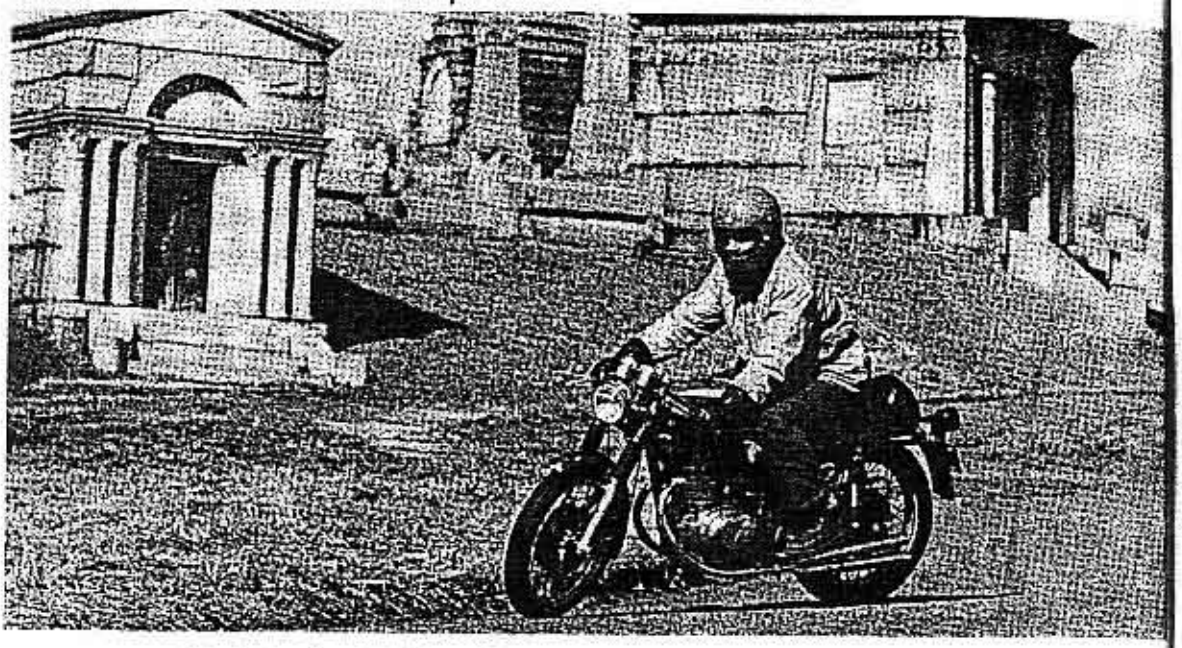


MV 350 B ELETTRONICA

Italian motorcycles, like Italian clothes or Italian sports cars or Italian anything else, are all painted red and cost a lot of money. The MV 350 is no exception.

By Steve duPont Jr.

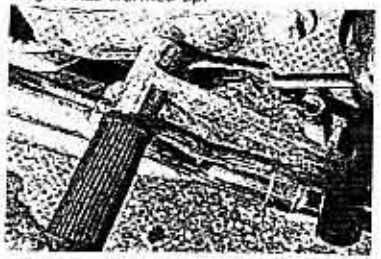
Daytona is always an extravaganza. Bikes and gear are jammed into the town in incredible numbers, though probably not in as many numbers as at Loudon or the Isle of Man. Last year there was also a display at the Jai' Alai ground that involved the people from MV. If you go (or, by the time this reaches the stands, have been) to Daytona, you will find MV Agusta back again with more wares; in fact, their Milan show was transported. In addition, Phil Read will be there and will show his big racer off on the race course if the race committee will allow it. What makes this event significant is that MV has recently gone through a major upheaval, for the Count Agusta, until his recent death, was the guiding force behind the company, and in particular the motorcycle concern was his baby, run originally in part to finance his racing interest. Agusta is primarily a helicopter concern, having an affiliation of sorts with our own Bell Helicopters. Fortunately for those of us who care whether or not MV motorcycles disappear from the face of the earth, the company has decided to continue racing and producing bikes. Indeed, they have decided to expand their operation (which until now has been absorbed almost completely by the European market) to try to sell bikes in this country.

