

MV AGUSTA SPORT AMERICA

Getting the adrenalin flowing

OVERWORKED and somehow inadequate words like Character and Presence and Charisma tend to recur in conversations during chance meetings of enthusiasts on the road when the focus of discussion is an MV Agusta 750 Sport America. It gets the adrenalin flowing even when hunched in silent majesty on the stand and it is interesting to see the effect it has on people who would not normally give a motorcycle a second glance. City gents in bowlers cross over — nonchalantly, that is, for it would never do to appear impatient to examine such an obviously rorty device and care must be taken to preserve a civilized image. Then, if the rider is near and looks as if he might be a reasonable sort, one or two polite observations may be in order, like, "A fine looking machine you have there." While a bolder spirit anxious to demonstrate that, dash it all, he does know something about it, may venture, "Raced, weren't they, years ago?" or perhaps — "Surely that fellow Surtees did well on them — yes, knew I was right!" Approve of what it does and what it represents or not, an MV is difficult to ignore and that applied with particular force to the machine borrowed for test. It was loud.

This Four, the personal bike of Italian specialist dealer Mike Ward of Nottingham, is to the same general specification as the last of the line available up to 12 months ago save for the incorporation of optional components which

convert a standard model to Monza state of tune. It looks a battle-scarred veteran for a machine with just a few thousand miles behind it but that is perhaps not surprising in view of its history. It had a hard life before Ward got it.

MV Concessionaires of Slough had apparently used it for Press demonstrations/road tests and it bears many signs of rough treatment for engine inspection plugs have chisel marks, chipped point at the front of the tank indicates that it has been carelessly removed at some time, large alloy nuts on the forks are scored and lower engine covers grazed. Ward believes it was dropped before he got it.

He noticed it looking forlorn and covered in dust in a corner behind the concessionaire's premises about a year ago when rumours that the Italians were halting motorcycle production were hardening into fact. Ward, realizing that he before supplies dried up, put in a bid and got it without much trouble as by then nobody at Slough seemed very bothered what happened to it and shortly afterwards speculation was confirmed: MVs were indeed retrenching to concentrate on helicopters and other work. There would be no more motor bikes.

Despite its chequered past, the MV remains a scintillating performer. The magnificent engine is vibrationless, the gearbox among the best,

transmission hard to fault and the disc front brakes are awesomely powerful. The engine makes all the right noises, music to an enthusiast's ear. These days it takes something special to get me out of bed at six in the morning. The MV did. On test it covered 1,035 miles in four days. It was hard to keep off it. It was a privilege to be allowed to ride it far and fast without restraint and I made the most of my time with it and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

The 750 Sport America, which bears a striking resemblance to the 500 cc racing fours of the early 1950s, was offered in various forms in the five or six years it was available in Britain. Early 750 Fours had classic, timeless lines with rounded tanks, a dumpy racing-type single-seat and matching "toolboxes," which doubled as battery covers. Subsequent re-styling altered tank shape and introduced louvred side panels which, taking the place of "toolboxes" hid the battery. In all essentials, the specification of engine, gearbox and transmission was the same for all models, though overbored cylinders, alternative camshafts and carburetors and different wheels and brakes were obtainable for later machines.

There is some uncertainty about the antecedents of the frame, a duplex downtube cradle type with distinctive humped top tube to permit engine removal, but it is generally

MEN OF EXPERIENCE

I MUST record my thanks to three other MV owners, all men with considerable experience of motorcycles, for help and advice when this MV report was being prepared.

Not entirely happy with the roadholding of Mike Ward's MV, I asked former world champion roadracer Bill Lomas, now a dealer with shops at Milford and Clay Cross in Derbyshire, what he thought of the roadholding of his personal machine, an 832 cc Arturo Magni version. His bike, which had then done less than a third of the recommended running-in mileage of 1,800, has Metzlers, a dolphin fairing, chamois-finished single seat and Koni shock absorbers but is in most other respects similar to the test machine.

Lomas, who is still 20 or so years on from his racing days no slow-coach whatever he rides, described his bike's grip on dry roads as "all right". Pressed, he said that it does "wobble a bit" and thinks the handbook recommendations on tyre pressures ... suggested minimum settings are 28 lpsi front, 34 rear ... too high and prefers 24/28.

