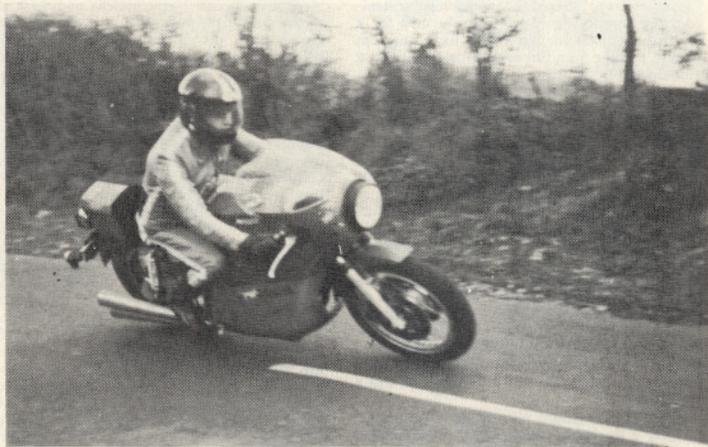


MV AGUSTA 750 AMERICA-PLUS!

"Faint not, nor fear" (J. S. B. Monsell, 1811-75)



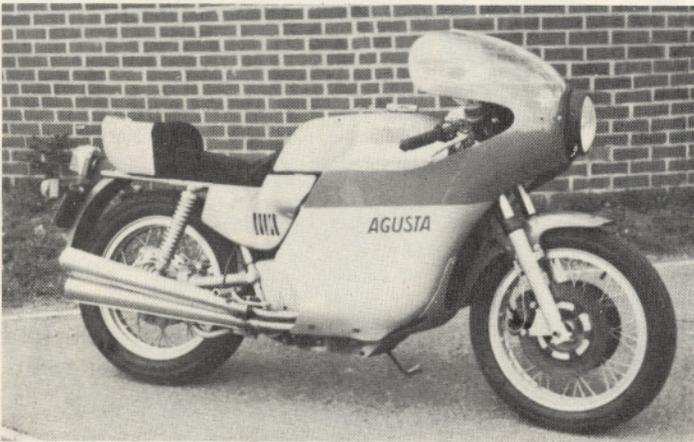
I EXPERIENCED a mixture of strange emotions one day amid intermittent snow showers just before Easter: a combination of sheer joy and rank terror. The reason for this was an MV 750S America, at least they were the words emblazoned on the side panel; but the machine is considerably different from standard. It is, in fact, an 850 with four larger than standard Dellorto carburetors complete with bellmouths, bigger valves, high lift cams and a power output that can only be guessed at. Oh yes, and those exhaust pipes; the plot looked quite harmless until it was started, but the noise when it finally fired on all four was tremendous. The bike was on the garage forecourt which has a kind of corrugated plastic roof. The noise bashed

against the roof and blazed down to assault the ears of the customers hitherto calmly filling up with petrol. It was unlike anything I had ever heard before. I was expecting something akin to the racing 500s, a smooth sweet pleasant sound, but this was far more brutishly powerful, if anything more exciting, and frightening because I was about to get on and ride it. I was told that it wouldn't want to tick over until it was really warm and until then it had to be kept above 2,000 rpm. This may not sound like much but you should have heard it. I finally found enough courage to take hold of the fat twistgrip and climbed aboard the machine. The first impressions were friendly. The seating position was racy without being initially too uncomfort-

table and the clutch was found to be very light as I drew the lever in and engaged first gear in the five speed box. Perhaps we were going to become friends after all. I was so relieved that I unconsciously let the revs fall, there was a cough and a splutter and it died. I laughed nervously and pressed the starter button, thankfully it started and I manoeuvred it out into the traffic. Of course by now it was snowing too, but that soon ceased to worry me because I was protected fairly well by the fairing. Anyway, I was too busy trying to stop accelerating so fast; it wasn't my fault, the beastie seemed to have a mind of its own. The best thing of course would be to apply the brakes, especially prudent as there was a roundabout coming up. I did so and found not a trace of delay in retardation, which I was half expecting in the wet conditions. The twin Brembo cast-iron discs behaved admirably, fully complemented by a large diameter drum brake on the rear.

