

# The Classic MOTORCYCLE

*Celebrating our motorcycling heritage*

OCTOBER 1999  
Printed in England

## CONSUMING PASSION

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# GALLERATE



# SYMPHONY

*When Granville Ogden swapped a 500 Gold Star and a BMW R65  
for the machine of his dreams, he felt he had got the best of the bargain.*

*Twelve years on, he still has no regrets as he tells **Gerard Kane**.*

**A**mong motorcyclists – and particularly classic motorcyclists – charisma is as vital as technological excellence. Virtually every marque has its share of besotted fans for whom nothing else will do and no amount of argument or persuasion will convince them their chosen make is not the best thing to ever roll off a production line. Die-hard BSA men can hardly bring themselves to acknowledge the existence of Coventry – let alone the famous brand name of their firm's local rival. Many a Manx Norton rider would not give you 'tuppence' for BSA's cheap skate, pushrod Gold Star racer – and so it goes on. Just occasionally though, a manufacturer manages to make an impression on all but the most fanatical one make zealots and a true classic emerges. MV Agusta is one such enterprise.

The appeal of the Agusta name is virtually universal, despite the fact that a number of our ex-servicemen spent the war years locked in combat with the airborne products of the Italian concern.

They will have less than fond memories of the Breda Ba88 attack aircraft and Fiat BR20 bombers that were produced under contract at Agusta's Gallarate plant.

The motorcycling arm of Agusta's operation, MV (Moto Verghera) Agusta, came into being in 1945 for the most prosaic of reasons. After Italy's defeat in the war, the manufacture of aircraft was forbidden and Count Domenico Agusta, who assumed control of the family aviation business following the death of his father, Giovanni, in 1927, was forced to seek other products to keep his factory busy. Correctly foreseeing the rapid growth in demand for cheap transportation in the immediate post-war years, MV Agusta embarked on the manufacture of a range of two-stroke scooters and lightweight motorcycles.

Soon, a push rod four stroke was added to the range and, as a forerunner of things to come, the company developed a 500cc four cylinder prototype as early as 1950. At the 1952 Milan show, MV unveiled a 175cc ohv single, the CSTL

Turismo that would prove to be the springboard for their range of ohv and ohc roadsters and racers.

In fact, MV had dipped a toe into the world of road racing as early as the late Forties, with their early stroker singles, but it would be 1952 before they secured their first world championship success. Cecil Sandford won the 125cc class for the Gallarate concern on the back of consecutive victories in the TT, Dutch GP and the Ulster. By the end of the decade, they had added 250, 350 and 500cc titles to their roll of honour and their last world crown was collected by Phil Read aboard his 500cc MV four as late as 1974.

With so much success on the road racing stage, the company was strangely reluctant to cash in with a road going version of their all-conquering fours. Their first production four cylinder machine was the sublimely ugly 591cc Tourer in 1965. Domenico Agusta's almost paranoid fear of his works machines being beaten by privately entered converted

roadsters was the explanation for the odd choice of capacity – and the trademark shaft drive was adopted for the same reason. The 600 was no race replica anyway and sporting enthusiasts had to wait until 1969 and the launch of the 750S before they could swing a leg across a racy looking MV.

The engine of the 750S was, in essence, a bored out 600, but the rest of the machine was much more what the MV cognoscenti dreamed of. With its sports tank and seat, huge twin leading shoe front brakes and four megaphone style silencers, at last the well heeled MV rider could emulate his track heroes on the road. During the course of the next few years, development hardly troubled the 750S and its touring cousin the 750GT. Disc brakes became an option, at the front at least, but otherwise the 743cc, dohc fours continued largely unchanged. Then, in 1976, two Americans, Jim Cotherman and Chris Garville managed to convince MV that a revamped four would sell in the relatively affluent American market. The result was the 750 America.

