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MV Agusta & Laverda 750 SFC

Italy's racing heritage on the road and rowdy

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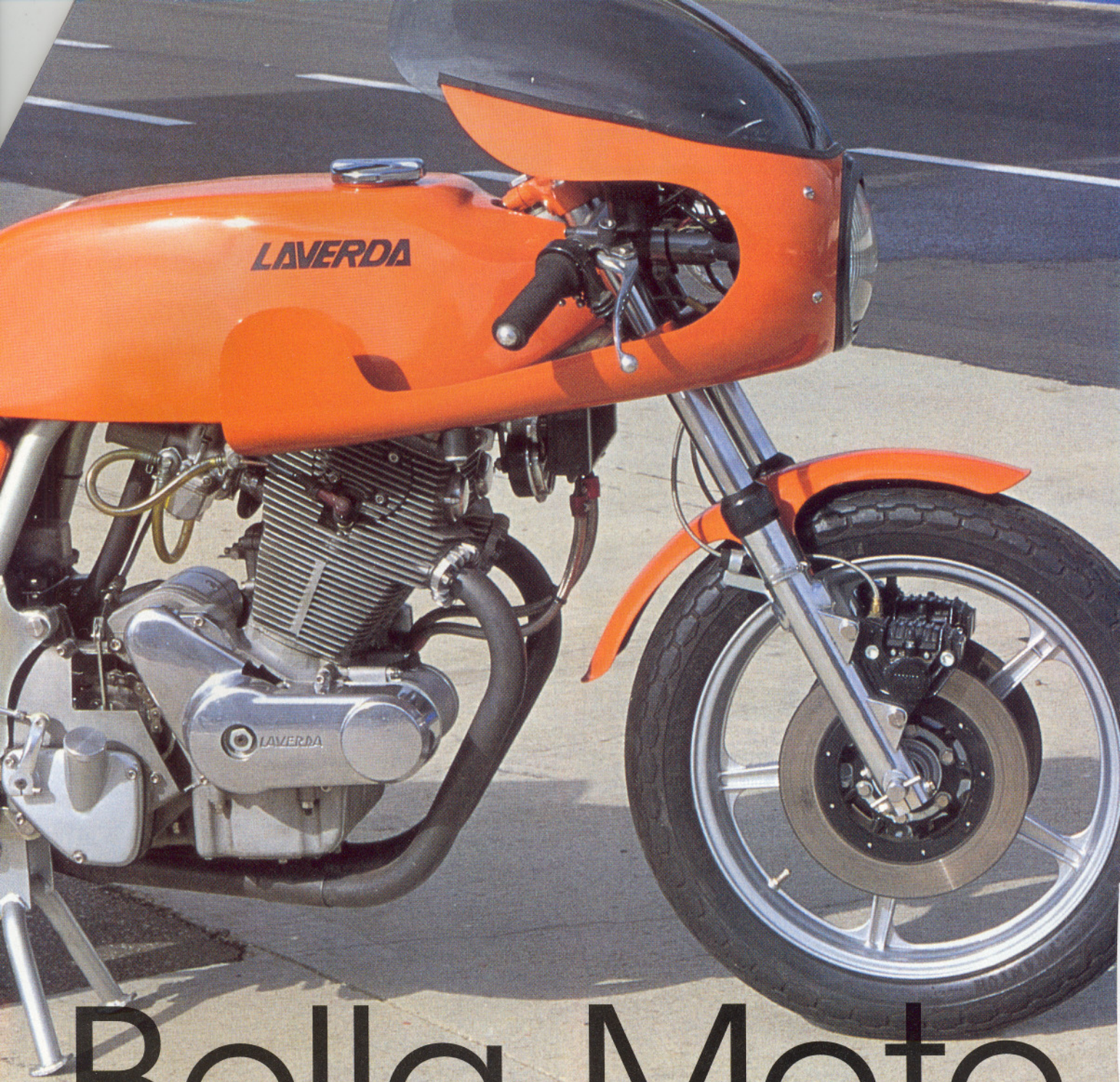
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Triton buyer's guide

Lethal lash-up or sexy special?
We show you what to look for





Bella Moto

It's not every day you get to ride the world's most evocative motorbikes. It's not that easy to organise either. But the promise of a blast on a Laverda 750SFC and an MV Agusta 750S is worth a bit of hassle. **Steve Rose** fixed the draw pics Jason Critchell