Son Mike, who tries to keep his Yamaha RD400 close behind the MV on a run, said he has noticed that in bends the MV "snakes a bit." Bill Lomas favours Dunlop TT100s, which have apparently improved the stability of various sports machines used on ordinary

roads, though to date he has found neither opportunity nor real reason to change from Metzlers.

Estate agent Richard Marchant of Holcot, Northants, another MV Four owner, rode the test machine from Oakham to Melton Mowbray on dry roads while I followed on his 900 Super Sport Desmo Ducati. There was no hanging about and afterwards Marchant said he had found the MV's roadholding "acceptable" and no different from his own bike's. He also thought Ward's bike had more torque and said it seemed quicker. Moving straight from the MV, I thought the big Ducati's roadholding was much better; it stayed put in the most convincing manner and could be placed exactly where desired in the certain knowledge that it would hold course no matter what. It was inspiring. There was plenty of mechanical clatter below 60 mph but above that speed the din was carried away on the wind. A very impressive machine, with good brakes and gearbox.

Another educational interlude occurred when Nottinghamshire luteholder contractor Bill Moore allowed me a spin on his immaculate, and standard, 750 Sport America, which had then clocked up precisely 800 miles. This bike, tried over winding back roads, was definitely more stable over bumps; the steering had a tauter feel than the test bike's and on

indifferently-surfaced roads wobbling at speed was milder. I found it the preferable bike of the two.

Moore echoed my findings after trying the test machine and remarked on its low-speed "wander" and weaving when going fast; I gather its behaviour never alarmed him but he concluded that it could be improved. His MV has Metzlers and the standard Sebac rear units and he commented: "You must go purposefully into a bend, not on a neutral throttle, with the MV; I think its cornering ability is then very good at medium speed. My bike feels more secure than the test machine and I shouldn't be surprised to learn Ward's bike has been down the road. ..."

Ward's workshop mechanic Trevor Milner, who has ridden many of the large-capacity machines now available, believes that high engine mass, inevitable with the transverse-four layout, is responsible for causing speed wobble and has found that a Laverda Triple is also susceptible. In his experience, big twins like the Guzzi Le Mans and Ducati veees do not wobble. Milner commented: "With the MV 750 you must go hard into bends. Don't be half-hearted. Keep the power on and it feels very good. Being gentle with the twistgrip starts it wobbling. I have found that all the transverse fours I have tried will roll from side to side in certain conditions and I put the effect down to high and wide engines."

believed to be the same as that made for the 600 cc Tourer of the mid-1960s. An all-black Tourer, a model very rare in this country, was seen in the Isle of Man during TT week some years ago. Reports suggest it was a dilettante's plaything and an expensive disappointment...

The 750 Sport America, compared with other high-performance bikes of similar capacity, still looks dear on paper now (this report was compiled in September 1979) but the engine shows evidence of much costly refinement and selective assembly, which help to explain the

price. With crankcase and transmission covers off and innards exposed, the engine is seen to be a work of art typical of Italian engineering craftsmanship at its finest. Though other manufacturers of large-capacity Fours follow accepted practice in running valves direct in



MV 850 as produced in 1977 and advertised by the English concessionaires as "The world's fastest-ever production motorcycle." On the open road, it was said (by the concessionaries' PR people), to shrug off even the most persistent of the so-called superbikes with gears to spare. The price was given as £3,975, going up to "well over £4,000" when fitted with the optional fairing

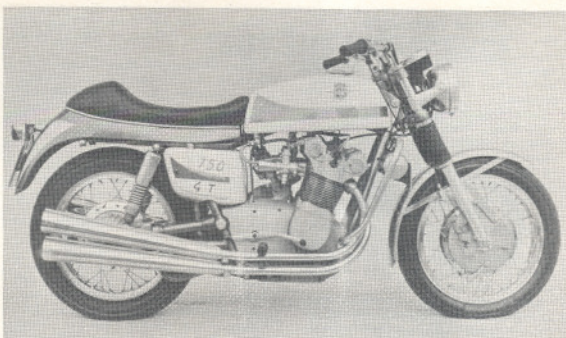
It has been estimated that only 50 Fours were sold here

cylinder heads, MVs specified separate, cast-iron, detachable troughs to carry guides and valves. Should gearbox or transmission give trouble, they can be dismantled in situ, leaving the engine undisturbed. Experienced British consultant engineers who examined the MV's specification called it poetry in metal, applauded the Gallarate designers and asked how on earth the factory expected to make a profit from what was, in Japanese terms, a very small number of machines. It has been estimated that only 50 Fours were sold here.

