

On Two Wheels

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THE INSIDE STORY OF MOTOR CYCLING

MV Agusta 850 Monza

The name of MV Agusta has quietly dwindled into the shadows in terms of 'the quickest superbikes' in the past few years, with that particular battle being fought out between Laverda's Jota, the 900 and 1000 Kawasakis and the new wave of other 1000cc machines from the Orient. In fact, Gallarate's offering, the 750S America, has had something of an identity crisis in the past year or so, being neither the best tourer nor outright quickest bike for its undisputed highest price.

However, late Summer 1977 saw the shadow lift from the sleepy little town north of Milan as the tuned America, named 850SS, or Monza, howled into life for the first time. Although still 100-odd ccs away from the now accepted norm of 1-litre, the MV instead boasted over 100bhp and gearing which took it to something approaching 160mph. That

should be the end of the story as far as 'superbikes' are concerned: 'MV rules' etc will be the cry from devotees of the Italian marque.

On first seeing a road-going four-cylinder MV, the mighty engine-transmission unit stands out as overwhelming most of the bike, which it indeed does, for the undercasing houses the gearing which turns the rotation from the transverse crankshaft to the longitudinal shaft drive. Yamaha have made it smaller, but the progenitor of that layout, MV, have their bulbous case. The difference between the racer and the Monza is that the track bikes have four valves per cylinder where the Monza has two. Apart from that, there is no knowing how much of the racing engine goes into the Monza; if there are no actual interchangeable parts, there is an awful lot of racing know how inside the impressive matt grey engine.

Astride the bike you are aware that there is a lot of machine underneath you, all of it wide and low. 'There can be no way it handles at all' is something which springs to mind. If it was not for the fact that you are busy trying to stop your toes from ploughing the tarmac at the first corner, you would have time to think again. It is easy to ride fast and feels as safe as houses. Somehow you can sense every undulation and bump in the road, unlike most other multi-cylinder machines.

Braking is sensational and never has a bike given us the feeling that it would stop so quickly that the surprised rider would carry on, alone and airborne.

Although geared for more, top speed will work out at a little over 140mph, 146 being our best figure. Acceleration feels identical to the Jota, and our 12secs dead standing start quarter-mile time bears that

out. Fuel consumption was 42mpg overall, a very creditable figure for a machine whose performance is so spectacular.

To add to all that, the instruments and switchgear are good, the suede seat is ultra grippy (although damp for days after any rain), the neat rear fairing slides back on rails, so there is room for someone to share your pleasure, and the gearbox is just about perfect—and that, considering the shaft drive, is amazing.

The howl of the engine will not be apparent when you first button push it into life, as it will clatter a lot until it gets warm. An enthusiast will tell you that some of the noise comes from the gear drive to the overhead camshafts and that such a drive is the most expensive solution. However, gear drive is also the best there is, and that may be a clue to why the MV Agusta Monza is the world's most expensive production bike.





Engine

Air-cooled, four-stroke, four-cylinder. 69mm (2.72in) bore \times 56mm (2.20in) stroke = 837cc (49.71cu in). Maximum power undisclosed. Light-alloy cylinder block and head. Compression ratio 9.3:1. 6 main bearings. 2 valves per cylinder operated, direct, by twin overhead camshafts. 4 Dell'Orto carburettors.

Transmission

Wet-multi-plate clutch and five-speed gearbox. Ratios – 1st 2.38, 2nd 1.69, 3rd 1.28, 4th 1.11, 5th 1.0:1. Shaft drive to rear wheel.

Suspension

Front – telescopic fork with springs and dampers. Rear –

swinging-arm with coil-spring damper units.

Brakes

Double disc front, and disc rear.

Wheels and Tyres

3.50in \times 18in front, 4.0in \times 18in rear.

Weight

506lb (230kg).

Tank capacity

4.17gals (19 litres)

Performance

Maximum speed 146mph. Acceleration: standing start quarter mile 12.0secs. Fuel consumption approximately 42mpg.

