



ARTURO MAGNI

MV'S MAIN MAN

PHOTO MARTYN BARNWELL

During Arturo Magni's time at MV, the Italian factory won 38 world championships. **John Surtees** profiles the man whose job was winning

Originally met Arturo Magni in September 1955 on my first visit to the MV Agusta factory at Cascina Costa outside Gallarate, in Northern Italy. I had been invited there to discuss my riding for the team in 1956.

My preoccupation was machine testing and on arrival I was taken to the workshop to see Arturo. I sat on a bike, adjusted the handlebars and footrests, and off we went to Modena. We couldn't use Monza because the track was covered in leaves, but the weather wasn't kind at Modena: it was pouring with rain. The machines were about to be put back in the van when I said 'Hold on, let's do some laps. Its bound to be wet sometimes when we race.'

With this I think the beginning of a bond between Arturo and myself was created. We had a full day's testing and then went to Monza the next day, a path having been swept through the leaves.

During those tests we learned to appreciate each other. I realised that he was a man with a wealth of experience who had known two tragic events in his relationship with MV: the loss of Les Graham and then Ray Amm, who was very hungry for success, just as I was. Until then MV's achievements were mainly in the light-weight classes.

Arturo and his brother Andrea certainly tried to make me feel at home. Luckily Arturo had a smattering of English because of his relationship with Les Graham and of course, two other British riders, Cecil Sandford and Bill Lomas. What was

immediately obvious was that he lived and slept motorcycles; MV motorcycles. I was often invited into his home and you can guess what the conversation was about.

It wasn't an easy position that Magni held. After Ingegnere Remor had left, the team really had no chief engineer or chief designer. There was a very good drawing office and there were engineers on the payroll, mainly responsible for helicopter work and, to some degree for the production motorcycles.

But there was no chief engineer like Giulio Carcano at Moto Guzzi, or Joe Craig at Norton; Arturo had to be chief mechanic, chief organiser, and component designer: most of the development work was his responsibility.

Arturo the man could be warm, friendly and encouraging, but he could also be biting in his criticism. If you asked the opinion of other riders who knew Magni, you would no doubt get varying replies. Some would say he was great, a super mechanic. Others would say he was a devious so-and-so; or that he was too much of a politician. In some ways, all of them would be right because in his position he had to be first and foremost a good mechanic, and know how to put a team together. But he had to be a politician to exist in a team like MV, particularly in his key position, and he had to be devious at times.

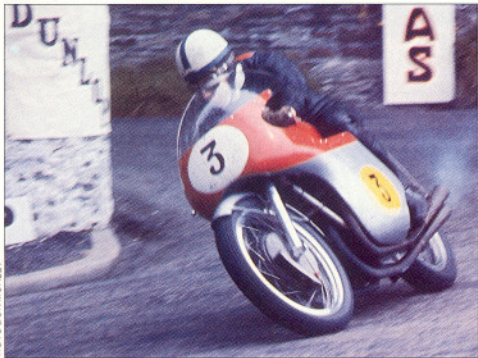
I came to realise that the straightforward approach often just didn't get things done. Different routes were sometimes needed to get results. This wasn't just true for MV: it was very noticeable at Ferrari.

Now the MV period is behind him, Arturo is busy with the Magni company. It is quite a different team, a family team. He has been wise enough to ensure that his sons are fully trained engineers.

I think Arturo was very hurt when the MV racing team got broken up. For years, the machines lay at the factory, Magni tried to deal with the Agusta management, but in a state-owned concern it was difficult to know who to talk to. When, suddenly, all the racing machine stock was dispersed this was a great shock. Magni could not be blamed if he took it as a slap in the face: for there was most of his life's work being disposed of like common chattels.

I didn't agree with Arturo at all times, and I certainly did not understand some of the things that happened - or didn't happen - at MV, but we started off on a friendly basis and we are still good friends to this day. When we were together we had a common objective - to get the machines home, and out in front.

Below: Surtees on a 500cc MV four in the 1960 TT. A lap at over 104mph showed total supremacy



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Behind
the scenes
at MV:
Arturo Magni
talks to
Mick Duckworth

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Mike Hailwood on a 350cc four in 1964: he was less successful with the later triples

Big organisations are no good, according to Arturo Magni. 'Some factories have tried to run racing departments by paying lots of money to many good men, but the result has been zero,' he says.