Similarities with the early racing MV Fours, which were based on a Gilera design, are immediately obvious in the 750 Sport America: gear-driven twin overhead camshafts, helical gear primary drive, aluminium-alloy cylinder barrels and heads inclined forward 20 degrees, apparently identical engine/gearbox castings, a massive and generously fitted sump and ignition distributor angled backwards between the inner carburetors.

With detachable side panels in place to cover the gap between carburetor trumpets and mudguard, the MV presents a profile of frame packed with power, and flowing lines and graceful exhaust pipes bewitch the eye. Viewed head on, the MV resembles a charging bull and bristles with menace. Creating an impression of terrific speed even at rest, it remains unequalled for sporting good looks.

In 750 Sport America form, the aircooled



Another variation: the 750 GT roadster as sold by Gus Kuhn of South London

transverse four-cylinder four-stroke has bore and stroke dimensions of 67 mm x 56 mm, 9.5:1 compression ratio, cast-iron liners shrunk into the barrels and a one-piece cylinder head with V-mounted valves operated by caps and plungers.

MV Augusta claimed a maximum power output of 75 bhp at 8,500 rpm, achieved with valve timing as follows: intake opens 48 degrees before top dead centre, closes 68 degrees after bottom dead centre; exhaust opens 70 degrees before top dead centre, closes 36 degrees after top dead centre. Valve clearances, with a cold engine, are the same for intake and exhaust—12 thou. Maximum torque is said to be 47.9 ft-lb (6.62 kgm) at 7,500 rpm. There was some doubt about the cubic capacity of the test machine but

it was thought to be slightly bigger than the original 743 cc Four.

A built-up crankshaft comprising five pieces has six main bearings, four roller-type and two ball races. A pinion between numbers one and two cranks on the nearside drives a primary transmission gear and another, smaller pinion between the middle cylinders drives the camshaft gear train which runs in a removable tunnel, a gear-type oil pump provides pressure lubrication for the inner four crankshaft bearings, the others being splash-lubricated from the sump.

Oil is drawn into the pump through a mesh filter at the bottom of the sump and passes through a second filter, with replaceable cartridge, in the distribution line. This has a by-pass valve which operates if the filter becomes clogged; it then closes off the filter section and passes oil straight into the

ASIDES . . .

MV information sheets, urging careful running-in, advised that during its first 600 miles a 750 Four should not be taken above the following speeds in the gears: first, 32 mph (5,000), second, 45 mph (5,000), third, 64 mph (5,500), fourth, 76 mph (5,700), top, 90 mph (6,000). Between 600 and 1,800 miles recommended maxima were: first, 38 mph (6,000), second, 53 mph (6,000), third, 70 mph (6,000), fourth, 90 mph (6,500), top, 106 mph (7,000).

With a fully run-in engine, the makers said a 750 Four was mechanically safe to 9,000 rpm in all gears and quoted speeds as follows: first, 57 mph; second, 80 mph; third, 105 mph; fourth, 125 mph; top, 135 mph; the rev-counter being redlined between 9,500 and 11,000.

The final retail price list, issued by MV Concessionaires at Slough on 15 April, 1978, was as follows: Monza 861 cc Arturo Magni Special with wire wheels £4,498, with mag wheels £4,927.99. Monza 832 cc with wire wheels £3,457, with mags £3,887. 750 Sport America (789 cc engine) with wire wheels £3,187, with mags £3,617. The last batch manufactured all had disc front brakes, the double-sided twin-leading-shoe braked wheel having been discontinued two or three years earlier.

An admitted weak point on all the Fours was the clutch, surprisingly small for the

power it had to transmit. It was strongly rumoured that the clutch was being improved when factory executives decided to halt motorcycle production. It is possible to convert any of the roadgoing Fours to chain drive.

A conversion kit, extremely expensive, comprised front and rear sprockets, different engine/gearbox covers, alternative swinging-arm and wheel, and of course a chain. It is alleged the cost was close on £1,000. A very rapid MV so converted has appeared in long-distance races on the Continent recently.

Many extras were available at one time or another: the most popular was a beautifully-tailored and very slim dolphin fairing. Three stages of tune were also offered to owners of standard 750 Fours. It is estimated that an MV fitted with every possible extra would have cost approximately £7,000 ex-works.