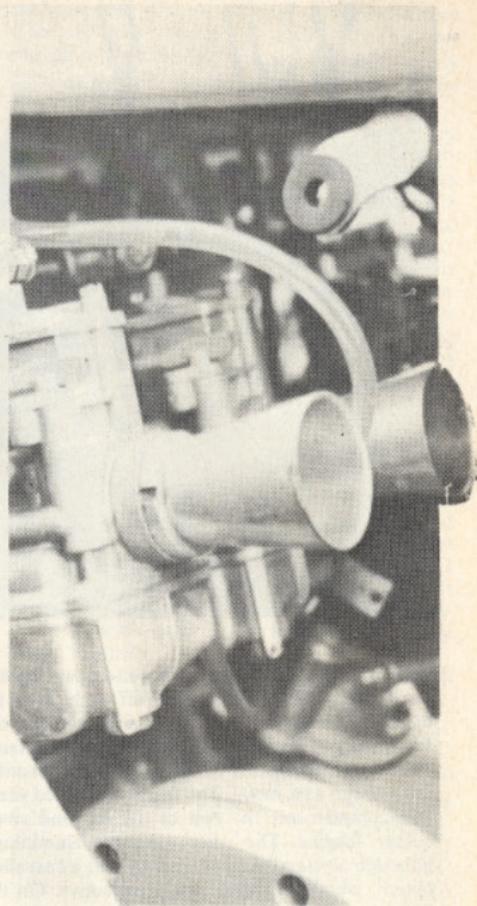
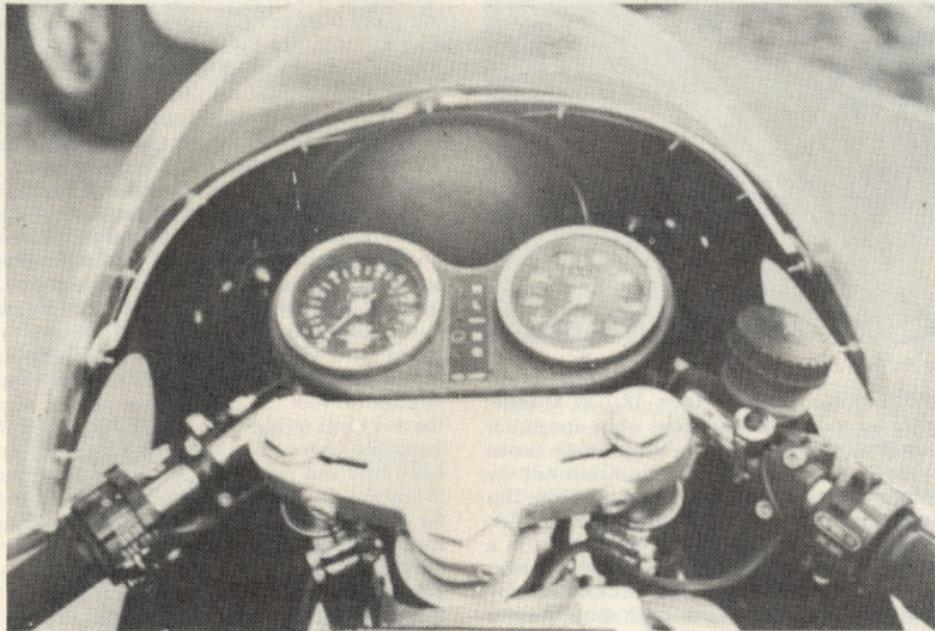
On the A412 coming eastwards out of Slough there is a piece of dual carriageway a couple of miles long which has long undulating bends along it. It was here that the beast first revealed its ugly nature. I had noticed before that at about 40 mph the bike moved gently from side to side, but this cleared up by the time 50 mph was reached. In fact, everything was rosy until it was banked over above 70 mph (who, me, officer?) then the dreaded weave started. It was a long lazy oscillation from side to side which got worse as I tried accelerating out of it. I must admit that I had been warned back at the garage that it might weave. I was assured that this didn't happen to standard machinery and that they had in fact cured it with an eleven stone rider aboard by adjustment of tyre pressures. However, I am two stone lighter than this so it was back to weaving. I arrived back home and was asked what it was like. I didn't reply, I was too busy rushing for the loo!