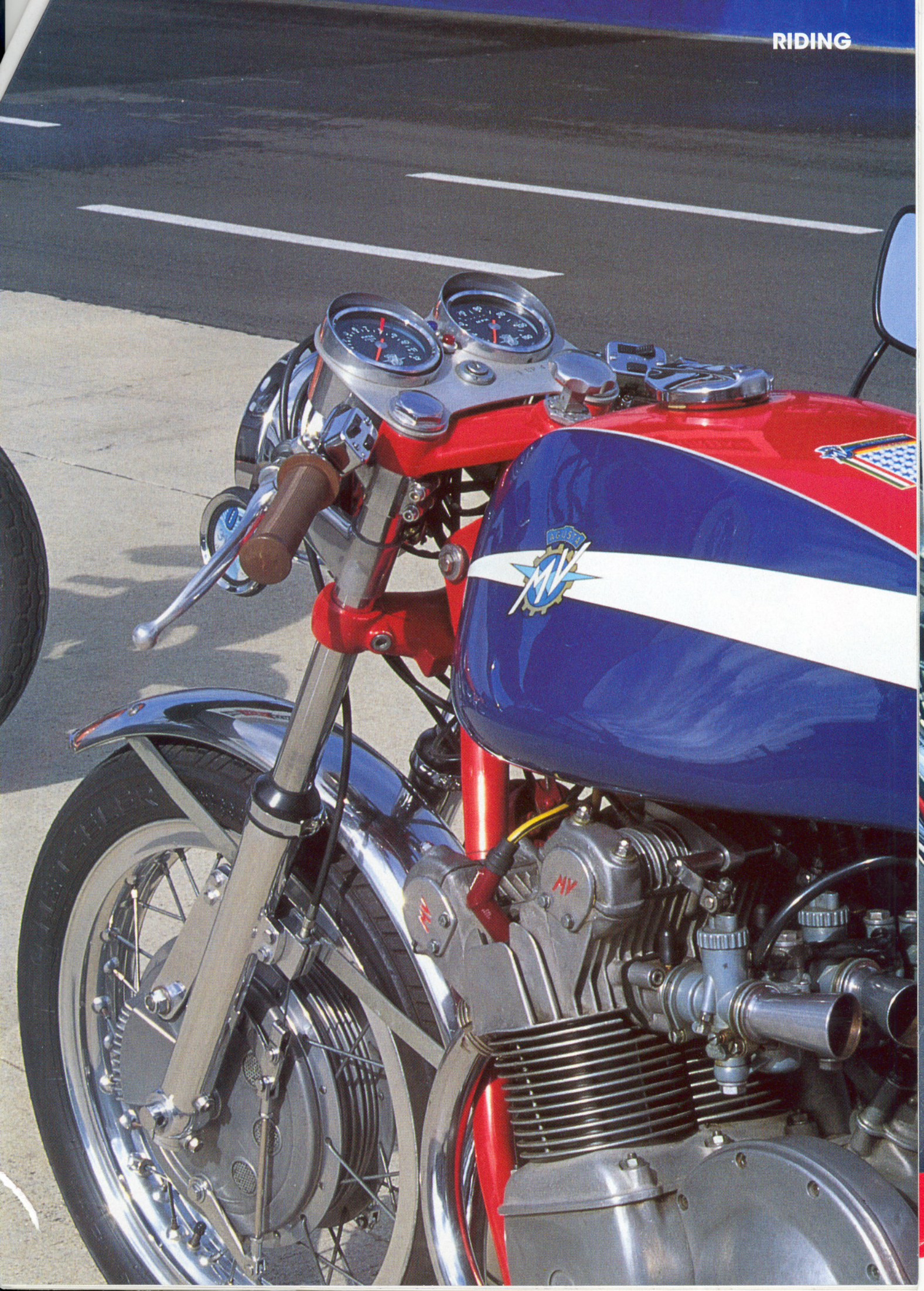
SOMETIMES THIS JOB IS more about detective work than motorbikes. When *CB* decided to feature a Laverda 750SFC and an MV 750S the first question was 'Where the flipping heck are we going to find them?' Because unlike tracking down a nice Bonnie, Gold Star or Squarrel, there are only a mere handful of these bikes in the country. And even fewer that are taxed, tested and running well enough to explore their legendary performance.