According to Chris Garville of Commerce Overseas Corp. (the helicopter parts distribution arm of the Agusta company that is distributing the bike in this country), sales will begin on the East Coast and work their way westward as facilities and supplies allow. For several years there have been at least two dealers in the country affiliated with MV - Ed LaBelle's Cycle Engineering in Philadelphia and Jim Cotherman's operation somewhere in the wilds of Illinois. Since I knew that Ed owned at least a couple of these bikes and had one for sale, I paid him a visit.

The motorcycle we tested for this article is Ed's own bike, a '69 350 B Sport. It is stock except for the mufflers. I have included a photo of his other machine, a '74, so you can see the changes yourself. The only major difference is in the quality of the frame construction. The '73 is one of the bikes that MV showed at Daytona last year. Ed has not serviced it and will not until it is sold.

Our initial favorable impression of the little twin increased when we rode it. As a photographer, I was particularly aware of the visual simplicity of the design, and on this point I was somewhat less impressed than I thought I would be. On the other hand, my cohort in this escapade, to use her own words, found it "lithe, pretty, sleek and

5. The shift lever and shifting linkage on the right side. Alloy pieces are well finished and the shifting is very smooth once the engine has warmed up.



sensation, as the engine approaches six grand, of a very rapidly building thrashing emanating from the powerplant, yet vibration never really becomes a bother; one just thinks that it will. What is significant about the running of this bike is the apparent camminess of the engine, which is really not that wild. First gear is fairly tall and the bike does not really want to get underway at less than 3,000 rpm. Even at cruise the machine prefers to run at engine speeds in excess of this figure. But at these speeds the running of the bike is very smooth with no lurching or snatching, and rolling on the throttle produces plenty of acceleration. This leaves a 4,500 rpm wide powerband.

As with most finer Italian bikes, what makes this one special for me (and there is something about almost every bike that somehow makes it special) is the handling. My weight, about 150 pounds, seems to be perfect for the suspension the way it is; that is fortunate, for the rear springs are not adjustable. They didn't ever bottom, though. The curious thing is that even the heavier people I know who have ridden it rave about the handling, even people as heavy as 175-180 pounds. For me that ride was very smooth, even softish. The suspension units absorbed every little bump, and the dampers did a nice job of keeping the tires on the ground, even on pavement that was cracked and strewn with broken-up asphalt. Tire slide was never a problem either. The only time the bikes got at all twitchy was when we rode across hard, bumpy and melting ground. (Like a road racer, the steering arc is limited.) The response was spontaneous and unanimous in this case: no one felt the bike likes being off the road; when it is, the rider's feeling is a very unsure one. No one tipped over, though. On pavement the sensation is just the opposite. The faster you go, the more sure-footed the bike feels, the smoother it runs and the better the cornering is. A steering damper of the friction variety is fitted, but the need was not felt. MV is primarily known in this country as a racing name, and if you want to know how nice a racer can feel compared to some of the bikes manufacturers pawn off as street bikes, this is the bike to find out with. With the clip-ons and the low seat, the center of gravity is low and the bike does not lean excessively in corners. Suspension travel was adequate to absorb every bump I hit but didn't let the bike pitch fore and back, a problem I note most on the BMWs with their eight inches of fork travel. Of course, this is a small bike, as you can see from the photos. The wheelbase is only 1,290mm or about 50.8 inches, which is quite short. It weighs only a little over 300 pounds, though it looks and feels smaller. What impressed me most after riding it is the ease with which this little wonderbike can be flicked back and forth in a chicane. The first time through the corners may be a little rough because you are charging harder than you should be on a road you don't know. But on subsequent runs my only reaction was to wonder what all the fuss had been about. These corners aren't sharp at all!