The 750 America tag was something of a misnomer. For a start, the new model's capacity ran out at a shade under 790cc. Not only that, but also probably as many of the new fours were sold in Europe as the continent that inspired the model's name. Various factory extras were available for those not content with having spent a cool \$3187 (in the UK) for one of the exotic Italian legends. Spoked or cast alloy



A sunny day, an MV Agusta and the road across Saddleworth Moor make for an exhilarating experience for our lucky tester.

wheels, drums or discs, a full race pattern fairing and a choice between extremely loud chromed, separate exhausts or a quieter – but much less stylish – black finished one piece silencers were the options. Depending on what permutation the customer went for, the total cost could escalate to just over \$4000 – a staggering price when a Kawasaki Z1000 could be bought for just \$1549. Still there has always been a price to pay for exclusivity!

It wasn't the heavyweight price tag that finally sealed the America's fate though. Since 1952, when the sanctions on aircraft production were lifted, Agusta had steadily and successfully, built up that side of its operation. Mindful of the importance of revitalising and protecting their aircraft industry, the Italian government had taken a 51 per cent share in the company in 1973, following Domenico Agusta's death in 1971. Aircraft production and development was seen as the way ahead and motorcycle production ceased in 1978. Recently though, the MV Agusta name has been revived and now graces a magnificent new four cylinder machine from Claudio Castiglioni's resurgent Cagiva concern.

Granville Ogden's pride and joy comes from an earlier era though. The retired engineer is an incredibly youthful looking 75 and has been riding motorcycles for well over 50 years. If he doesn't know what he likes by now, he

never will. Granville's motorcycling career began in the army – he served as a despatch rider from 1944 – and when he came out of the forces in 1946, he started competing in trials and scrambles with the Bar None club, which was set up by ex-servicemen. Riding Gold Stars and a 500T Norton, Granville rode as often as he could and also tried his hand at road racing. Still a regular spectator at Darley Moor club events, as well as making his annual pilgrimages to the Isle of Man and the North West 200, his early experience as a spectator in the Fifties and Sixties imbued Granville with the magic of the MV Agusta aura. Owning an MV soon became a burning ambition for him.

In common with many enthusiasts though, Granville had a long wait before he could achieve his goal and a variety of British machinery has kept him busy in the meantime. Like many of his generation, Granville has made a seamless transition into the world of classic motorcyclists just by sticking with the machines he enjoyed as a young man. Although he also owns a modern machine, Granville has never forsaken the motorcycles he grew up with. He has owned a number of Gold Stars (indeed, he is still a member of the owner's club) as well as a Triumph Trident Slippery Sam replica, countless Bonneville and "...too many others to remember," as he puts it.

Nevertheless the obsession wouldn't go away and about 12 years ago the time was right for Granville and he finally got



Gallerate's exotic four cylinder engine peeks coyly out from behind its race inspired fairing.