It starts with a long list of phone numbers and addresses and in this case, some 14 hours of phone calls, faxes and e-mails later, we finally come up trumps. Then it's simply a case of predicting exactly where in the country it won't be raining in late September, before finally getting to enjoy the bikes.

But come the day it's worth all the hassle and more. I meet up with my mate Des who's had the bikes overnight at his lock-up and we both

stare in silence at the two examples of Latin exotica in front of us. How do the Italians put so much soul into their motorbikes? Maybe if the Meriden canteen had served more pasta we could have built bikes with the same flair.

The Laverda SFC is a thing of immense beauty. It just hits you straight away. The long half fairing that stretches back down the even longer tank. The classical neat engine fins that could only originate from the Breganze factory, and ►





◀ a pared down hungry look that Laverda lost when it swapped two cylinders for three. Des points out that the seat unit looks like a bit of an afterthought with its rear light sticking up like a terrier's tail, but I can't see anything but beauty in this bike.

The MV demands more of a lingering look to appreciate its beauty. The cafe racer styling is more subdued than the full-on Laverda and try as you might, your attention keeps going back to the engine. The enormous sand cast casings really do look hewn out of solid alloy. The four separate round cylinder barrels, each perfectly finished to sit flush for the one-piece head. And those wonderful 'Mickey Mouse ears' cam box covers that don't need the MV logo on them. This engine could only be from one marque.

The four Dell'Orto carbs look tiny and the bellmouths pointing in different directions give the bike a sense of purpose. Those kind of details are there for a reason – the result of years of race development by some of the greatest engineers in the world.

The rest of the bike is a mixture of race and road. The petrol tank that swoops and curves around the frame gives plenty of room for your arms to reach the low bars while holding a very useful five and a bit gallons of four star. Top notch suspension and racing brakes are a nod to MV's heritage as is the leatherette racing saddle which only has room for one. The exquisite drilled alloy footrests remind me of Professor Scrumptious's Toot Sweets from the film *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. But the enormous shaft drive housing, red painted exhaust caps and car-type ignition distributor look out of place, and mov-

ing the bike around confirms it is no racing lightweight. In time the styling grows on you and compared to the other bikes of its era, the MV750S really is something special.

Des has already worked out a route. He needs to go to Baines Racing at Silverstone to look over a used Ducati for a mate and the ride from Peterborough to Silverstone takes in some of our favourite roads.

And now, it's time to fire them up. MV owner Terry Mitchell has kindly provided instructions. Flood all four carbs (no choke, only ticklers), press the button and away it will go he says. And that's exactly what happens. Now I've heard a lot of people go on about the sound of an MV and even with four roadgoing baffles fitted it really is something. Not too loud but so crisp it could only be a race developed motor. Call us sad if you like but we stand there blipping the MV's throttle for a good five minutes, revelling in the bark from those four stubby pipes.

After that, the Laverda can only be a disap-

Trees shake, birds fly south and small children cover their ears. But to a bike enthusiast, there's nothing like the sound of these two glamour machines on song



pointment, surely. Nope. Like clots we fail to see the starter button tucked away on the side of the left hand switchgear and assume it must be bump start only (the SFC was a genuine production racer, never intended for road use). Fortunately Des used to race in the bump start days and gets the SFC going first time. The big twin roars into life pushing out strong enough gas pulses through the stubby two-into-one pipe to make my eyes water as I run behind. Where the MV sounds crisp and refined, the SFC is rough and rorty – a real streetfighter. Way too loud for road use but thoroughly addictive all the same.

Des grabs the Laverda and I get the MV. The first trip is all of half a mile to the petrol station and we're already both aware that we're the centre of attention. After filling up it's time to see whether these bikes can live up to the legend.