If you do a lot of riding two-up, however, this is probably not the bike for you. The second person seems to settle the rear of the machine way down. The short seat, which is so nice with just one aboard, gets a little crowded, especially for the driver, who is happier sitting a little back from the tank because of the rear-sets and the knee-notches. Most likely the touring model, which we have not seen, would be a better choice if suitable springs were fitted on the rear. We did not test the bike two-up for this

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE

Type	4-stroke, OHV, parallel twin
Displacement	349cc
Bore & Stroke	63mm by 56mm
BHP @ rpm	35 (SAE) @ 7650
Advertised c.r.	9.5:1
Cam Timing	
intake opens	43 degrees BTDC
intake closes	68 degrees BBDC
exhaust opens	63 degrees BBDC
exhaust closes	42 degrees ATDC
overlap	85 degrees
Carburetion	(2) Dell'Orto 24mm
Overall gear ratios	
First	NA
Second	NA
Third	NA
Fourth	NA
Fifth	NA

RUNNING GEAR

Frame	double-cradle tube steel
Rake & trail	NA
Suspension	telescopic forks (f) shocks/swingarm (r)
Tires	
front	2.75 by 18-inch
rear	3.25 by 18-inch
Brakes	
front	double-leading-shoe drum
rear	single-leading-shoe drum
Electrics	electronic ignition 12 V, 6 AH battery with charging alternator

GROSS MEASUREMENTS

Weight	375 lbs (wet)
Wheelbase	52.5 inches
Seat height	29 inches
Ground clearance	6 inches
Handlebar width	30.5 inches
Fuel capacity	

COMFORT RATING

1. Vibration	7
2. Suspension	7
3. Noise level	8
4. Seat	7
5. Handlebars	6
6. Start mech	8
7. Controls	9
8. Stand	8
9. Shift mech.	9
10. Switches and Instr.	7
Overall rating	76

PERFORMANCE

1/4 mile	NA
0 to 60	mph NA
top speed	105 mph

SUMMARY

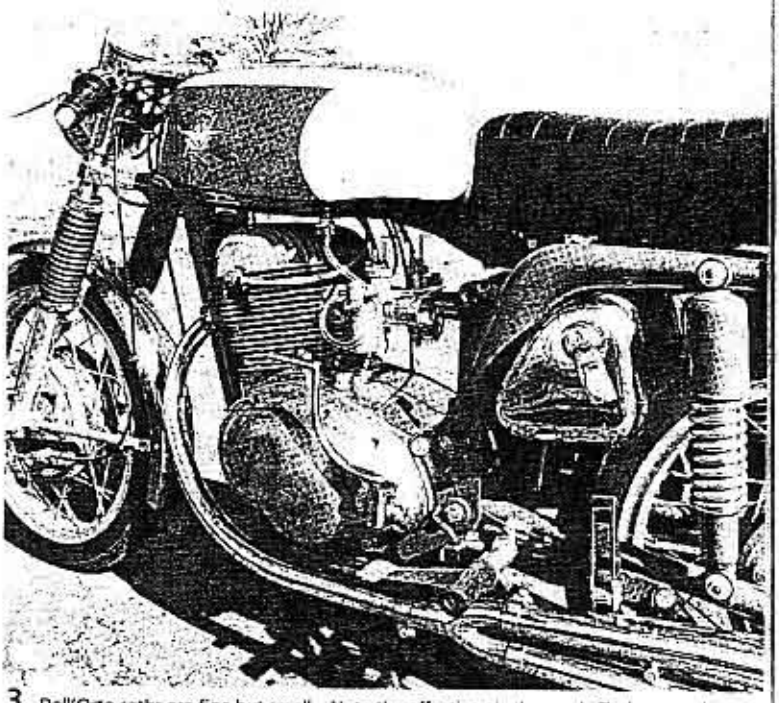
For the man who has to have something different. True exotica in a racy Italian package with superb handling and fine balance. The brakes are good to very good, but the power only moderate. Bring your checkbook.

fast." Though the bike is quite small, she felt it was "not puny but trim." What more can I say? Orange and white are the predominant colors, and while they lose some of their drama on black and white film, they really are quite a lovely combination. Also, while the machine does not appear complicated mechanically, and in fact is not, all of the visible work is of the highest quality. In particular, the newer machine is very carefully finished, and the frame appeared more substantial. Items such as the shifter and the rear brake lever are integral with the rear-sets and well-designed and executed on both bikes.

