

THE 600cc MV AGUSTA FOUR

By building a version of his fabulous dohc racing engine into a touring frame, Count Agusta has created a unique, weird and wonderful collectors dream.

Motorcycle collectors, take heart. Here is one that will really add class to your flock. The MV four, after nearly thirty years on the international racing scene, is now available in limited numbers as a 600cc touring mount. It's big and it's unique and it's very, very sophisticated in a classic sort of way. The price you pay for a machine with one of the world's most famous engines is just shy of three grand—not very much for a collector's item.

CYCLE Magazine has been trying to lay its hands on the MV four ever since we heard it was going into production. That is, since we heard last. The MV four, it seems, has been dangled before the enthusiast's eye numerous times throughout the last twenty years, usually at the big European cycle shows, and always accompanied by much ballyhoo, and ooohing and aahing by an impressed public. Only later and with many regrets would Count Agusta disclose that his showpiece was not yet to be. When it was shown again the Spring of 1967, cycle enthusiasts were beginning to exhibit a certain wolf-wolf conditioning. But they stared and they wished, and our European correspondent sent the word.

Then to the surprise of everyone, MV cranked out 20 of the things and began giving people rides. In Italy you can buy one for something over two grand and you get a free week at the factory to learn how to ride and service the thing. A single unit somehow got to England where it was won in a contest by truckdriver Ernie Arundell. Meanwhile in the U.S. various alleged MV licensees kept promising the new four for test and then going out of business.

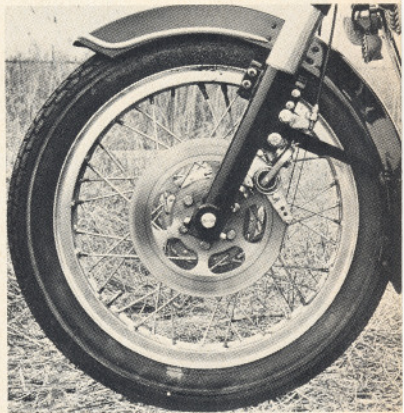
Finally one fine January day, our editorial phones began their familiar jangle and who should it be but Big Ed LaBelle from Philadelphia, offering us the MV four for test. Big Ed has been a name in an enormous variety of U.S. and Canadian racing for many years. He was Canadian National Road Racing Champ (500cc) for several years,

and he has placed variously in U.S. nationals (AMA) and in AAMRR races. He's raced the TT at the Isle of Man and built drag bikes and sold motorcycles in Philadelphia and generally kept his thumb in many motorcycle pots. Ed reported he's set up his own motorcycle engineering firm, one of whose activities will be to import and sell the MV four. His U.S. price \$2889.02.

So we leaped into our van one 20th morning and sped to Philadelphia, justly fired up over riding the world's second living production-line four-cylinder motorcycle (second to the Munch Mammoth). After meeting Big Ed and staring dumbly at the monstrous machine, we headed for a nearby proving ground. Ed followed our van, riding the MV. Above the roar of our own in-cab V-8 engine, we could only hear the whine of the MV's double overhead cam mechanism. Nice sound: sort of like a jet, and not a whisper of exhaust note.

At the test site, Ed LaBelle admitted he hadn't received any paperwork with his three thou investment. Valves, timing, lubricants, etc. were serviced more or less as an experienced motorcycle man judged correct. We asked Ed what he had been using as a shift point. "Oh, about three thousand," he said. This brought a visible wince from several staff members, for we had all already run it up handily to over 8000. The engine hardly makes any sounds at all, except for the valve gear, but it *feels* good above 6000. Riding the MV4 is sort of like riding a heavy motorcycle with an in-line Chevrolet six installed. It's *smooth*. The engine just hums and the power comes on and it *goes*.

Features to fascinate the aficionado abound on the MV. The four cylinders sit in line, crosswise to the fore-and-aft axis of the bike. A gear arm between the center two cylinders drives the dohc mechanism and the five-speed transmission. An enclosed shaft drive carries power to the rear wheel. Starting is provided by a Mirelli starter motor, driven by the enormous 12-volt 18 ah bat-



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tery. When not acting as a starter, this unit becomes a 12v, 135 watt, dc dynamo to recharge the battery, drive the ignition coil, power the light, turn signals, etc. Up front there are mechanical disc brakes and a two-tone in-town or open-road horn. There is also a great rectangular headlight that would easily illuminate the Houston Astrodome.