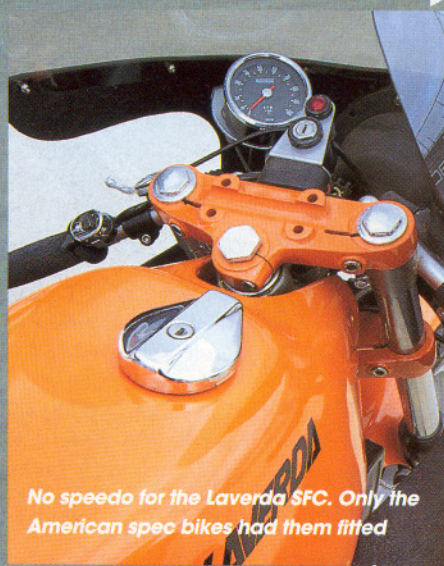
We take the A15 to Yaxley and down the backroads to join the B660 heading for Bedford

(I never said we were going straight to Silverstone). Now this is embarrassing. I'm a journalist, paid to convey the experience of riding the world's finest motorbikes and I can't find any words to adequately describe how this engine feels. It's like nothing else I've ever ridden. The pickup at low revs is a little woolly but above 4000rpm the MV carburates perfectly and revs so fast and cleanly it's hard to believe this is a 30-year-old engine. The only other bike I can relate it to is Honda's RC30. The same feeling that your right wrist is directly connected to the engine. Same buzzsaw acceleration and willingness to rev. It feels as though it was built by hand by some of the world's finest motorcycle engineers which of course is exactly what it was. How sick must Honda have felt when this bike came out only a year after their CB750. The Honda would feel asthmatic in comparison.

Owner Terry has stuck some red tape on the tachometer at 8000rpm but the engine feels like it will rev much higher than that if only I could get the flickering needle to stay still for long enough to see how many revs I am doing. And it's so

smooth. Surely racing engines are meant to be rough and uninhibited. Not this one. The light clutch and slick five-speed gearbox add to this civility. I can always find neutral at junctions and it feels like a nicely run-in new bike. The lack of internal friction is obvious when warm starting the bike. The starter barely gets chance to spin before the motor fires and is ready to go.

As we leave Glatton village I get the first chance to attack some bends. The road here is fast and undulating and the MV is a peach. The steering feels heavy when pushing the bike



No speedo for the Laverda SFC. Only the American spec bikes had them fitted

“I can't find any words to adequately describe how the MV's engine feels”

The Laverda might be the pukka racing bike but it's the MV Agusta that has the real pedigree. Together, they're worth more than my house!



“The Laverda’s in-town impracticality isn’t an issue. Just stay out of towns”

◁towards Baines’ shop Des keeps turning to look back at the MV. I know what he’s thinking but for me it’s the Laverda that makes the better package. Raw emotion wins over historic pedigree in my world.

But neither of these bikes is daily transport.

Both are there to satisfy the fine weather Sunday blaster in all of us so the Laverda’s in-town impracticality isn’t an issue. Just stay out of the towns – simple, huh?

Now I’m a sucker for racetracks and they’re just as interesting when there’s no racing hap-

pening. Turn up midweek and you might just catch a glimpse of a secret new motorcycle being tested, or – more likely at Silverstone – one of the Formula One teams testing. The Jordan Grand Prix outfit is based just across the road from the Silverstone entrance and we’ve already



seen the race team transporters arrive back from their unfortunate European GP at the Nurburgring where Heinz Harold Frentzen dropped out while in the lead. You didn't even need to watch the race, the drivers' faces in the transporters told the story.

The bloke on the Silverstone gate is a classic bike fan and says we can go inside for a nosey round so long as we don't get in anyone's way.

I'm impressed. It's a long time since I've been here and my memories of sodden British bike GPs don't tally with the smart looking new

grandstands around the place.

Alas though, all that's happening today is a British Racing Drivers Club (Silverstone is owned and run by this group which includes just about every famous name in British motorsport) drivers day with members taking Peu- ►

The MV tank logo was replaced on later bikes with the word Agusta. We prefer this logo





The Jordan Formula One team returns to its Silverstone HQ. Des meanwhile is angling for another go on the Laverda

◁ geot 306s and Lotus Elises around the circuit. But most of these blokes know a thing or two about bikes and it isn't long before there's a small crowd around the Laverda and MV. Most are knowledgeable and a straw poll reveals that while the majority would take the SFC for a quick lap, it's the MV they want to hear fired up. Of course we oblige and when the Laverda is also started the crowd suddenly gets a lot bigger.