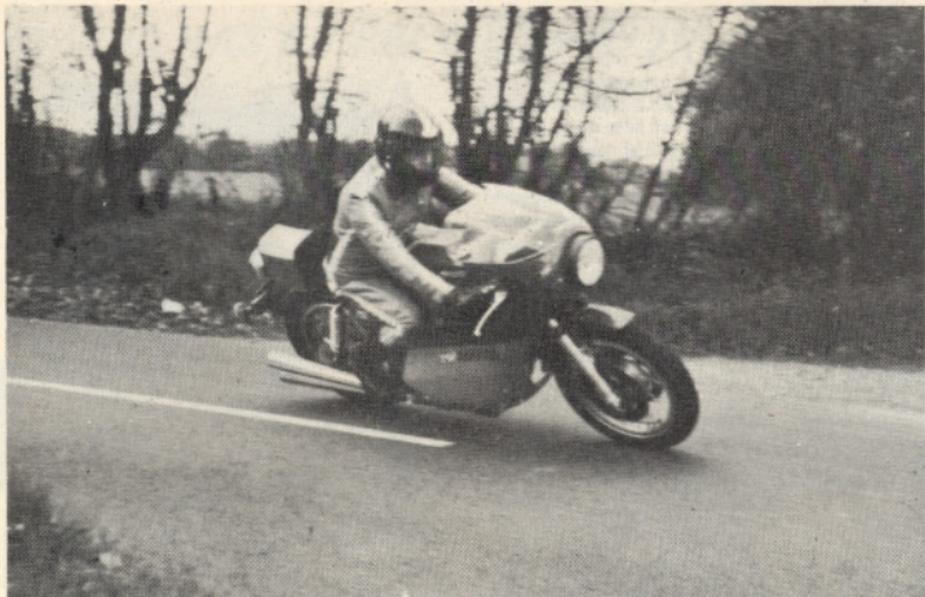
By the afternoon I had convinced myself it was



all in my imagination, so I took a trip to Reading, utilizing the M40. This time it was fine in a straight line up to 90 mph, but when a crosswind hit the machine the weaving started again. After answering another call of nature, I put the tyre pressures down a few pounds and checked the rear springs which are, incidentally, dual rate units. To my surprise they were at the softest setting, so I put them up one notch on the five-way adjustment. This seemed to help the straight line stability, but it still weaved here and there.

Back home again, I contemplated the machine overall. It is very handsome and from cursory inspection, well made. It is hardly representative of the marque however. It has become over the past few months a press hack which was not its original purpose. In the first place it had been made for Phil Read to ride in a demonstration at a race circuit in November. The only trouble was the bike arrived five days after the event! So it has been put to good use and loaned to gentlemen such as I. In consequence it has covered 2,000 miles and unfortunat-





ly the last people to have it (a well-known weekly publication) fell off it, wiping off both front indicators, dislodging the fairing and cracking the front mudguard; so it does look a bit secondhand. The engine, though, is oiltight and looks beautiful in its rough cast metal. The frame is painted silver and complements the rest of the red and silver colour scheme. The wheel rims are aluminium, although on standard machines there is a cast alloy option, which looks extremely attractive. On the front there is a 3.50 x 18 Pirelli and on the back a

racing profile Metzeler 4.00 x 18. The Metzeler gives a good section of rubber when upright for acceleration, but instead of a round profile like an Avon Roadrunner, it is flat in the middle with the sides rising at a 45 degree angle like a TT100. This factor contributed to the fact that I spent the first day fighting the motorcycle round corners in a series of lurches and that was when it wasn't weaving! Altogether I could not be called a happy man that day. There was so much about the bike that was so enjoyable, admittedly most of it cen-

tred around the magnificent performance of the engine, but because this could only be enjoyed in short bursts in straight lines I felt cheated. Motorcycling is after all just as much about going round corners as anything else. But before I go any further a bit more about the engine. Unfortunately the concessionaires don't know what is inside the engine exactly.