The parallel twin engine displaces 349cc, with a bore and stroke of 63mm by 56mm. With a compression ratio of 9.5 to 1, the factory claims an almost modest horsepower output of 32 SAE. The rpm maximum is at 7,650, resulting in a piston speed of about 2,784 feet per minute at the red line. By today's standards this is very safe.

Two smallish Dell'Orto carbs - UB 24 B2's - with velocity stacks and no air cleaners do a nice job of metering the fuel mixture. The people at the distributor are aware of the lack of adequate filters, and in fact have filters on their own machines. Hopefully the new incoming bikes will be equipped with them. Since these are the earlier round slide carbs, there is no problem with the too-strong return springs. I am not familiar enough, unfortunately, with the Dell'Orto line to know why the square slide unit was introduced. The chokes are on top of the slide cylinders and are operated by pushing the plungers down.

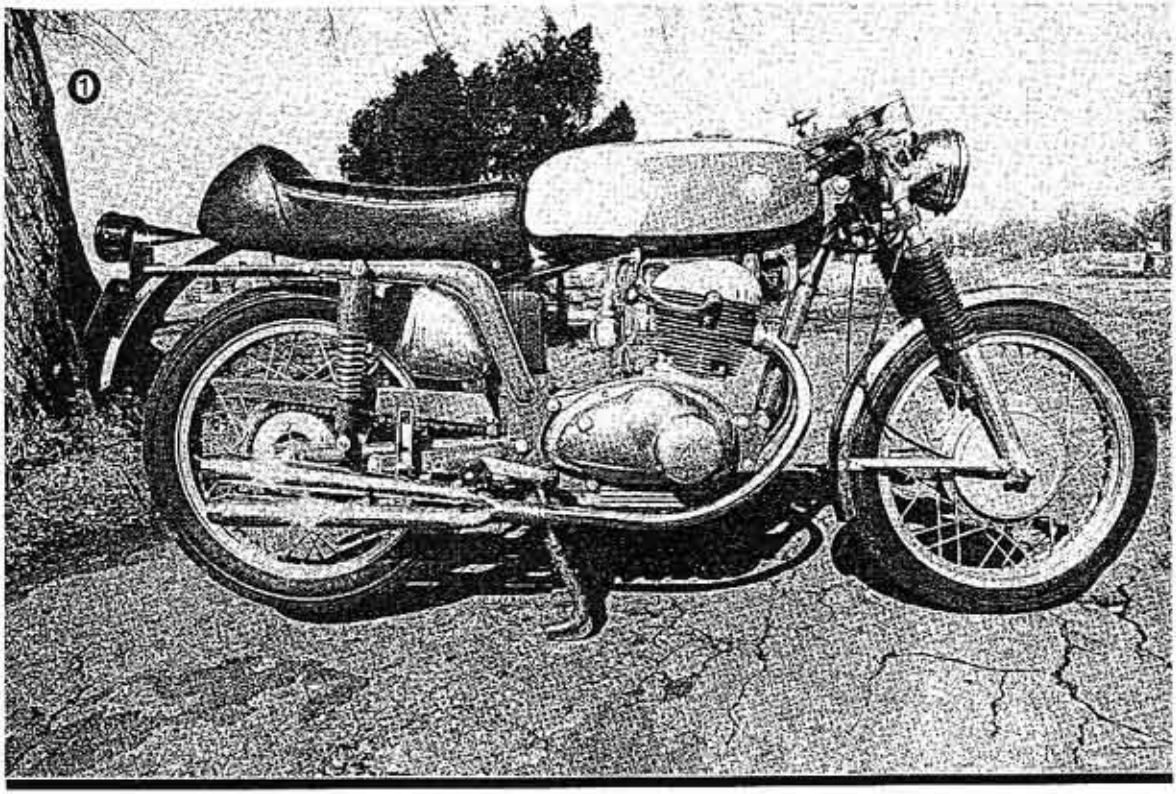
As you may be suspecting by now, the 350 Sport is not a Yamaha RD as far as power and acceleration are concerned. Yet the machine is capable of brisk performance and easy and smooth cruising in the 60-to-80 mph range, with a claimed 105 mph tops. There is the