Then it's time for a quick bite in the canteen and we're heading home. Des takes the Laverda so I can compare the MV's behaviour in town (at least that's what I tell him). We swap bikes again at Kimbolton.

As we approach Peterborough, it starts to spit with rain. This is bad, I promised Terry we wouldn't ride his bike in the wet and the last

It isn't long before there's a crowd wanting to hear the bikes fire up ▷

couple of miles seem to take forever. Back at the lock-up we wipe down the bikes carefully, listening to the pinging sounds of cooling brakes and engines.

It takes a couple of days for the reality of riding these legends to sink in. I talk to some former colleagues on another bike magazine

and they're obviously awestruck that I've ridden a real MV. One of them has ridden the new MV750 F-4 and he's keen to quiz me about the old bike. I'm honoured and indebted to Terry Mitchell and Steve Elliott for making it happen. Now, where did I put the deeds to the house... ? ■

Second opinion

Des O' Connell is old enough to remember the the MV and SFC first time around.

"I used to race against SFCs in open class racing – in fact I'm not sure Steve Elliott of Palmelli wasn't riding one. They're wonderful bikes and just as good to ride as they are

to look at. It's difficult to imagine the raw feel of that big Laverda twin. Its power delivery is an assault on your whole system. But it still handles and brakes well for an old bike. I was pleasantly surprised. And doesn't it look good for a 24-year-old machine?"

The MV is the stuff of legends. This was a real once in a lifetime opportunity for me. The engine was

actually better than I ever imagined. It looks handbuilt and feels like some of the well tuned ex-works engines I used to see when I worked with Leon Moss at Ledar many years ago. The bike is more of a grand tourer in the Ferrari GT mode than a racer on the road. I'd change the brake material for softer road linings if it were mine, but I'm nit-picking.



1975 Laverda SFC

Price new (1975) £2000

Price now £7000 - £12000

Engine: 744cc, sohc aircooled twin with 80 x 74mm bore x stroke and 9.8:1 compression. Carburation by two Dell'Orto 32mm. Five-speed close ratio gearbox with triplex chain primary drive and wet multiplate clutch. 12v electrics with coil ignition

Chassis: four tube spine frame with two way damping 38mm Ceriani telescopic forks and twin two way damped Ceriani shock absorbers. Brakes: Twin 11in (28cm) discs with Brembo 2-pot calipers front, single 11in (28cm) disc with Brembo 2-pot caliper rear. Tyre sizes 4.00 x 18 front and rear

Performance: 125mph, 75bhp@7500rpm, 37mpg

Dimensions: wheelbase 58in (147cm), dry weight 475lb (216kg), seat height 28in (71cm), fuel capacity 5 gallon (22.7 litres)

Owners Club

International Laverda Owners Club Ray Shone, 10 Arran Avenue, Sale, Cheshire, M33 3NQ

Publications

Registro Laverda 750 SFC Italia Massimo Borghesi (limited edition, 1000 printed in Italian). Tel 00 39 02 720 22 600

Laverda by Raymond Ainscoe. Osprey books (1991). ISBN 1 85532 183 1

Laverda Gold Portfolio Brooklands Books. ISBN 1 85520 353 7

Laverda Twins and triples by Mick Walker, Crowood Books (1999). ISBN1 86126 220-5

