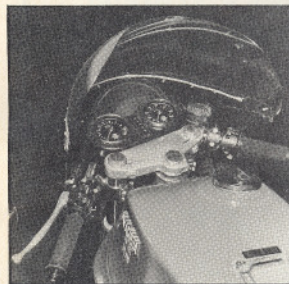
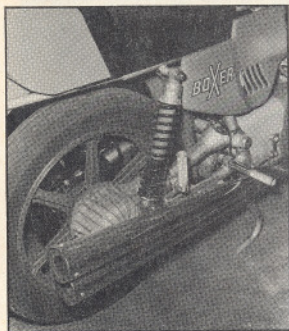




## BOXER TRICKS

**Exclusive Track Test... Phil Read  
and Michael Scott play tunes  
on the most melodious and  
expensive bike in the world:  
MV Agusta's £4180 850 Boxer**





#### MAKE & MODEL

### MV AGUSTA 850 MONZA (nee Boxer)

£4183.60, including £210.60 for optional fairing

#### PERFORMANCE

Maximum Speed - 145mph (est)  
Standing Quarter Mile - 13sec (est)

#### ENGINE

Type - transverse four-cylinder four-stroke, gear-driven  
dohc, air-cooled  
Displacement - 832cc  
Power - 90bhp at 8500rpm (est)  
Torque - not available  
Bore & Stroke - 69 x 56mm  
Compression Ratio - 9.6:1  
Induction - four 27mm Dell'Ortos with accelerator pump  
Exhaust - four into four  
Oil System - wet sump, 7.3pt capacity  
Ignition - car-type distributor and twin coils

#### TRANSMISSION

Clutch - multiplate wet  
Primary Drive - helical gear from crankshaft between  
third and fourth cylinders  
Final Drive - drive shaft and Cardan joint

#### CHASSIS

Frame - duplex cradle, single top tube  
Front Suspension - telescopic Ceriani fork  
Rear Suspension - swinging arm incorporating drive  
shaft, three-way adjustable spring-shocks  
Wheelbase - 54.7in  
Ground Clearance - 6.3in  
Seat Height - 31in  
Weight - 518lb (dry)  
Fuel Capacity - 5.2gall  
Tyres - Dunlop Endurance Racing  
Brakes - triple 11in discs

#### INSTRUMENTS

150mph speedometer, no trip meter; 12 000rpm rev  
counter, red line at 8500rpm; warning lights - high beam,  
lights, indicators, neutral and generator charge

#### EQUIPMENT

Electrical - 12v 32a/h battery, 135w generator  
Lighting - 40/45w headlight

"Until today, I didn't know what a magnificent bike it is. I've ridden it on the road, but you can't get near the limit there. Too many people doing unpredictable things, and I'm frightened. Now, since riding the MV on a closed circuit in comparison with other road bikes, I've discovered what a superlative sports motorcycle it is."

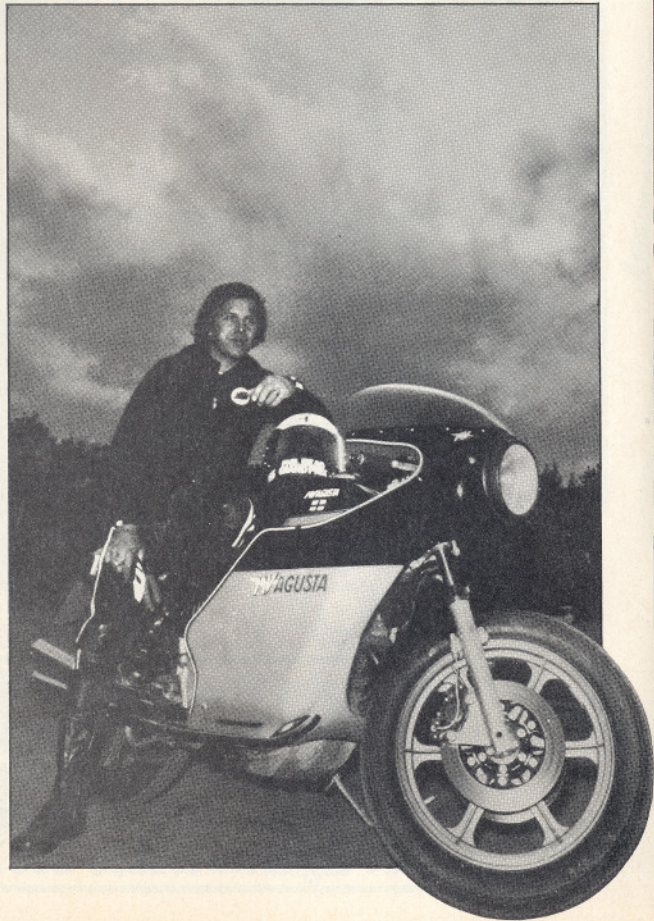
Phil Read talking. Eight times world champion and veteran manipulator of racing bikes that were the pinnacle of two-wheel development in their time. Works Yamahas, MVs in their prime, works Hondas. And now, after a day at the test track with Super-Bike, he's like a kid with a new toy, all wound up over his latest acquisition, the MV Agusta 850 Boxer.

