

On Two Wheels

58
38p



THE INSIDE STORY OF MOTOR CYCLING

MV Agusta 350 Sport

To those people who want value for money, the little MV Agusta 350S may appear to be out of the question: quite frankly, you can buy a decent 750 bike for the same amount of cash. However, that would be missing the point of what MVs are all about. The chances are that the motor cycle side of Count Agusta's manufacturing empire makes little money, the Bell-Agusta helicopter factory profits and the Count's passion for his 'fire engines' keeping it above water. Why do they build bikes then, even at such high prices? Quite simply, there are people around who would buy MVs at any price even if they were bad bikes. The 350S is not a bad bike, however, and is delightful to ride fast.

The basis of the machine is a simple pushrod parallel twin which produces 34bhp, revs safely to 10,000rpm and shakes and vibrates like hell. Starting the beast, too, is a difficult and sometimes dangerous affair. Turning the engine over is so hard that an 11 stone rider can put all his weight on the left-hand pedal and the engine compression will hold him up. After a few hefty kicks and some spitting and banging from the carburettors, the engine will fire and clatter into life, and keep clattering until the oil warms. Performance is good by any standards and exceptional for a 350 with its top speed of 103mph and 15.1secs standing start quarter mile time; fuel consumption is good, too, for we averaged just on 60mpg over our test. The right-foot gearchange with its one-up-four-down pattern takes some getting used to but was quite smooth in use, except trying to find neutral at rest.

The chassis is exceptional with an uncommonly rigid single downtube frame, three powerful Scarab discs and thin alloy wheels with Metzeler tyres. Ignoring the fact that a pillion can be accommodated at a squeeze, you get astride the Giorgetto Giugiaro-styled

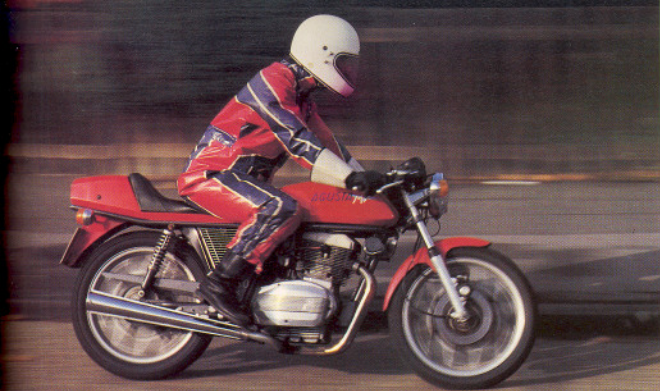
bike and lean forward to the low set clip-on bars. The light switches and indicators are some way from the hand grips so they do not get in the way, and from that point on everything feels just right. Ride crazily and throw the bike into corners and it will take it, but treat it right and ride smoothly and the MV will get quicker and quicker, the cornering being entirely dictated by the

not inconsiderable grip of the tyres. That is how it should be, for handling is not something you think about with this bike: it is the rider and the tyres, and nothing in between to conceal the deficiencies of either.

To make the MV 350S a little different and enhance its aesthetic qualities, a full dolphin fairing is available. It is not as efficient as BMW's design but it makes hard riding

more comfortable and gives the rider the looks as well as the performance of a racer. There is also a sticker on the bike with 37 stars which states that MV Agusta have won that many World Championships; the rider somehow remembers that every time he banks low into a corner. After that, a 'decent 750' seems remarkably poor value in comparison!





Engine

Air-cooled, four-stroke, twin-cylinder. 63mm (2.48in) bore \times 56mm (2.20in) stroke = 349cc (21.29 cu in). Maximum power (DIN) 34bhp at 8500rpm. Light-alloy cylinder block and heads. Compression ratio 9.5:1. 2 main bearings. 2 valves per cylinder operated, via pushrods and rockers, by a single side-mounted camshaft. 2 Dell'Orto carburetors.

Transmission

Wet-multi-plate clutch and five-speed gearbox. Ratios – 1st 2.87, 2nd 1.91, 3rd 1.33, 4th 1.06, 5th 0.94:1. Chain drive to rear wheel.

Suspension

Front-telescopic fork with springs and dampers. Rear – swinging arm with coil-spring damper units.

Brakes

Double disc front, and disc rear.

Wheels and Tyres

2.50in \times 18in front, 3.50in \times 18in rear.

Weight

352lb (160kg).

Tank capacity

4.17gals (19 litres).

Performance

Maximum speed 103mph. Acceleration standing start quarter mile 15.1secs. Fuel consumption approximately 60mpg.