A look at the technical characteristics of the engine reveals a sharp contrast with its performance as fitted to this luxury tourer. Displacing 36 cubic inches, it generates 50 bhp at 8200 rpm, or almost one-and-a-half bhp per cubic inch. In terms of tune, that puts it on the hot end between a conventional tourer and a real sports scorcher. What is surprising is that the engine wears

only two tiny (24mm) carburetors, despite intake valves for each cylinder of 30mm diameter. Little carburetors, a heavy flywheel, fixed gearing all suggest an engine for gentle touring use. Yet the engine revs comfortably to well over 8000, has those big valves, and a modern, oversquare 58 x 56 bore-stroke ratio. One must conclude that Count Agusta wanted to produce an untamperable engine, but just couldn't help making one that twangs the mainstrings of a tuner's imagination. Four 30mm carburetors, improved cam timing, a tuned exhaust, a hot cam, compression ratio in the twelves (up from 9.3) and you'd get an easy 70 bhp.

But the Count laid on a frame and suspension so ugly and unmanageable,

besides the fixed (shaft) drive ratio, that nobody's likely to go racing with his 600cc prize. The engine smacks of the racetrack where it was bred, but all else is for the highway. The MV four is a specialty bike and that specialty is luxury touring alone.

Despite its bad case of the uglies, the MV does what it's made for very well. That great bulbous gastank is a horror (and doesn't hold much gas) and the headlight-cum-control module has equally absurd bulk. The two-level seat is comfortable, but awkward-looking and two rear outboard snuff-tins are too large for tools and too small for anything else. You collectors will love this machine, but your eye may take its time getting used to the Count's notion

PHOTOGRAPHY: EBERHARD LUETHKE



of style. All of which you forget immediately when you get aboard.

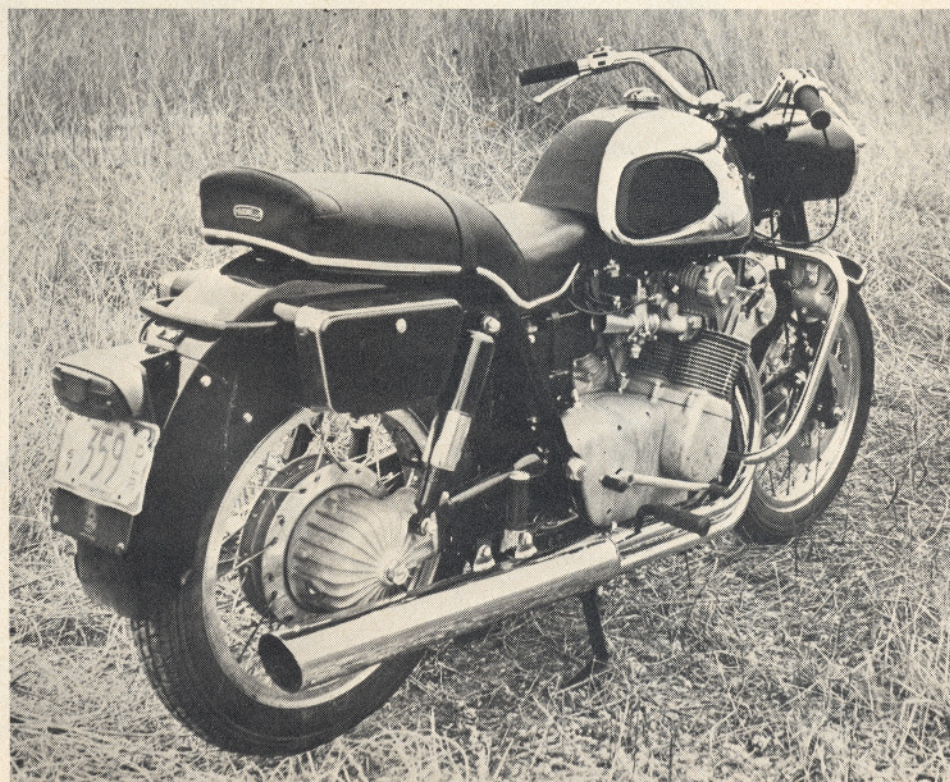
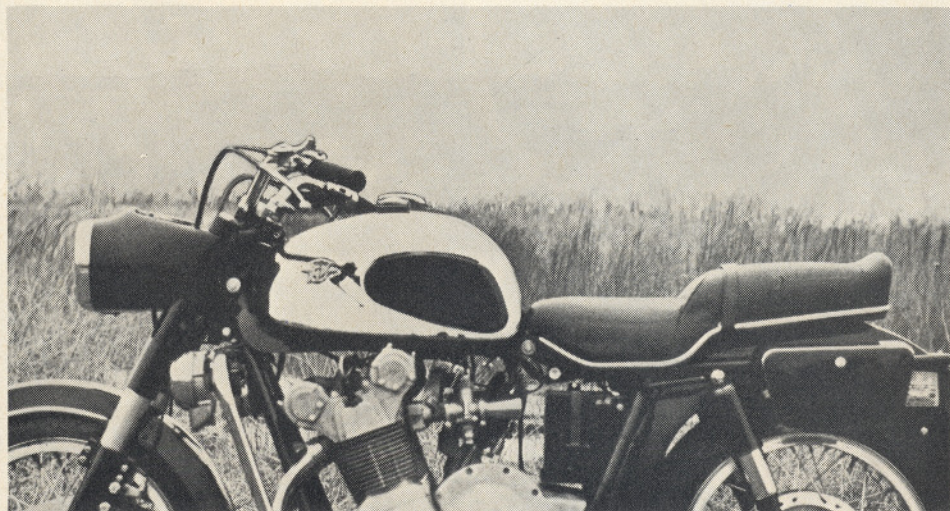
Staring down at the tank and headlight nacelle makes you think you're on something BIG. In point of fact, however, the MV weighs 484 pounds, more by 40 than a BMW, but less by over a hundred than a Harley 74, less even than an electric-start Sportster. Which is what you set about while you're sitting there. The MV has no provision for kickstarts, so you push the button and the engine fires up straight-away. Bump starting a machine of this size is no snap, but you can do it. Blipping the throttle produces a hum from somewhere, that whine of valve noise, and the tach is up to four thousand.

