn't the race bred unit one could rightfully expect from MV Agusta. Instead, it's a pleasant flexible engine which equals the performance of a Triumph Tiger Cub or Terrier, and I imagine is equally miserly on fuel. It slogs well on hills, doesn't easily give up even when the going gets tough and spins smoothly through its rev range with only the very slightest hint of vibration. It's an able motorcycle, which was capable of mobilising the Italian work force in the Fifties, without fuss, drama or excitement – exactly the role it was intended for.

Yet this MV Agusta 175 Turismo Lusso, like the Triumph Tiger Cub/Terrier, has areal plu. Style. Elegant lines, a clean tidy engine, lots of polished aluminium and a superb colour finish makes it a lightweight you will be chuffed to be seen on. Unfortunately for MV Agusta, most of their rivals in Italy were also turning out stylish well-engineered lightweights too. ■

Fact File

1955 MV Agusta 175 Turismo Lusso

Engine type	air cooled ohv single cylinder four-stroke
Capacity	172.4cc
Bore and stroke	59.5mm x 62mm
Carburettor	Dell'Orto UB20S
Ignition	flywheel magneto
Transmission	gear primary drive, four speed gearbox, chain final drive
Electrics	6 volt
Suspension	inverted telescopic fork front, swinging arm rear
Tyres	2.50 x 19in front, 3.00 x 19in rear
Brakes	180mm (7in) sls drum front, 150 (6in) sls drum rear)
Wheelbase	1346mm (53in)
Seat height	813mm (32in)
Weight	110kg (242lb)
Top speed	100km (62.5mph)

Club Contact MV Agustsa Owners Club of Great Britain, Richard Boshier, 27, Melbourne Road, High Wycombe, Bucks HP13 7HE.
Italian Motorcycle Owners Club, John Riches, 10, Wapenham Road, Abthorpe, Towcester, Northants.



Unusual rear frame construction is another typical Latin styling cue.