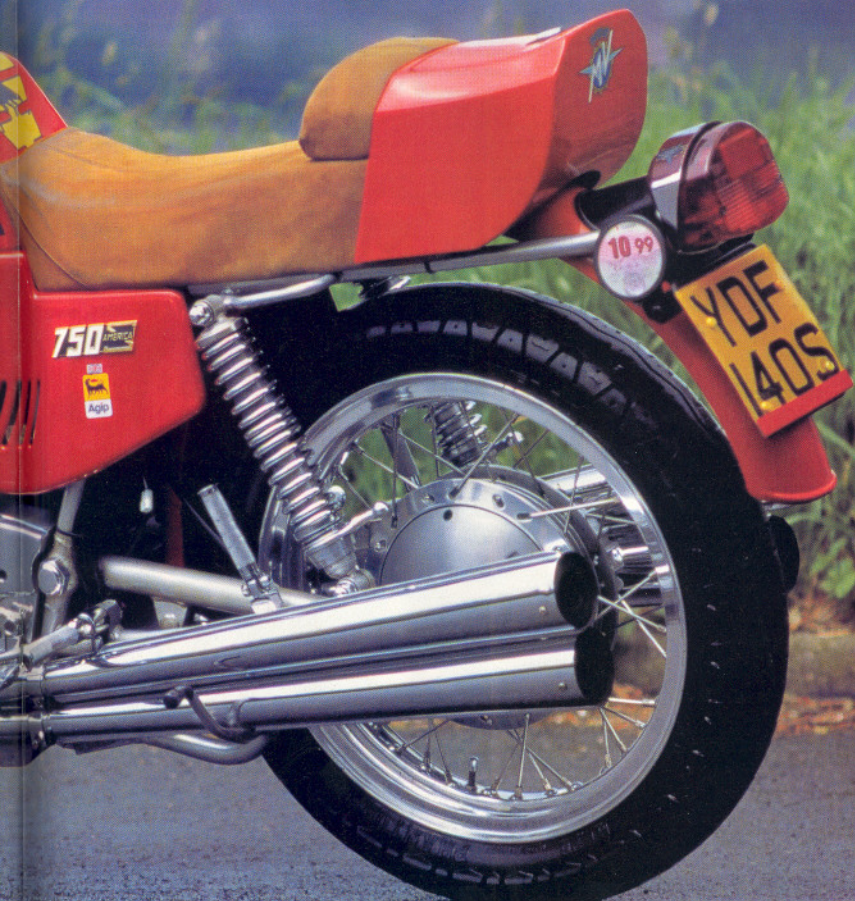


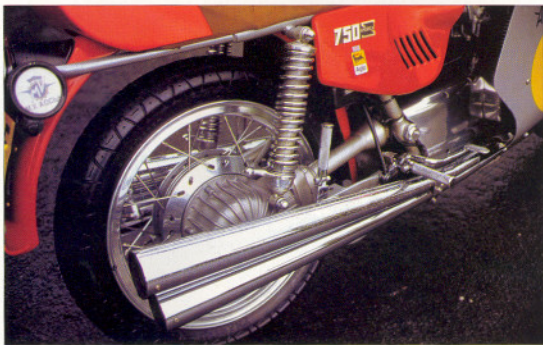




The Classic  
**MOTORCYCLE**

# 1977 MV Agusta America





**Trademark four silencers – two on each side – echo the fabled racing fours that cemented MV's place in motorcycling folklore.**

hold of the machine of his dreams. The deal was too tempting for him to resist and a 500cc Gold Star and a BMW R65 were traded for a low mileage example of Gallerate's finest. Partly, Granville says, it was the racing success of the factory's works machinery, that attracted him to the marque, but there was also the exclusivity of MV's roadsters. The standard of engineering in the Italian thoroughbreds also appealed. "Look inside the engine and there's not a chain in sight – everything is gear driven," says Granville, "that's quality".

Granville's machine is from the penultimate year of production – 1977 – and was originally supplied without the full fairing it now wears. This brought Granville into contact with the owner's club, of which he has been a member ever since. "There are only really two sources of spares in this country," he says, "the owner's club and Dave Kay." Kay, the long time MV enthusiast and engineer not only provides spare parts for the Gallerate fours, but will also undertake to build complete replicas. Like all good owner's clubs, the MVOC is not only useful as a parts supplier, but is invaluable as a point of contact between like minded enthusiasts.

It is essential to be a member, says Granville. The club has numerous contacts in Italy where a number of small specialist firms still produce parts for the legendary fours. Dave Kay and Magni – a firm founded by former MV race boss Arturo Magni – are able to supply tuning parts and a chain final drive conversion can still be yours if you have around £2000 to spare! In fact, between the club and Dave Kay, Granville confirms that virtually any mechanical part for the big four is available. That must be reassuring for a man who is not afraid of using such an original machine. Apart from braided

brake hoses and the odd sticker, Granville reckons his America is as close to original as makes no difference. Certainly, the machine is not overcosseted. When rain swept in on our photo session, there was no unseemly

haste to get the machine under cover. "I can always clean it," laughed Granville as the less hardy Jack Burnicle and myself sheltered under a convenient tree.

The full, race style fairing Granville's machine sports was bought from a fellow member as was the 'bikini' type he also has. Supplied in primer, the fairing has been sprayed to match the rest of the machine and boasts Jim Redman's autograph on the left hand side since the former Honda ace visited the Manchester Motorcycle show at the beginning of this year. By the time you read this, Granville is hoping that former factory star Giacomo Agostini will have obliged by signing the other side at the Post-TT meeting at Mallory Park. Granville's MV is nothing if not widely travelled.