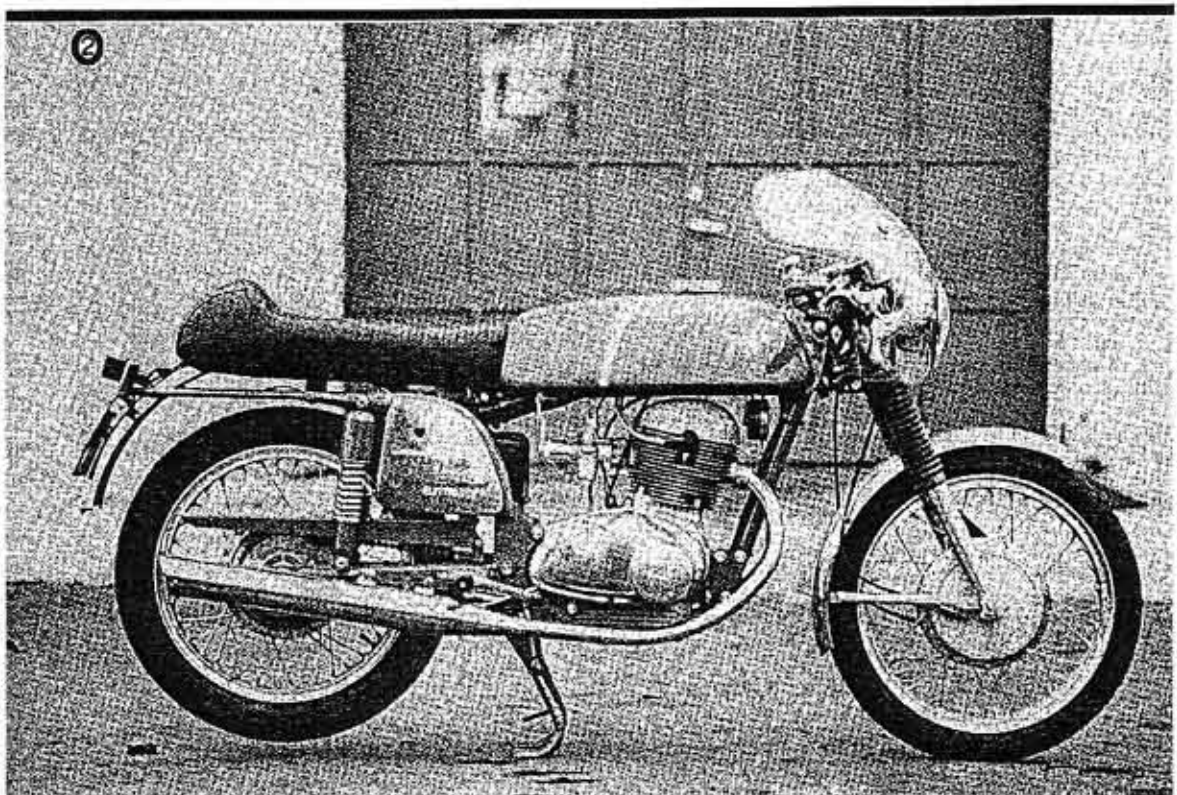


3. Dell'Orto catbs are fine but small. Note the effective air cleaners! Chokes are plungers in tops of slide cylinders.



4. Tomaselli clip-ons and the standard Italian light and horn switches are very comfortable. The instruments are calibrated in metric units. The paint finish is very nice.