Just a day at the circuit: one of our regular outings to test bikes in the controlled conditions where you can take them to their very limits (or your own, whichever comes first). And one tries, you know, not to be overruled by Phil Read's presence. He's an approachable and likeable guy, and just another biker who happens to have got his shit together to the extent of winning a string of championships. But it's hard not to be impressed. Because, apart from anything else, this guy can ride a motorcycle about twice as fast as anyone else I've ever ridden with.

And it's not an ego-trip when I say the following.

With me mounted on his MV Agusta and Phil on a dead-standard Honda F2, I was able (just) to stay in front of him. Not an ego-trip at all: just a profound tribute to the Italian masterpiece. It had endurance racing tyres fitted, and gas shocks at the back. These considerable assets, combined with the already substantial performance and roadholding, made the MV utterly invincible. I have never been round our test track so quickly, nor in such security. And there sure isn't any other way I'd be able to stay in front of a world champion, either.

The Boxer is a direct development from the MV Agusta 750S America, tested in our July issue. Which is in turn a development of the racing Agusta fours of the '60s. It starts out as a winner just by looking so beautiful; that sculptured scalloped fuel tank, the squat and purposeful stance, the evocative red-and-silver racing fairing. And within the glassfibre flanks, a classically beautiful engine. The America is fast, memorable and a joy to ride. The Boxer fulfils all the promise that, it becomes obvious with hindsight, was only latent in the America. You pay the price (the highest in motorcycling), and you get a bike that is as raucously brash as the America is quietly genteel. Where the America is fast, the Boxer is sensational ... the









former bike will top 130mph given a long enough run; the Boxer will accelerate past that and (so the claim goes) run on to around 145 given the space. Top whack on our short-straightened test track was around 120, with plenty more to come.

**Phil Read:** "The Agusta is race-bred, and it shows. It's stable and sensitive. It wasn't always so stable though. When I got it (on a permanent loan from Agusta Concessionaires) it was fitted with Dunlop TT100s, and over 80 it wouldn't travel in a straight line. Possibly, this was something to do with the shaft drive, but certainly those tyres don't suit this particular bike with me on it. Dunlop say their Endurance Racing tyres aren't suitable for road use, but I fitted them anyway. They made all the difference. There's a very slight weave at about 80 now, noticeable at the start of the straight on this track, but basically it's dead stable and roadholding on the road, is limited only by the state of the traffic. On the track, where you can look for the limits of the bike instead, I discovered that it handles superbly. It remains a road bike, and so it feels heavy. But there are none of the usual suspension problems and it really goes round corners."

True, true. The circuit wasn't in good condition: trails of dust on one corner, damp patches elsewhere, and even a horrifying bed of wet leaves round the outside of the bend. Cornering lines had to dodge the dodgy bits rather than take the classic arc. We had a standard F2 Honda there (also Phil's bike), also a present. Lucky sod. On its Bridgestone tyres. It was spooked. And a test BMW R100RS on Continentals. Also scary, but a bit more manageable. And the MV on Dunlop Endurance Racing covers. Magnificent! It also slid on the slippery bits, but predictably, and so quick to recover without losing its poise.

**Phil Read:** "Unlike most other road bikes, the Boxer's suspension doesn't get weak at the knees when you ride it to the limit on a closed circuit. Mind you, this bike does have Koni gas-shocks mounted at the back. Don't know what the standard Marzocchi is like, but these are terrific. They really keep the back end under control without losing too much comfort on the road. Being gas, they can be mounted upside down, which is why the pre-load adjuster is up at the top and so accessible. The real reason is to save unsprung weight, though, by putting the body of the shock on to the frame rather than the swinging arm. With that sodding great crown-wheel-and-pinion of the shaft drive, every little bit helps."