To assist with maintenance, a second main stand was available; it enabled both wheels to be raised clear of the ground. A comprehensive Official Workshop Manual (retail price, £25.00) and a separate Official Spares List, both produced to the same high standard, both in English, were also available.

How many of the Fours sold here were bought by private owners? Bill Lomas thinks very few. Most, he believes, passed into

trade hands. Although I should emphasise that Lomas did not suggest this, were there, it appears, always doubts about the long-term prospects of a good spares supply. This factor may well have influenced private individuals, not in a position to pull strings if things got tough, to settle for more popular machines. Hence the comparatively small number of MVs sold in Britain.

And now an appeal. As regular readers may have guessed, *Motorcycle Sport* is not run by folk with money to burn. Therefore the kind of ultra-sophisticated analytical apparatus much favoured by free-spending American journals is beyond reach; in any case, I am not at all sure it is really necessary.

One facility, however, is: a suitable venue where a machine's true top speed may be determined. If one or two other points of interest, such as braking distance from 30 mph and 60 mph and acceleration from rest can be recorded at the same time, so much the better. Please don't suggest the MIRA ground at Lindley in the Midlands; that is already rather too well patronized, and journalists thrive on "exclusives".

I am keenly aware that this report shows a dearth of hard facts: here, dear reader, is your chance to help *Motorcycle Sport's* contributors to put more meat into their critiques in future. No heavy fees, of course, but doubtless a jar or two would be in order. Offers, then, to the usual address . . .

THE NO-NAME CLUB

WHILE testing Mike Ward's MV in rural England, I had a whiff of the sort of atmosphere you get during TT week. On the afternoon of September 13, when the weather in the Midlands was perfect for motorcycling, I came across a heartwarming sight at Oakham in Rutland, a group of eight or nine interesting bikes cooling off while the riders swapped experiences. To judge by their animated talk, one would have thought they had just done a quickish lap or two of the Island, it was that kind of day.

What constitutes a motorcycle club? This one has no written constitution, no elected officers nor organizing committee and is kept going by word of mouth and an effervescent camaraderie. Until now no-one has suggested a name for it. I will call it The No-Name Club.

Because its members . . . nobody seems to know how many there are . . . are all busy men with limited spare time, you might think they are all well-heeled gents (which they are!) just playing at the game, but not a bit of it. Retired bank manager Geoffrey Addington, the group's self-styled greybeard, has been a motorcyclist for many years and the others have owned a bewildering mixture of machines from 125s to blockbuster Thousands.

It all began when Northampton enthusiast Roger Kimbell discovered that some of his business contacts were keen riders too. He made a few phone calls to round them all up and things snowballed. They all meet for a day out on the road three or four times a year but arrangements for a run are loose and informal: when they want a break from the workaday world, they take it — just like that. Being mostly self-employed, they can have a day off in the week without hassle.

When I stumbled on the club, Kimbell was absent as his wife had just given birth and the rest evidently missed his leadership for when they entered the Harborough Hotel at Melton in search of refreshments there was a cool response; reception staff, seeing helmets before owners, appeared to classify peaceable men of early middle years as chain-twirling Angels and when they realized their mistake the damage had been done. There was a warmer welcome, though, round the corner and over tea and cakes time to note details . . .

Len Tompkins, a market trader from Wollaston, Northants, rode a Kawasaki ZIA: he has had it for five years and it has never let him down. He said he was very, very pleased with it.

John Horrell of Daventry Farm, Woodford, Northants, on a 1958 Triumph Twenty-One, said it had stood unused in a garage for 18 years before he bought it two years ago. It has done only 3,500 miles from new.

Roger Hawkins brought a Honda CBX1000 up from Stonewell, near Stubbington, Cambridgeshire: "It's very crisp. I have no complaints about the road holding. The whole machine is very good and very smooth." His job might stump the team on What's My Line? He makes flameproof underwear.

Farmer John Bradshaw of New Lane, Stubbington, rode a new Suzuki GS1000E and noticed that from cold the handling

seemed inferior to the previous GS1000 he owned: "But when the tyres and suspension warmed up, it stopped worrying me and in the last 20 miles the handling definitely improved. I think these big Suzukis handle as well as any other Japanese machine."

