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- BIG-BUCK BIG-INCH SPORTSTER
- LOW-BUCK ONE-OFF PANTAH
- UNIQUE MV TOURER
- 140-MPH AJS RACER

SPEED THRILLS
Even Up The Odds!



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WIN A DUCATI PASO

WILD THING

Distinctive in appearance if not the criticism its styling provoked, this 600 MV Agusta four first debuted in prototype form as far back as 1950 yet had to wait a further 17 years before being offered in Italy for public sale.

Within some circles the 600's release caused outrage and dismay, cries of 'Ugly!' and 'Why?' echoed world-wide with motorcyclists almost unanimous in their condemnation of the model's offered form, especially given the Italian factory's racing pedigree and then stranglehold on the World Championship crown.

Yet it was that very prestige Domenico Agusta sought not to relinquish (along with control of machines racing under his banner) when designing this grand tourer with specifications almost certain to frustrate most privateer aspirations.



Still, this MV's ultimate guise fair bristled with pace-setting innovation: one of the first modern motorcycles to offer disc braking (albeit cable-operated and no contest against contemporary four-leading-shoe drums) and electric starting and, in preceding Honda's CB750 Four, this 600 MV Agusta was indeed the first of the new across-the-frame in-line fours and was among only a small handful of bikes fitted with shaft drive in its day.

MORLEY MORLEY discovers something very different deep in the Adelaide Hills.

Visually, the DOHC power-unit looked to be lifted almost intact from the works racer even if its resulting performance failed to underscore that parentage. We had to wait another decade before the Count addressed that point!

Bore and stroke measures 58 × 56 mm with the four forged high-dome pistons contained in separate cast-alloy cylinders canted 20 degrees forward from vertical, while the head remained a one-piece casting with cams driven by a set of three matched straight-cut timing gears positioned in the centrally-situated timing tunnel. Valve-lash was adjusted using shims placed under buckets and above each valve stem.

The 600 employed only two carburettors (whereas the racer had four) and 24 mm Dellortos at that compared with the prototypes' more promising 27 mm units, which in turn perhaps contributed to *Cycle World* recording a modest top speed on test of 99.3 mph. Ignition is 12 volt battery/coil sparked by a German Bosch distributor, the unit housed vertically standing below the carburettors and fired by a single set of contact breaker points and condenser.

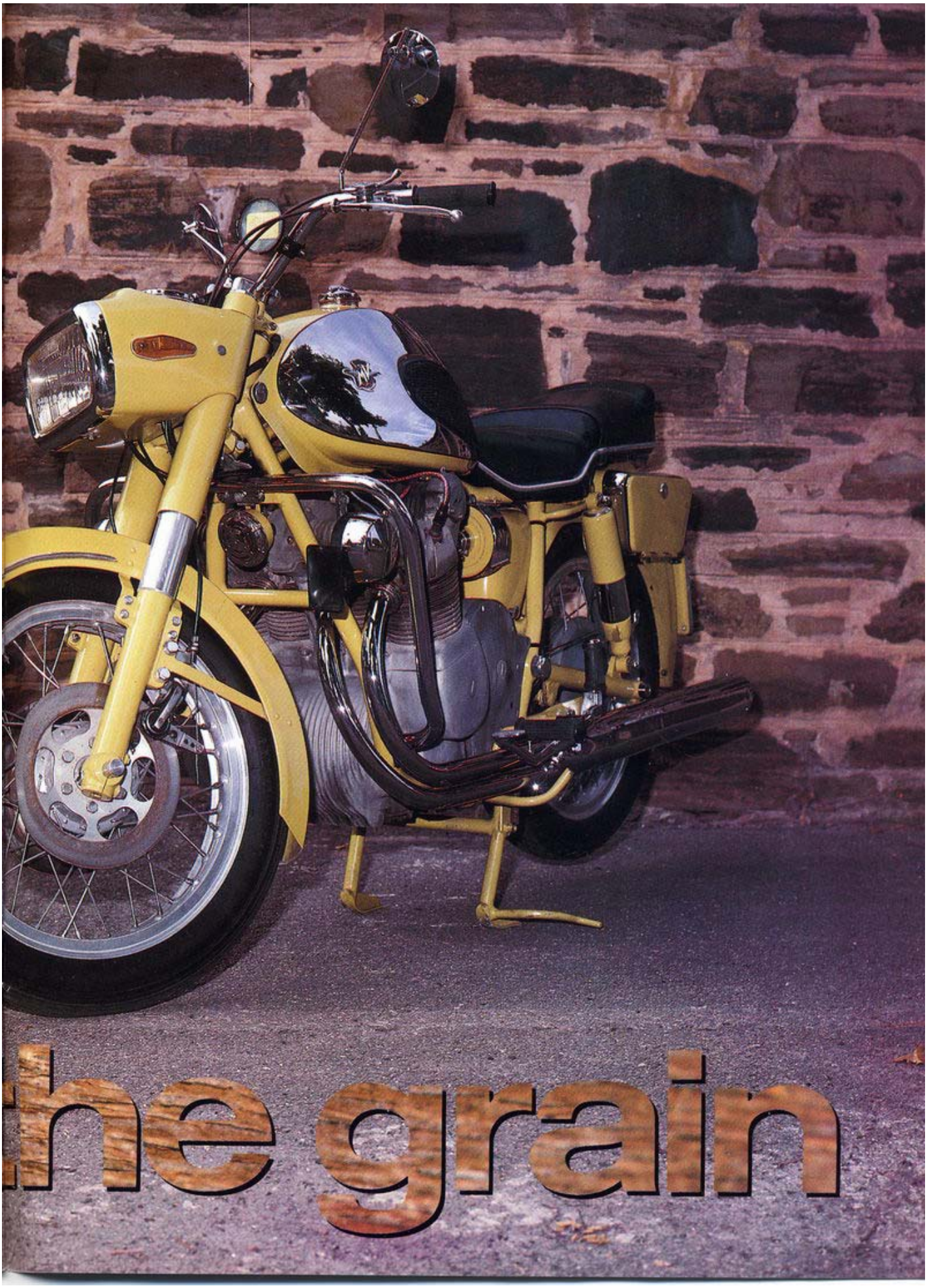
The crankcase followed standard MV practice being a one-piece casting almost to the base of the cylinders with a separate cast-alloy 'crank-holder' bolted across the top and upon which the built-up crankshaft sits supported by four inner and two side main bearings. Some three litres of oil were accommodated in the wet sump.