They have telexed for information but as yet have received no reply. They have set the carburation but the ignition settings are just guesswork. In fact, incredible as it may seem, this unit is probably not giving of its best. Once warm the engine ticks over at a consistent 800 rpm rumble, and apart from the odd splutter from the bellmouths of the Dellorto's it will pull from 1,000 rpm which is quite remarkable when there is enough power available to obtain 130 mph with another gear to go. A speed attained by one braver than I on a test track I hasten to add. The speed in which it will accelerate from 0-100 mph is quite phenomenal. On two-thirds throttle it will out accelerate a 550 Honda which is using 9,000 rpm and full throttle. Only to be expected you might say until I tell you that the power doesn't come on strong until 6,000 rpm and I was only using 5,500 rpm. At 5,500 rpm the motor starts to come on the cam and sends you grabbing for the next gear before the revs shoot through the roof. By the time your reflexes react the revs have reached seven and a half. Couple this incredible performance with the marvellous exhaust note and you soon run out of superlatives. When you shut off and the exhaust noise is lost to the wind there are some tremendous crashing sounds from the engine department as the all-gear-driven engine slows to more respectable speeds. These noises are compounded by the fairing diverting them up to the rider. Some might call all this noise unpleasant but to me it all adds excite-

Still, back to the chassis, I adjusted the pressure differential in the tyres from 3 psi to 5 psi making a larger rearward bias and put the springs up another notch. I had already checked that the tyres were seated properly and that all the bearings were tight, so I thought the answer must lie with the tyre pressures and/or spring settings and damping. I could do nothing to change the damping so I could only adjust the other two. These latest settings made quite a large improvement, but still it would weave alarmingly round high speed corners. The straight line stability was now quite good though. After a 100-mile ride that day, I was beginning to feel an empathy towards the MV. I was no longer fighting against it and so it seemed, vice versa. On one bumpy stretch of about ten miles, it was superb. The road was fairly narrow and bumpy and consequently it was not possible to travel very fast. There were a lot of medium speed corners as well. I balanced my weight on the footrests and used my legs as auxiliary shock absorbers. In contrast to the previous days, the MV instilled absolute confidence this time, with not a trace of a wiggle. I expended a good degree of energy over the short stretch chucking the machine from side to side as each successive bend appeared. The ground clearance is very good with high placed footrests and the steering was absolutely neutral. It is such a machine of contrasts. But then, is that so surprising when the same factory make both a 750 DOHC with shaft drive and left foot gear change and a 350 pushrod twin with chain drive and six speeds on the right? Or taking it one step further the same people make helicopters and motorcycles. I wouldn't be surprised if they had a side-line in washing machines as well!

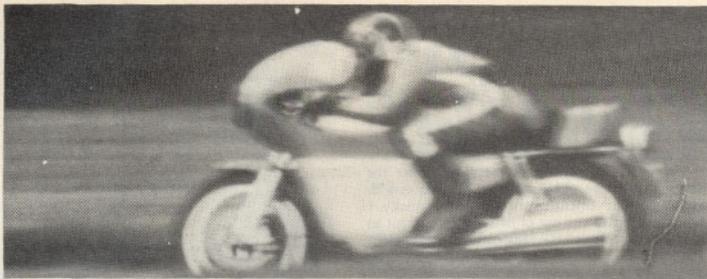
I went to Thruxton to watch (dare I say it) a car race. It was a Formula 2 international, which was won by an Englishman, a rare sight in For-

mula 2. On the way I kept the speed to legal limits and managed to achieve just over 40 mpg, whereas a more normal figure would be between 30 and 35 mpg. The only things wrong with the journey were aching wrists and left elbow. Due to the seating position and lack of wind resistance because of the fairing, you need to be travelling above 60 mph before the balance becomes correct and then high mileages can be sustained.