Hugh Porter, a motorcycle dealer (Suzuki, Kawasaki, Morini) of Thrapston, Northants, turned out on a Suzuki GT550, actually a customer's bike sent in with a speedometer fault, and said it was nice to get back to a smooth two-stroke after four-strokes: "I stopped only once today for petrol — but we'd better not give the registration number."

Estate agent Richard Marchant from Holcot, Northants, arrived on a rebuilt 900 Super Sport Desmo Ducati as his 750 Sport America MV Four had blown up ("My own fault for playing about with jetting"). He rates the Ducati's all-round performance as superb.

Company director Trevor Goode of Silverstone rode a Guzzi V50 and commented: "I think that for a five-hundred it is excellent. I can see why it has become a bestseller." But, having had a Le Mans, still his favourite motorcycle, he had become used to something heavier than the 365lb V50 and said that he hoped to buy a Spada in the near future.

Also from Silverstone, Addington returned to motorcycling quite recently, having dropped out just after the war (when he was for five years treasurer of the Northampton Motor Cycle Club) to marry and raise a family. He rode a BMW R90S: "I find it is fairly satisfactory."

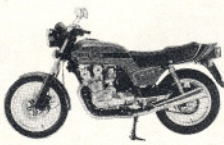
Kimbell missed a good day out.

There was a last minute treat when I returned MV literature to Bill Lomas. He handed over the keys to a 16-valve Honda CB900F, in mint condition, with the words, "Try it up the road."

Now I know why it has an oilcooler. Performance is shattering. This Honda has the fiercest acceleration of any full-equipped road bike I have tried. Make no mistake, it is quick. With the aid of a lightning-fast five-speed box, it scorching up to 125 mph and still had something left. Ridden into the teeth of a gale, it held course with remarkable assurance: no wobbling, snaking, weaving or rolling to make the rider back off, though the forks fluttered, suggesting the wheel was out of balance, above 90 mph.

This Honda had a tenacious grip. Deliberately run down a line of road studs, it gave not an inch; which made me think it should be good in the wet. During this 30-minute outing, roads were dry.

As *Motorcycle Sport* people frown on gushing enthusiasm, and a good thing too, I will sum it up in a word. Wow. It was on TT100s, 410 x 19 and 425 x 18in.



distribution line. Force-fed oil lubricates guide pins, needle bearings at the small ends, pistons and barrels. It then passes to the cylinder head where it is delivered via holes to the camshafts and by ducts to the cams. Oil drains back to the sump and crankshaft motion splash-lubricates gearbox shafts, needle bearings, bushes and pinions. An eight-plate clutch runs in oil mist.

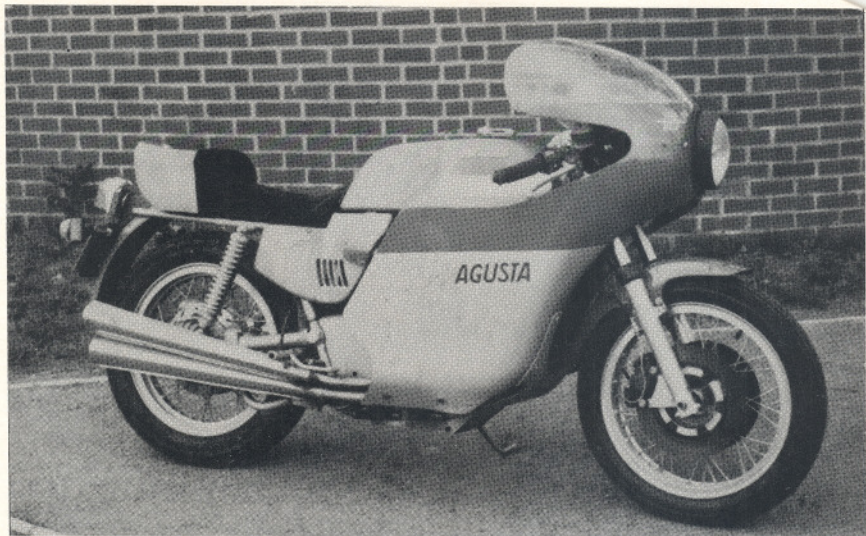
Like a Ferrari or Maserati, the MV burns some oil in the interests of mechanical longevity and on the first start of the day it was noticeable that the test bike, chokes on, smoked. Provided that engine oil filters are cleaned and/or replaced as necessary and the engine oil (six and a half pints) is changed every 3,600 miles as recommended, an MV Four should do a considerable mileage before it requires overhaul.