Conrods sport caged roller big-end bearings. At their other extreme, each gudgeon pin is located without bush or bearing.

And while this race-bred four could rev through to its 9000 rpm redline with



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he grain



maximum power showing 52 bhp at 8200, perhaps the bane of the 600 MV (at least to those who moved beyond its appearance) was its five-speed gearbox and a weakness attributed to the needle-roller bearing supporting fifth gear and the bevel-drive pinion in the gearbox cover. But if this problem did not so much manifest when the machine was used in its intended role, ridden hard it was sufficient to frustrate go-faster exploits and indeed was the reason Agostini retired from the 1972 Imola race aboard the works shaft-drive 750 racebike.

Yet as a touring machine the MV offered appointments aplenty including cow-horn handle bars, a comfortable seat and a 20-litre fuel tank that complemented the bike's meagre thirst. The machine could also accommodate riders tall or short and if the handling was not in accordance with its race-bred siblings there were still few alternatives on sale back then to match this MV's smoothness and ability to eat up the miles.

History records just 135 MV 600s constructed before their production ceased in 1972. Most were exported to be sold on the American market but the bike featured here was purchased brand new from Italy, landing here in 1967 and to this day remains owned and ridden by its original importer, Mr Kym Bonython of Adelaide.

Born in that city in 1920, Mr Bonython has been a motorcyclist for most of his life and despite the breadth of his experiences and advancing years, riding this MV remains "one of, if not the only remaining pleasure left in my life," he declared on the morning we went to see him.

Former World War Two RAAF pilot and training instructor, twenty-five-year lessee and promoter of (and competitor at) the Rowley Park Speedway in Adelaide, speed boat racer, lifelong jazz *aficionado* and entrepreneur responsible for bringing in many great musicians (and speedway racers) to this country as well as presenting the ABC's jazz programs for almost 40 years, Mr Bonython remains one of life's gentlemen.

In his autobiography, Mr Bonython's first motorcycle recollection was spurred by a childhood bid to make a pair of snakeskin shoes for his mother, an idea attempted with the aid of a dead snake and a tyre pump borrowed from the head gardener's ancient Indian outfit, the intention being to remove the creatures innards using the pump.

His first ride followed not long after when the friend of one of the house domestics pillioned the young Bonython on a Levis up to Eurilla. Kym was hooked from then on, gaining his first machine, a 175 cc Triumph, after his grandfather had unwisely promised "whatever I wanted" if he could top his class at school. The old man had hoped a Big Ben watch would suffice but Kym held him to his word when he won the bet!