He never had to wait for experts to chew over decisions at MV. The boss said what he wanted, and Magni's job was to make it happen. During most of his time at Cascina Costa, the boss was Count Domenico Agusta. His retention of the archaic title of Count tells us a fair bit about his 'Lord of the Manor' style: the worst sort to work for, you may think.

But for the purposes of running a victorious racing team, Magni found a short chain of command effective. And he admired Agusta's strong leadership: 'He let his men use their heads. He asked them to give 90 per cent, and he received 50 per cent: this is a good system,' he says.

Magni (pronounced Maan-vee) surely gave close to 100 per cent to the most successful racing campaign in motorcycling history. He arrived at MV in 1950 and became chief racing mechanic, then team manager until the equipe was disbanded in the mid-seventies. Before joining Agusta, he had worked for Gilera in his native town of Arcore. There, he assisted Pietro Remor with Gilera's 500cc four, the world's most advanced racing motorcycle at the time.

When Remor, one of the fathers of the now universal multi-cylinder machine, moved to MV, Magni soon followed. It was natural for him to stay with the *Ingegnere* he admired, but Magni says there was also a financial incentive to move.

MV's output at the time was small-capacity road and racing machines, mainly with two-stroke engines. In 1950, however,

the first four cylinder machines appeared, 500cc machine, in both race and road-going trim — although the latter was far too expensive to be a realistic commercial prospect. Being a Remor design, the new engine had many similarities with Gilera's unit.

It was to be the basis of a line of racing multis lasting twenty-five years.

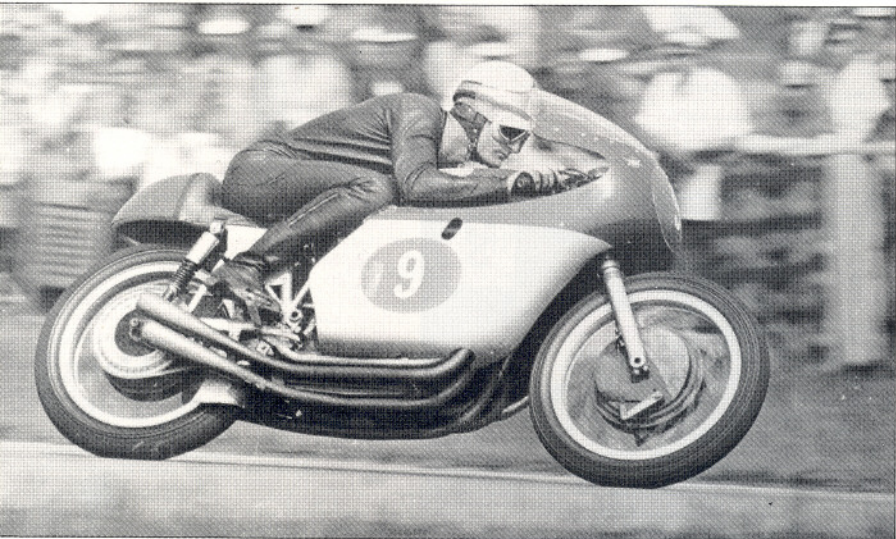
The 500cc Gilera was producing 49bhp in 1950. By 1974 we had an engine of the same transverse four layout that made over 100bhp, Magni says.

Much of the credit for the improvement must go to Magni. Remor left in 1953, and despite his inspiration and firm convictions, Domenico Agusta was not an engineer.

As Magni points out, a lot of technical progress made in the fifties was due to input by riders, particularly Britons Les Graham and John Surtees. But as the man who travelled the circuits of Europe as well as implementing policy in the workshops it was Magni who made things happen.

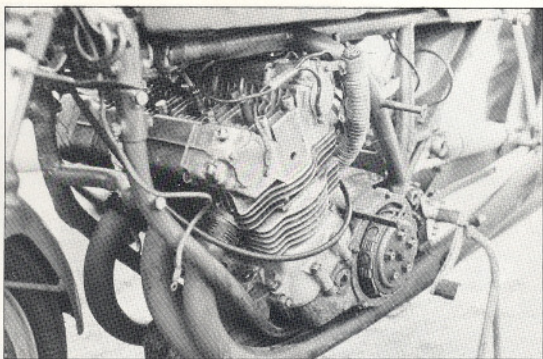
To illustrate the way he sometimes had to work Magni offers the example of the Dutch Grand Prix in 1966. That was the year MV faced a challenge which had seemed inconceivable a few years earlier: the Italian factory's dominance in the 500cc world championships was under attack from Honda.