A separate, secondary gearbox, in tandem with the five-speed box, transmits power through a totally-enclosed shaft running in oil to bevel gears in the rear hub; the shaft housing doubles as the other arm of the pivoted fork, which is controlled by five position Sebac hydraulically-damped spring units with hand adjusters to alter the spring rate. Overall gearbox ratios are 11.84:1, 8.40:1, 6.36:1, 5.52:1 and 4.97:1. The swinging-arm pivots on roller bearings.

Four Dell'Orto VHB DD or VHB DS 26 mm carburetors, with choke linkage operated by a lever on the left, draw air through a filter element on a standard 750 Sport America, but the test bike had 27 mm carburetors with individual choke controls and air intake horns in place of the airbox as fitted to the Arturo Magni overbored engine, and a cylinder head reworked to Monza specification. A belt-driven 12V 135W Bosch Dynastarter, Bosch JF4 type distributor and battery and coil ignition supply sparks to the two-valve heads, and no kickstarter is fitted. Total ignition advance is 46 to 50 degrees, firing order 1-3-4-2 and recommended spark plugs are Champion N3 or equivalent.

Night-riding illumination comes from a 7in Aprilia headlamp with 12V 45/40 main bulb, and a biggish 6 x 5in Aprilia red light makes the rear prominent to following traffic. The ignition key works a switch mounted below the tank and there are three positions: On (when the lights may be used), Off and Park, when a 2.5w bulb in the headlamp shell and one rear lamp come on. Four 8-amp fuses protect the different circuits.

Because the 4 1/2-gallon steel tank has a broad base, the ignition switch is out of sight and awkward to reach from the seat. Handbrake switches by Aprilia had a cheap and tacky feel but worked well, with a logical operating sequence and gave no trouble during the test. Tommaselli dropped bars had black blanking plugs, a neat touch. There was no mirror and Mike Ward had removed the direction indicators and the standard MV single seat; instead the test bike had a good Ducati dualseat which he had modified to suit the MV mountings and everyone who saw the machine agreed that the seat blended well with the bike's lines. Ceriani forks with exposed stanchions, Metzler 350 x 18in front and Avon Roadrunner 4.25 x 18in rear tyres, two 11in cast-iron discs with Scarab calipers behind the fork legs, an 8 1/2in drum cable-operated rear brake and heavy duty Borran alloy rims complete an impressive specification. Dimensions of Ward's bike, common to all versions, are: wheelbase 55in, seat height 30 1/2in, width 28in, length 79in, overall height 38 in, ground clearance 6in. With



a full petrol tank but no toolkit, which is normally carried in a lockable box fitted into the single seat, the MV weighed 539lb.

Before the test began in earnest (when the bike, according to the odometer, had done just 4,433 miles) Mike Ward explained that he had spent a long time checking everything as he was keen to get the best from it. He had stripped the front forks and adjusted the head bearings to a nicely balanced carburettors and tuned the ignition as a worn fibre heel on the contact-breaker had upset the timing. Although there were still several jobs he wanted to do, at that point he found performance more than satisfactory and noted that in 500 miles during Manx Grand Prix week the MV averaged 44 mpg and used just under half a pint of SAE40 engine oil.

Starting was invariably a first-time affair. The drill was: flick on outer cold-start levers... the inner pair being hard to get at... turn on both petrol taps and, given a fraction of throttle, the engine was usually firing on the first touch of the button; only after passing through a touch was the MV slow to respond, water having got onto the driving belt of the starter motor. It was advisable to spend a minute or two warming it up at a steady 2,000 rpm on mornings when air temperature was below 60 deg. F, and indeed the owner's manual warns against riding off straight away as combustion heat spreads slowly through the large alloy engine. As the chill disappeared, the "choke" levers could be turned off but it was as well to go steadily for the first few miles after an overnight stop until the power unit was thoroughly warm.

The MV broadcast its presence. At tickover speeds, which varied for no obvious reason between about 900 revs and 1,600, it growled and chugged like a tractor and in built-up areas its bellow was embarrassing. Pronounced

whirring and clicking sounds were amplified by the deep tank and in traffic this high-stepping thoroughbred chafed impatiently at the bit, eager to be turned loose. When the MV was cramped among slow-moving vehicles, the penetrating exhaust note drew stern looks from constables, and elderly citizens in particular scowled and turned away and there were times when the MV seemed about to become a target for rotten eggs.