Websites

Laverda SFC 750

www3.sympatico.ca/kalimidis/pivV.htm

Laverda SFC 750 Owners Registry

www.richtea.demon.co.uk/laverda/index

Laverda International Links

<http://203.34.180.3/laverda/body/llinks.htm>

History

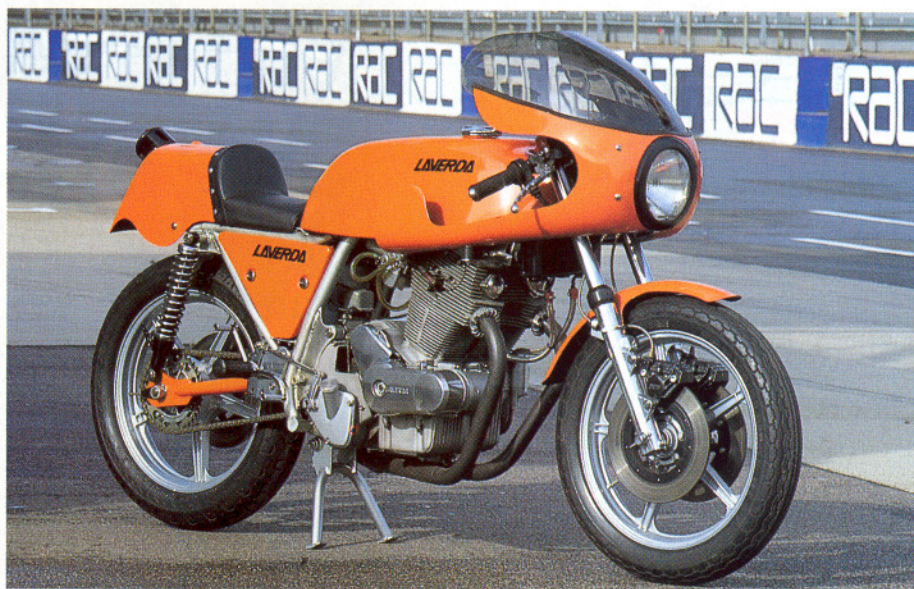
Racing success has always sold motorbikes and Laverda knew this as well as anyone when they launched the 750SFC back in 1971. They'd already dipped a toe in the water with the original 750S, racing in selected endurance events, but without the success (or reliability) the factory thought they deserved.

The factory's response was to create a purpose built racer – the SFC or Super Freni Competizione (Super Brakes Competition). It was almost an entirely new bike and was an instant winner taking first second and fifth places in the 1971 Barcelona 24-hour race at Montjuich Park.

The bikes were all handbuilt by the factory's competition workshop and were ideally suited to endurance racing – more so than short circuit racing where the extra weight and stability was a disadvantage.

The first batch of 20 bikes (the 5000 series – so called because the frame numbers began in the 5000s) were for approved customers only including the factory's contracted riders. Later on the bike was available to mere mortals (starting with the 8000 series) and although intended for competition use quite a number of SFCs made it onto the road.

There were few parts interchangeable with



the standard 750 roadster. All engine components were specially selected, honed, heat treated and balanced to ensure maximum reliability rather than headline grabbing power figures. Which isn't to say it was slow. Each SFC engine had to make 70bhp at 7500rpm or it was back on the bench for more work.

Inside the motor were bigger valves, polished inlet tracts, a modified crank running roller bearings, specially forged Mondial three-ring pistons and a close ratio gearbox.

The frame was based on the roadgoing SF but had extra bracing, needle roller swinging arm bearings, taper roller head bearings and mounting lugs for the fairing.

Suspension front and rear was by Ceriani and customers could specify either Laverda's own drum brakes or a Ceriani made four leading shoe front unit.



Silencer is barely worthy of the name but the suspension and brakes are excellent

40mm exhaust downpipes minus balance pipes were unique to the SFC in Laverda's range as were the narrow taper megaphones. Although technically a road legal bike, no speedo was fitted – just a Smiths tachometer.

The 1972 models got a higher output oil pump, revised swinging arm and exhaust downpipes, and a glass fibre fuel tank to replace the original alloy item. They also had the MKII Laverda front brake.

The 11,000 series was the last drum braked SFC. The major change was a new exhaust with a balance pipe under the engine.

Laverda stopped racing the SFC officially at the end of 1973 to concentrate on production of the new triple. But production continued and for the 1974 model year (16 - 17000 series) the SFC had some major changes. The most noticeable was fitting triple Brembo disc brakes and the new more rounded styling. The engine got higher compression pistons, revised cam timing and new Dell'Orto carbs (the previous models had all used Amal Concentric MKIs).

The final SFC was the 1975 Elettronica which had electronic ignition and a redesigned cylinder head. New barrels and 10.5:1 Asso pistons plus an oil cooler were fitted. The final SFCs built in 1976 had cast wheels.

What to check

- Is it genuine? Real SFC models have the frame prefix 750C or SFC, and frame and engine numbers should be the same.
- Originality. You might find an early bike with disc brakes and later engine parts fitted.
- Listen to the engine. They were very reliable but even the newest are 23 years old and most have had a hard life. Also check spoked wheels with disc braked hubs which were magnesium and often cracked.