When he bought the America, it had 3000 miles on the clock. Now, 12 years later it has recorded 8039 miles. Five thousand miles in 12 years might not seem a lot, but the MV has never been the only machine in Granville's garage and he is understandably anxious to keep the MV in good fettle. His pride and joy is not shut away however. Granville enters his immaculate four in a lot of



**Owner Granville Ogdan heels the America into a right hander. His MV is no silent museum piece.**



shows and has picked up plenty of awards. That's not surprising given the lovely original condition of his MV and its comparative rarity. As a result, he has had plenty of offers to sell the machine, but has resisted them all. "I've been offered £20,000 and seen similar machines for sale at £25,000, but I'm not interested," he says – a true aficionado.

Granville is also a very generous and trusting soul and his offer of a ride on a motorcycling legend is not one to turn down. Returning to his home near Manchester the following day when the rain has given way to glorious sunshine, I check over the MV – a vision in red and silver with a luxurious looking brown suede seat. Twin Scarab front discs with a massive rear drum look reassuring and the rest of the specification is top drawer Seventies kit too. Four Dell 'Orto carburettors adorn the rear of the wide and handsome cylinder head, while at the front of the engine, the massive deeply finned sump juts out purposefully between the chromed exhaust down pipes. The electrics are not neglected either – as they were on too many Italian machines of the Seventies – everything is Bosch and as neatly functional as I have come to expect from the German firm.

Sitting astride the America, I feel a tingle of anticipation as I press the button and the combined generator/starter motor brings the four cylinders into soul stirring life. This is a genuine slice of exotica and I intend to enjoy my ride to the full. About an hour later, I hand the machine back to its quietly smiling owner. He knows what I've experienced.

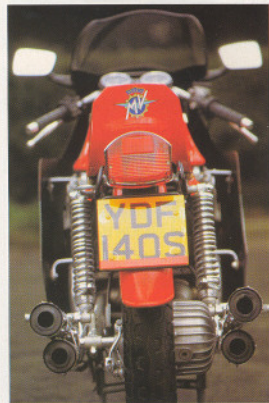
It's very hard to be objective when you're let loose on a magical piece of



As thunder rolls in over distant Manchester, the MV Agusta looks equally ready to rumble.

motorcycling history. The head knows that a Kawasaki Z1000 of the same vintage is probably faster and a Ducati twin more precise in the handling department, but the heart just doesn't care. The MV experience stays with you forever. Just the sound, the glorious unfettered bellow, from those sensuous four megas is enough to justify the price tag – if you can afford it.

The ride up over Saddleworth Moor, the road clinging to the side of the valley and almost devoid of traffic in the mid afternoon heat, provides the more practical answers to a road tester's questions. The brakes are more than up to the best Seventies' standard, handling is on a par and performance is what you might expect from a late Seventies 'superbike', but that is missing the point. When you ride an MV, you become part of something. People stare and smile – you become a star for a short while and your fantasies seem that little bit closer to reality. It may be just an illusion, but then, isn't that why we ride old motorcycles in the first place? ■



A classic view of a classic machine – pure romance on the road.

## Fact File

### 1977 MV Agusta America

Engine	dohc four cylinder
Bore and stroke	67 x 56mm
Capacity	789cc
Compression ratio	10:1
Power	75bhp at 8500rpm
Transmission	5-speed, wet clutch
Lubrication	Wet sump
Primary drive	Gears
Final drive	Shaft
Carburettors	4 x Dell 'Orto VHB 26 D
Brakes	Front: twin Scarab 280mm discs, rear: 200mm s/s drum
Suspension	Telescopic front forks, swinging arm rear
Tyre sizes	100/90 x 18in front, 110/90 x 18in rear
Weight	240kg

**Club Contact** MV Agusta Owner's Club of Great Britain: Richard Boshier, 27 Melbourne Road, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP13 7HE.  
MV Enthusiasts Club: Ray Gascoyne, 7 Lowes Lane, Wellesbourne, Warwickshire, CV35 9RB.