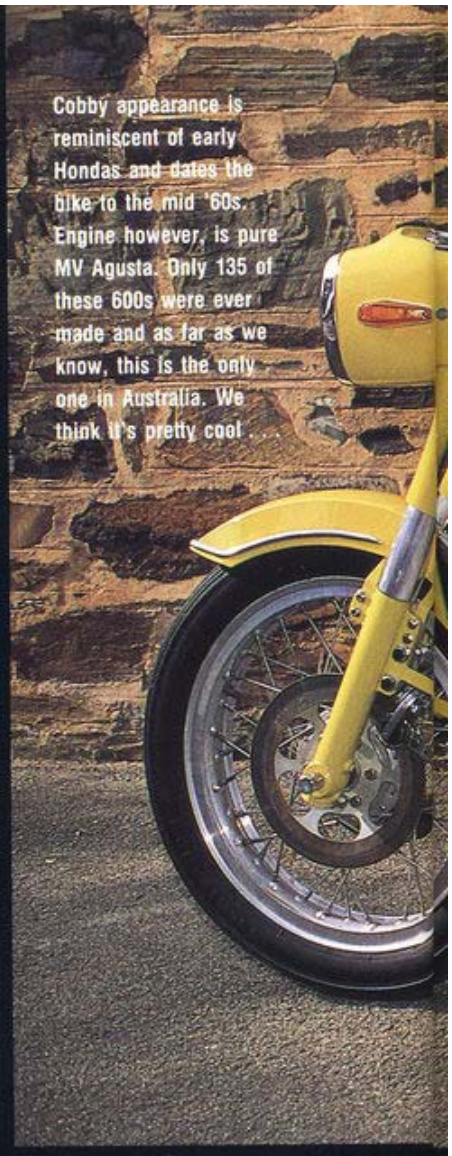
"Along with a friend who also had a Triumph we made the old Summit Road fairly buzz, but it wasn't long until I had my first (one of only two) motorcycle accidents riding down the then graveled Greenhill Road; I lost control rounding a curve on Mount Bonython and subsequently struck a fence post. The impact wrecked the front of the bike and threw me into the middle of the road, cut and bruised but miraculously unbroken.

"That fence post remained with a starboard list outlasting the Triumph by a good many years and almost the rider too had it not been destroyed by the Ash Wednesday fires, as was the family home, Eurilla," he added.

A Royal Enfield replaced the Triumph briefly, then came Mr Bonython's all-time favourite, a Zundapp that stayed with him throughout the war years. It was replaced at the end of hostilities with an army disposals BSA and in fairly quick succession two Vincent HRDs, a Bella scooter, a Honda, a Yamaha and finally his present bike, the MV Agusta.

"I have never owned any machine as long as the MV. While I was thinking of





Cobby appearance is reminiscent of early Hondas and dates the bike to the mid '60s. Engine however, is pure MV Agusta. Only 135 of these 600s were ever made and as far as we know, this is the only one in Australia. We think it's pretty cool.



buying one I read a roadtest in an American magazine and was captivated by the opening paragraph. It stated: 'The Agusta exhaust note can only be likened to the unique sound produced by the tearing of rich silk!' I repeated this to my friend Ross Luck who remarked 'Christ — every time you ride the bloody thing you'll think you're raping someone!"

As a dedicated motorcyclist Mr Bonython did not welcome the 'Seventies legislation that compelled riders to wear a crash helmet. "To an old enthusiast like me, half the joy of riding lies in the exhilaration and freedom so much reduced by the clamping confines of a helmet," he writes. Still, that very compulsion may in some part have provided the spur for the Christmas '73 painting of three nude figures on this gentleman's helmet by the well-known artist Louis James. The same helmet still accompanies him whenever he rides, although it may soon be replaced to be used purely as an art object on the mantlepiece.

Speaking of the MV he likened his current riding joys to the harmony found when watering the garden in that both provide private space and a time to run with one's own thoughts uninterrupted. He reports that his machine suits him best at 60 mph now, and that a reverse gear would be handy in view of the MV's worse-than-Ducati turning circle.

Living ten minutes from Adelaide's brilliant hills has its own rewards, but not on the day in 1982 when he was riding from the city to where he then lived at Mt Lofty.

"I was wearing, foolishly, a safari suit and on a corner below Eagle on the Hill the bike suddenly went out from under me. I'm not sure what caused it but the fact is I was catapulted over the handlebars, extremely fortunate that there was nothing in my way," he recalled.

"The bike wasn't badly hurt: the exhaust and handlebars were bent a bit and there were a few scratches here and there. I got nothing but gravel rash, black and blue all over and every time I'd sit down my clothes would stick to me. Even now I've got crumpled skin where . . .

"But people have asked me what it's like to have a by-pass. I had a triple by-pass operation in 1990. My standard answer is it's nothing in comparison to falling off the MV that day. Heart by-pass surgery is much over-rated and one fears it more than need be because a simple thing like a tumble off a bike when you're not prepared is much more painful, and I've tried to convey that to people who have been worrying about whether or not they'll have a by-pass operation," he concluded.

Spoken like a true enthusiast and we thank you, Kym Bonython, for your time and the opportunity to review this unique MV Agusta. ●