1. A very straightforward machine: clean and simple, especially the engine cases. Only the mufflers are not stock.

2. This is the actual '74 Elettronica B, only slightly refined from our near-stock test machine. The differences are the small wind screen, paint scheme, seat cover and tail light.

reason. In addition, we were surprised that the weight on the hands was so light. There was no problem, as sometimes happens with extreme rear-sets and clip-ons, with fatiguing knee-clench, either.

This model is known as the 350 B Elettronica because it is equipped with an electronic ignition system. No problems were experienced with this ignition; in fact, the faster the engine was run, the better it seemed to go. In addition, like the Moto Morini we recently tested, this system requires no maintenance because there are no points to be adjusted or wear out.

While we are talking about adjustments, let us mention that the rockers are done by screw-type adjusters on their push-rod ends.

The crankshaft, which is a preassembled unit, has a pinion on each end - on the right side for the camshaft and on the left for the gear-driven clutch, which has 10 plates in an oil mist. There are five spring pressers and a central screw adjuster, as in common practice. The clutch pinion gears are helical cut for quietness, and the engine is quiet mechanically. A five-speed transmission is at the rear of the crank in the same cases and shares the engine's oil. Shifting is by a drum-type cam and three forks. A large wire mesh filter and magnetic stud make up the crankcase drain.

Power is delivered to the rear wheel by a chain on the right side of the bike, and the rear hub is a standard drum unit with a silent-block shock absorber inside. The rear brake is a single leading shoe unit and does an extremely good job of stopping. It is operated by a cable from the left foot lever. The front brake is likewise a good brake unit, but it seems perhaps a little spirited. This may be fortunate, for while it does a fine job converting forward motion into calories, it is a difficult unit to lock up. I prefer a slightly harder - feeling front brake, though. This is a double leading shoe type, and both the front and the rear rims are of alloy.

The frame is the last major part of the machine that might be of interest to the reader. This is a curious combination of steel tubing and sheet steel used in a somewhat unique way. The backbone and the front downtube are of tubing, and the engine is held in front like a Ducati single is held, by two plates and two pairs of bolts. The plates are echoed at the rear of the engine but turn into hollow sheet steel sections that rise up to meet the rear of the backbone and continue rearward to support the seat and the shock absorbers. This unfamiliar yet conventional frame does a good job of keeping the bike aimed where you say, and appears to be reasonably light and simple.

Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the bike does not appear to be mechanically busy, and is designed in a straightforward and tried and true way. There is more than a little similarity between this bike and other small and middle displacement four-stroke Italian singles. Gears are used instead of primary chains, case mating surfaces don't leak oil (though most are vertically split cases) and gear-type oil pumps are almost always used. Most important, maintenance is minimized, because when most of your bikes are bought on a home market where one's hard-earned money goes for other things than 1,000-mile services, repeat sales are maximized when the bikes don't self-destruct.

The last thing that I want to comment on is the quality of the literature that MV packs in with each bike. This bike comes with an adequate owner's manual designed to help the owner prevent unhappy mechanical experiences. This isn't anything special, but there is also a parts list, and it is. It is complete with neat little exploded drawings of all the various assemblies of the bike, and the proper location of every part! What a boon that could turn out to be, both for ordering parts and assembling them.

There are, of course, rumors circulating about the new models to be introduced in the coming years. In order to gather some information to satiate my readers' tremendous appetite for knowledge, as well as my own, I gave Commerce Overseas a ring and talked with Chris Garville, who is in charge of the motorcycle operation. Some of MV's plans really set me back. Would you believe, for instance, a 350, based on this one but offering mags, disks and 40 horses for a whopping two grand? The bike exists but the price is not yet finalized. Or how about a super-sport 750 four, with the chain drive kit, for seven or eight thousand dollars! That would be for special order only, of course.

Actually, the new 350 was one of the incentives for writing this article. It is to be based on the bike that we rode, but will sport an all-new frame, new engine castings, larger carburetors and improved fuel flow for a top speed of 110 mph, in addition to the previously mentioned assets. Nevertheless, for two thousand dollars it had better be one hell of a 350!

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