AMA VINTAGE MOTORCYCLE DAYS

Grand Marshal: Giacomo Agostini

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MOTORCYCLE HALL OF FAME MUSEUM

Giacomo Agostini is considered perhaps the greatest Grand Prix rider of all time. Over the course of a remarkable career of 17 years, the peerless Agostini won 15 World Grand Prix titles (eight in 500cc and seven in 350cc), 12 Isle of Man TT crowns, an astonishing 122 Grand Prixs, and he rarely ever fell off his machine during all those years. He became motorcycling's first genuine world superstar and, whether riding a 350cc or 500cc, he was nearly always the man to beat whenever he took up his position on the starting grid. In America, Agostini won the Daytona 200 in 1974, bringing unprecedented recognition to the race.

Agostini was born on June 16, 1942, in Brescia, Italy, and was raised in Levere near Bergamo. He cut his racing teeth in European hillclimb events (racing up hillside roads, not the American style of hillclimbing) before being offered a place on Morini's works team in 1964. He immediately began to impress and was soon given a world championship ride by MV Agusta as understudy to Mike Hailwood. Hailwood became something of a mentor to him.

"Ago," as he became known, made his first telling impact in 1965 when he rode a 350cc three-cylinder machine to victory on its very first outing at the Nurburgring in Germany. He narrowly missed out on his first world championship that year but, following the departure of Hailwood to Honda, Agostini became MV's number one rider.

On the 350cc bike, he was twice runner-up to Hailwood, in both 1966 and 1967. But he managed to take revenge in the 500cc class as he prevailed in several duels between the two riders over the same two seasons. Ago claimed the 500cc world title in both 1966 and 1967 in championships that came down to the final event.

Honda's departure from the scene in 1967 heralded eight years of dominance by Agostini and MV Augusta in the world championships. He completed the world title double with MV — on both the 350cc and 500cc — in 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971 and 1972. In 1973, he won the 350cc title and then, with Yamaha, he won the 350cc world crown in 1974 and the 500cc title in 1975.

The only real threat to Ago's supremacy came in 1971 when Jarno Saarinen, a young Finnish rider, burst onto the scene with Yamaha. Saarinen won the first two rounds of the 1973 season

14

on a powerful 500cc Yamaha but he was then tragica[...] pile-up in the third round at Monza. MV and Ago were o[...] But MV's plans to develop a new four-cylinder model[...] 500cc ride to Englishman Phil Read — and then move[...]

Agostini made his U.S. racing debut in the Daytona 20[...] was loaded with talent, including Kenny Roberts and B[...] riders. Agostini led early, but then had to battle Sheene[...] race, the quartet staged some of the most exciting l[...] reduced to 180 miles due to the oil crisis). Eventually, th[...] due to bike problems or crashes and Agostini rode to [...] Winning the 200 not only added immensely to Agost[...] helped solidify the Daytona 200's standing as a world-c[...]

After winning his final world title in 1975, Agostini enj[...] when he managed to notch up Grand Prix wins in both t[...] last career victory came at the Nurburgring, the German[...] Grand Prix race back in 1965.

After retirement, Agostini became team manager for th[...] guidance the team won world championships. Ago has [...] over the years. He was the first motorcyclist recognized[...]