The queue to get out of the circuit after the meeting was large and long. After 20 minutes with hardly any movement I was becoming panicky. I was expecting to run out of petrol any moment as I needed to replenish the tank before I went home. The generator light didn't go out until past 2,500 rpm and I thought that with a motor this "hot" the plugs were bound to oil up. None of these happened and I was yet again amazed by the docility of the engine as it ticked over reliably for half an hour. Once out of the confines of the circuit the queues didn't stop, but the road was wide enough to filter along the outside so with the headlight on and the engine in a low gear I proceeded. People actually moved out of the way for me when needed. Whilst on the subject of admiring glances, if you're not the talkative type don't buy an MV. Wherever I stopped the crowds gathered – well one or two anyway and this despite the tattered appearance. Most knew that it was so 37 world championships must mean something. When I had started it up outside the house that morning a neighbour came out and I thought there were going to be complaints but as it turned out he liked it and we had quite a talk, well more like a scream as we had to make ourselves heard above the crescendos of sound waves echoing round the quiet suburban area. One chap came up when I was outside the local motorcycle emporium and asked if this was the one with the automatic gearbox!



The gearbox is actually a five-speeder with a high first and the top three very close together. The movement was quite long but not much effort was needed. It was necessary to be careful to engage each gear fully though or false neutrals would appear. Once I had cleared the queues I decided to use the performance in an effort to get home before it got dark, a feeble excuse but so what? Again when a bend appeared I flung the



machine down without too much *finesse*, but it seemed to respond well to this treatment because it remained absolutely stable for the whole of the 80-mile journey. I returned much happier. I arrived home and realizing I had forgotten my door key I proceeded to climb through the only open window. This required considerable contortions on my part, but it was worth it, not only because I gained access to my own home but also because I had been struck by an idea. The reason for the weave might have something to do with the unusual rear tyre profile. When the bike was well

banked over there were no problems; it was steadier than the proverbial rock, but when it was just gently leaning into a corner it would start to weave. It could be that with the bike only gently banked over it was cornering on the very edge of the first part of the tyre, whereas when it was well banked over it was cornering on substantial amounts of rubber on the side of the tyre. Homespun wisdom perhaps, but this hypothesis was borne out in practice the next time I went for a ride. Any corner that required a considerable amount of lean was a joy to go round and slight curves were more of a menace. With more experience of the motorcycle however I also learned to control it more capably. If I almost let go of the handlebars and put my weight as far forward as possible when entering a fast curve and made sure I accelerated earlier, then it seemed to alleviate the problem. Before whenever I had felt the bike start to wiggle I hung onto the handlebars in white knuckled fright and shut off the throttle; an instinctive reaction. With further acquaintance of its weird and wonderful ways I made better progress.

Brakes and shaft drive

There are two aspects of the bike I haven't mentioned yet, these being the brakes and the shaft drive. The reasons for this is largely because of the fact that both items were so utterly unobtrusive as to not warrant any conscious comment on any part. It was not that I had no cause to use the brakes in anger however. No matter how noisy the machine or how garish the clothing, people still refuse to believe that two-wheeled vehicles have any right to even be noticed. A recent advertisement by the Institute of Motorcycling illustrates this. It says that a motorcyclist must treat all other road users as idiots unless otherwise proven. I wholeheartedly agree. Several occasions in my brief ownership of the MV I had occasion to use the brakes to the full and a testimony to their intangible efficiency is that I am still here today. And the shaft drive? Equally un-

obtrusive and efficient although there was a very slight oil leak around the drain plug, but not enough to clog the rear end of the machine in oily filth, as is the inevitable case with a chain-driven motorcycle.

By the time it had come to give the machine back I did so with great reluctance, especially after I gave it full throttle in third from 2,500 rpm right up to 7,500 rpm. It would be a long time until I can sample such performance again. It is so difficult to put the overall performance in perspective. I rode my own Japanese 750 shortly afterwards and thought it exceptionally mundane. This is a machine with which I have previously been very happy from every angle. Things like the superb steering and stability of the MV are not properly appreciated until you ride something else and try taking the corners at the same speeds as the MV. Ground clearance has suddenly become a problem for me with my motorcycle! The sheer roadholding capabilities of the MV are far in excess of the ordinary Japanese heavyweight. In fact after having tasted strawberry jam on my bread I'm finding it very hard to return to bread and dripping. Can you get addicted to a motorcycle? I am suffering withdrawal symptoms so I suppose it must be possible. Finally thanks must go to MV concessionaires for letting me loose on their rather special machine.

P. J. STEERE



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