Since the Boxer is a supersports development of an already sporting motorcycle, one might expect it to have become a peaky devil; reluctant to start, awkward at low revs then screaming with sudden fury for the last 1000 revs before the red line. Quite the reverse. The Boxer is louder and more powerful than the America. But much of the power increase comes low down in the range, and the torque curve has been lowered and flattened. The 750 America suffered in acceleration from over-tall gearing; you have to slip the clutch to more than 20mph to get it off the line even halfway fast. The Boxer has exactly the same gear ratios, but no more do they feel too high. The new bike pulls from 2000rpm, and is almost as easy on its clutch as a low geared Japanese iron.

**Phil Read:** "I was surprised at the speed of power. It really pulls from low down, and keeps at it right to the red line at 8500. I'd expected it to be at least as peaky as my Honda F2, which has a noticeable power step at 6000rpm. But there's none at all. Actually, the racers used to be a bit like that, too."

You could ride them - if it was desperately wet or something - you could ride them from 2000rpm. They were perfectly tractable, really well-behaved. But the power came in with a bang at about 10000 revs, and they revved up to 14500 . . . 15 for the last two laps. Mind you, my Boxer's barely run in, and I'm not too sure that the tuning is spot-on. We should have done a plug chop at the end of the straight. On this circuit, it was pulling about 120mph no matter whether I was at 8500 in fourth or 7000 in fifth. It should go faster by revving it in the lower gear, so I think it must be a bit off song."

Since the physical resemblance between racer and roadster is so strong, especially of their engines with that unique quickly detachable crankshaft, I wondered just how much the Boxer felt like those old-time racers. To me, riding even the 750S America feels like winning the Italian Grand Prix. The engine is so responsive, so willing to rev, and the handling so taut that it feels like a GP bike despite its weight. Even more so with the Boxer: it has opened exhausts and a four-cylinder howl that remains exclusively MV no matter how many Jap four-pots there are. Is there really a roadster/racer similarity?

**Phil Read:** "No. Well, yes . . . the thrashing of the camshaft gear train, that reminds me of the old works MVs. Otherwise there's a huge difference. More important than that they are both MV Agustas in that one is a racer and the other isn't. Remember that a single-seater racer weighs about 300lbs; the Boxer weighs more than 500. It's a superb sporting machine. But to me it's just a road bike."

"The Boxer is heavy to ride. Not difficult, very nice in fact. But the steering is heavy, the bike has a long trail. The racing bikes did, too, so there is that similarity. It means that they won't naturally follow a line . . . you have to steer them with the handlebars all the time. But it makes them stable in a straight line at high speed. That's why neither the Boxer nor the racers need a steering damper."

"Although it doesn't feel much like an MV racer, you can certainly feel that the Boxer is race-bred, because it is so good at those aspects of performance that you can only really test on a closed circuit. When you really stretch it, then you discover how much poise - and thus safety - the MV has in reserve."

OK, so it's a superlative track bike, a machine that makes most other road bikes look and feel like donkeys. But is it a really practical road bike, or has too much been sacrificed for those more esoteric and seldom-used facets of motorcycling? With my largish frame, I found the big MV a bit cramped for long-distance road riding, and the clip-on bars made my wrists and neck ache.

**Phil Read:** "For me, it's terrific. The riding position has been designed by a racer, and suits me perfectly. Comfortable for long trips and quite satisfactory for short hauls two-up. The fairing is really a racing item, and it doesn't give as much protection as I'd like except if you lie flat on the tank, which is silly. There's absolutely no hand protection. And I had to trim the trailing edges to avoid slicing my knee-caps off under heavy braking. I find that once the speed gets up, though, the rush of wind over the screen cushions my weight so I'm not leaning forward on to my wrists."

"The most thing, I find, is the exhaust noise. After a run, my head buzzes for quite a while. The standard exhaust system may be legal in Europe, but it's illegal here, I'm sure. I love the way it sounds, though. Quieter silencers are available, but then you lose it, don't you? There's another aspect, though, that makes me think that in the long run I'd prefer quieter pipes. The Boxer is so noisy at full song that I can never use the last 1500 revs on the road. Every policeman in the country would hear it. With a quieter system, then I'd be able to use the full performance."

The MV Boxer is a really exciting machine. It looks right, it sounds right, and it offers more up-and-out speed than any other bike in the world. Just the sort of thing you shouldn't be without."

Footnote. Identity crisis: since the MV Agusta Boxer was announced (the name Boxer commemorates the ill-fated horizontally opposed MV racer and is used in England only), an awkward fact has emerged. The name Boxer had already been patented, so the top Agusta had to be rechristened in a hurry. From here on in, it shall henceforth be known as The Spotlight Kid. No, sorry, mistake. It shall be known as the MV Agusta 850 Monza. **Michael Scott**