Gear operation is by right-foot rocker

pedal, or one up and four down with the toe. Like most transmissions, this one takes a little getting used to. In a few sequences you get it very positively and find clutch operation suitably smooth. Ease open the throttle, ease out the clutch and you're off and running. There is no other feeling like it. You just move out, change gears whenever you feel like it, and keep humming along. Almost makes you want to start humming yourself. Power is very, very steady and that heavy flywheel keeps the rear tire from screaming if you yank open the throttle. But the MV is just too damn majestic for any of that throttle yanking. Even if you're shifting at 8000, you want it to be smooth, don't want anything uncomfortably abrupt.

Luckily, you don't want to stop abruptly either, for the brakes aren't up to it. That front twin-disc unit is clean, light, and handsome, but it doesn't work very well. Grabbing a handful of brake lever produces a funny shuddering in the front end and the bike slows down. You don't have to worry about locking her up. Like a disc brake should, this one has a very graduated feel and no inclination toward snatchiness. We don't know whether the shuddering is typical or unique to this one unit. Ed told us there was a "rough spot" on one of the discs that he hadn't gotten around to removing. In any case, mechanical as opposed to hydraulic calipers present the problem of getting enough pressure

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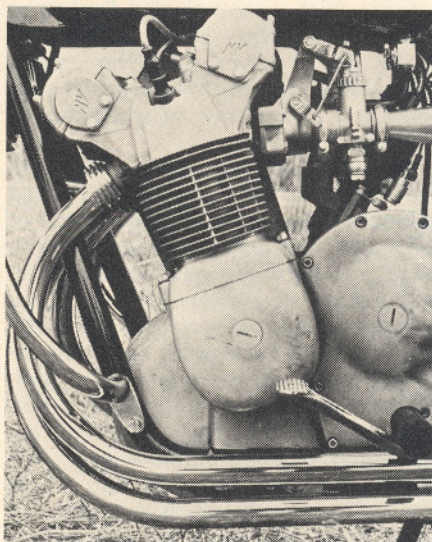
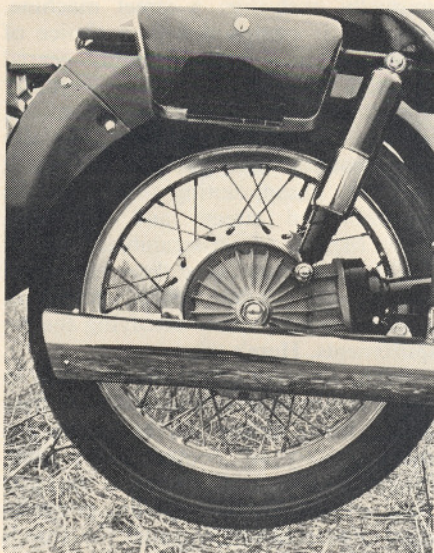
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MV AGUSTA 4 *Continued*