There was a different response from the law when the MV passed through a Leicestershire village. Edging forward in a traffic jam, the bike stopped behind a patrol car. The windows were down and two pairs of beady eyes looked for the source of the din. Things looked black when a brawny arm beckoned the MV, which sounded louder than ever, to draw alongside; then a voice commanded, "Keep blipping it... we have never seen one before," and it turned out that both crewmen were motorcyclists (Norton 650SS and 150 cc MZ).

Away from suburban speed limits, the MV came into its own. Taken up to 5,000 rpm in the gears as roads cleared, the engine roared with life and felt unburstable and response to the throttle was immediate, strong, smooth. When a motorist misjudged the MV's speed of approach and turned across its path, only the bike's sure and powerful brakes denied the ambulance-men...

Banked well over for tight bends, the MV was stable, sure-footed, vicefree but it was plainly less confident on long uneven curves which made it wriggle and it objected strongly to cross-hatchings at junctions and to all other painted surfaces, and cat's-eyes tossed it about; but in slow corners it exhibited no trace of the unerving top-heaviness experienced on a similar machine tried two years ago.

Chained metal footrests provided eloquent

proof that this classic engine design had been made as smooth as possible without recourse to rubberized mounts, balance shafts, etc, for whatever the MV's speed there was never the slightest sign of vibration through them. In cities only the lower three gears were needed and in hilly Lincoln just the first two. At times the clutch took up the drive in two distinct stages, although the hand lever had been fully released.

Initially I thought the riding position afforded by the drooping bars and footrests a couple of inches behind the seat nose very good but there was a price to pay and two days after collecting the MV and putting 450 miles on it I contracted "MV back"—a malady, little known to medical science, which caused aches and twinges of the lower spine, but happily the trouble cleared up before the test ended.

The headlamp was unexpectedly effective once the shell had been thumped (no tools supplied) to a lower setting and main beam brought down to earth. It threw a brilliant light far enough ahead to warn of potential danger and tricky turns and the pattern was admirable. On a run from Stockport to Buxton one moonless night, the headlamp produced its own genie. A beam intensifier, a bowl-shaped piece of metal, broke free and rolled against the glass, interfering with the shaft of light and blinding oncoming drivers.

Occasionally the engine spat back and banged once or twice when throttled down below 3,000 rpm and it was not really happy in top at about 30 mph when the rev-counter showed 2,500 rpm (the handbook advises against holding it at 2,200 rpm under load).

Twice the sole reason for turning back was the need to reload with fivers. The MV got through a lot of petrol but it was not unbearably thirsty, it seemed, during medium-speed tours of the Lake District, the fen country and The

In concrete canyons the MV was deafening and clearly upset non-believers

Potteries, though some fuel was lost from the Monza-type snapshut filler cap when the level was high; and the twin taps ought to be marked Off-On-Res, made bigger and re-positioned because at full throttle the carburettor linkage brushed them. A rattling noise at the front proved to be nothing serious: just the disc pads chattering in their cups.

Towards the end of the test the clutch slipped, fascia warning lights were no bigger than pin heads, Neutral and Generator bulbs flickered weakly and off and on of their own accord, and it was hard to tell when the rear brake was working (it had a long, long cable). The horn was passable.

Wherever the MV was ridden... between winding stone walls in the Yorkshire Dales, out over the wide plains along the east coast, high into the Pennines... it was hard not to dwell on its racing ancestry. It was, perhaps, an excusable fantasy of a no-hoper that on it he could show the real TT riders a thing or two, for throughout the test echoes of 37 world championships repeatedly intruded on a cool objective appraisal; and there speaks a failed racer. The noise had a lot to do with it. In concrete canyons, it was deafening and clearly upset non-believers and fuelled the arguments of people who equate all motorcycles with unnecessary din and would like to see them banned; these days riders to whom bikes are meat and drink need all the friends they can get. The MV was more often than not, offensively loud, I regret to say.

It inspired a neat riding style. There was a solid, beefy feel about it and when the leading tyre punched into a crater, nothing protested except me. Only one thing necessary to

Similarities with the early racing MV fours are immediately apparent. No other transverse four has quite the class...

complete the illusion that the MV was screaming round the Island, instead of dawdling in English country lanes, was missing — the smell of "R".