on the braking pads. Used in conjunction with the rear drum brake, the discs *will* stop you adequately—but they are a bit of a disappointment when, for the same cost, MV might have used a good Fontana racing unit.

The handling of the MV proved about average for a heavy tourer. You get the feeling that if something should go wrong (like a high-speed wobble) there isn't much you could do about it. But the ride is soft and cushy and the engine so smooth as to be unbelievable. You swing gently through curves and back and forth in the esses and you feel that ten hours in the saddle would go effortlessly. There are lots of gadgets to fiddle with if you get restless—like the twin horns and twin signals and light controls. The machine should do the ton and better without strain, though it may take its time getting there. Not that the MV is a slug; it should ET in the fifteens at about 90—no great showing for 50 bhp. Weight hampers acceleration but makes for a very stable ride, ideal for long distances.

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Most of the MV's castings are aluminum alloy and the rims are alloy and the rear fender, battery covers and headlight shell are fiberglass. Rear shocks are adjustable and seemed like good units. There is no airfilter on the carburetors, a fact that we found disturbing. It would be positively criminal to let that beautiful and complicated engine erode away from ingested bits of grit. The four exhaust pipes dispose themselves into two mufflers, which, as we have said, were very effective. All in all, the MV package appears to have been very thoroughly thought out—as in 30 years it might well have been.

Collectors will love the MV-four with its air of the exotic and the sophisticated, with its racing history of world championships and near misses. Engine output is high, along with much evidence of quality materials and thoughtful assembly—the whole lot should make 100,000 miles with little more than an occasional valve job. The roar of the great MV racing fours was a wonderful thing, only recently replaced by the roar of World Champion Agostini's MV three. You get a lot of history and very exciting ride in this touring version of those famous bikes. Ed LaBelle will import about a dozen of them this year. Get in touch with him (P.O. Box 332, Secane, Pa. 19018) if you want a ride that's expensive and rare and exclusive. Not for the many, this bike is a collector's item that just happens to be rideable.

MV AGUSTA FOUR

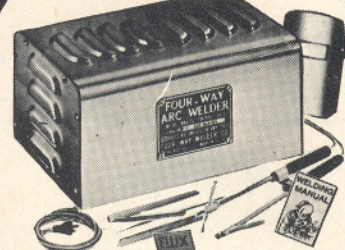
Price, suggested retail East Coast
POE \$2889
Tires, front 3.50 in. x 18 in.
rear 4.00 in. x 18 in.
Brakes, front twin discs,
216 mm diameter
rear Drum 200 mm x 45 mm
Engine type Double overhead cam,
four-stroke four
Bore and stroke 58 mm x 56 mm
Piston displacement 36 cu. in., 592cc
Compression ratio 9.3:1
Carburetion (2) 24 mm, Dellorto
Air filtration None
Ignition Distributor, battery and coil
Bhp @ rpm 50 @ 8200
Lighting 12 v alternator, 135 watts
Battery 12 v, 18 ah
Gear ratios, internal (1) 3.57 (2) 2.43
(3) 1.68 (4) 1.24 (5) 1.00
Gear ratios, overall (1) 20.0 (2) 13.6
(3) 9.43 (4) 6.96 (5) 5.60
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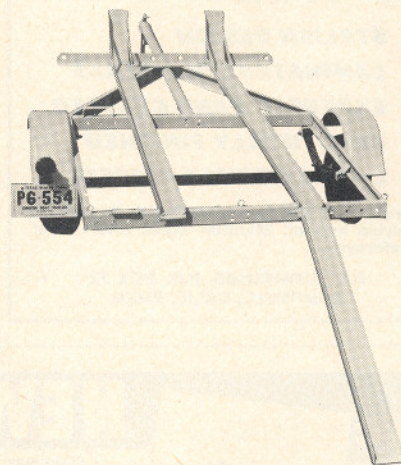
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