There were no complaints about the choice of ratios. The gearbox change action... taken through a rearset linkage on the left... and I could find no fault with the rest of the transmission. The rear wheel bevel box used no oil and none leaked from the shaft drive casing.

It seemed that this was to be another "dry" test in a perplexing summer but the heavens opened and deluged the Midlands a few hours before the MV was due to go back to Ward's Garage (Daybrook) as the bike sped down the M69 near Hinckley. A stiff side wind, very unpredictable, was strong enough to flex panels on tall lorries and gave the MV a hard time as the torrent filled gutters and flooded approach roads but the bike ploughed on at 65-70 mph without too much fuss, though it swayed a fair bit. The MV gave a nicely-cushioned ride which when a passenger was carried became luxurious, and there were no complaints about the accommodation nor the level of comfort from the back seat; the Cerianis looked immensely strong and well up to the job and were correctly sprung for the weight of the machine. Firm when the bike was used one-up, they complemented the action of the rear struts perfectly when the load was increased.

It may have been an aural illusion but I'd swear the right-hand silencers made most noise and at 40 mph in top on a light throttle they made the MV sound like a Mark VIII Velo. When it was travelling faster and had to be shut off while slower traffic got out of the way, the MV produced a thunderous hum.

When Reserve was required, it paid to go 15 or 20 miles before stopping to refill for only then would the tank accept three gallons. The

standby supply, incidentally, was good for about 60 miles; much more and one risked a long push to the pumps.

After three or four miles of very slow progress across Birmingham, the bike became temperamental as the tickover fluctuated wildly between 1,000 and 2,000 and one plug played up. Soot coated the silencer outlets but the plugs stayed free of lamplack.

During the test the big Varta battery below the seat became covered in an oily mist of carburettor blow-back but did not require topping up; parking lights were adequate and nothing — apart from the headlamp metal cup — broke or fell off. Although there was no place for tools, Mike Ward had coiled a new clutch cable under the seat. It was not required.

Attempts to see what it would do "on the clock" (see panel) were inconclusive for on reaching 110 mph the speedometer needle refused to go further, though the bike was still accelerating, and the rev-counter needle also seemed reluctant and stuck at 7,900-8,000 rpm... some doubt here as both needles were nervous and road shocks also made them twitch. Both "clocks" were Smiths. It was while I was trying for maximum speed that a goggle strap broke, which will mean little to the reader until I add that top-quality elastics have never before failed at speeds up to 130 mph. I tried again with a new strap and that also broke.

Fuel consumption varied between 57 mpg and 31 mpg. A diverting Sunday afternoon was spent making careful checks. The tank was drained and a measured gallon of four-star put in, an emergency half-gallon being carried in a haversack. The MV was kept below 70 mph at all times and taken up the Great North Road. Before gasping to a stop it covered 51.6 miles. It had been cruised at 50-50 mph. When the tiger in the engine was chained up even more securely and speed kept down to 40-50 mph, a similar test produced 56.7 mpg... call it 57 because a drop or two was spilled when another measured gallon went in. Unleashed and showing its claws, the MV managed just over 30 mpg and required a pint of engine oil after 550 high-speed miles to bring the level back up to the max. mark on the dipstick.

A few smears of oil stained the engine covers, most notably along a joint below nos. 3 and 4 cylinder barrels and some seeped from a plug on top of the camshaft drive housing. Coming to the bike after it had stood overnight, I noticed one or two drops of oil from an outlet in the nearside lower frame rail (the engine breather vents into the steering head) but there was nothing here to cause real concern.

As the test ended, the MV felt and sounded as crisp and willing as it had at the start and gave the impression that it would continue to deliver the same intoxicating performance for many more thousands of miles while needing little attention beyond periodic topping-up with fuel and oil; although it must be said that a question mark hung over the clutch.

Invading the world of motorcycling's jet set was a very pleasant experience but financially punishing and though I kept the MV for as long as possible I was nevertheless somewhat relieved when the appointed hour for its return arrived. I wanted to ride it all the time. That was the snag with this delightful machine. A journalist can't keep it in petrol. V.W.

Test bike kindly loaned by Mike Ward of Wards Garage (Daybrook) of 835 Mansfield Road, Sherwood, Nottingham.