The Japanese team had signed MV's former number one rider Mike Hailwood and wheeled out a sensational 500cc four at an early-season Grand Prix, to beat MV's star Giacomo Agostini. The Italian factory had responded to Honda's arrival in the 350cc class by building the four-valves-per-cylinder triple. But MV's 500cc candidate was a four of the type cam-





Phil Read about to test a 500cc four with experimental fairings in practice for the 1974 Belgian GP



Engine of a 500cc three: it derived from an oversize 350 cobbled together by Magni in Holland

pained for several seasons, since what Magni calls 'the calm situation' of the early sixties, when MV had minimal opposition.

At Assen, Magni's stopwatch told him that while Ago lost four seconds a lap to Hailwood's Honda when practising on the old 65bhp four, the margin reduced to only two seconds when the Italian was on his less powerful three-cylinder machine.

'After practice, I telephoned Mr Agusta and told him it was impossible to race the 500,' Magni says. He got his boss to agree a plan to avoid humiliation: 'We had two types of 350, with long and short strokes. Mixing parts from them together would make an engine of 385cc that could compete in the 500cc class.'

Magni and his mechanics worked through the night to make an oversize power unit for the nimble three-cylinder chassis, knowing of the hostile reception they were likely to receive back at Cascina Costa if it were to fail during the race.

Agostini didn't win on the midnight-oil special, but in a fantastic dice with Jim Redman on a Honda four (Mike Hailwood made a poor start), he broke the lap record and finished only two seconds behind the Rhodesian. To the world at large, the result helped quash an impression that MV were unprepared for the Honda offensive in the premier capacity class. Within a couple of weeks a full-500cc three-cylinder model had been readied and

Agostini went on to win his first of thirteen world titles for Agusta. When MV beat off the 500cc Honda again in 1967, the factory could claim to have established invincibility in the class, perhaps leading to further complacency.

It was logical for Agostini to ride threes in both classes. For, as Magni explains, the Italian rider was recruited specifically as a jockey for the triple, when the 350cc version was first fielded in 1965. In the previous year Redman had won every 350cc world championship round for Honda, and MV had to come up with a new machine to maintain credibility in the middleweight class.

'The technical department said a three-cylinder four-stroke was impossible'

Domenico Agusta had never forgotten seeing an early 350cc MV four being seriously challenged by three-cylinder DKW two-strokes at a German event in the early fifties. It fixed an idea in his mind that three was the right number of cylinders for a 350, Magni believes.

'Mr Domenico made the decision that we should build a three-cylinder 350 for 1965,' he says. 'The technical department said it was impossible to do with a four-stroke, but he insisted. We started in February and it was ready by April. Mr Agusta wanted to see it when it was finished, but as he was in Venice, we had to take it there by van for him to look.'

The machine was approved, and Magni told to organise the first test ride. Agusta said that it must be carried out by an Italian rider. 'I didn't think there were any good enough,' Magni says. 'Mike Hailwood was MV's rider, but he wasn't Italian. It was a problem for me.'

'Then I remembered Giacomo Agostini. He had spoken to me in Germany some time before where he was riding for Morini. He said he would like to ride an MV and I had told him he was too small. But later I noticed from newspapers that he was doing well.

'I went to a public phone box, and after making a few calls I got a number of Agostini's house in Lovere. I spoke to his father, who said he was out racing. I telephoned next morning and asked Agostini to come to Cascina Costa. Mr Agusta came back from Venice very quickly and a contract was signed.'

The new machine was successful in the hands of MV's new signing, but Hailwood did not have such a happy time, an engine blow-up in the 1965 Junior TT being a particular disappointment.

Magni believes Agostini was more suited to the three-cylinder machine than Hailwood. 'If Mike rode it ten times, it would break nine times. Agostini would ride the three ten times, and nine times he would get a good result.'

But after a few seasons, Ago's special relationship with the triples was a factor in the row that led the Italian hero to defect to Yamaha for 1974, in Magni's view. He says the rift started early in the 1973 season.

Phil Read had joined Agostini in the team, which was fielding lightweight four-valve 70bhp fours introduced for 1971 in the 350cc class, while still campaigning the 500cc threes. Although Ago had enjoyed a magnificent run on both types, the two-stroke threat was growing ever greater, reaching upwards through the capacity classes.

Yamaha had almost taken over the 350cc class — though Ago and the new four couldn't be toppled — and the factory provided the brilliant Finnish rider Jaarno Saarinen with a four-cylinder 500

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for 1973. On it he won the first two grands prix of the year.

After the second Yamaha victory in Austria, Magni was summoned to discuss the situation with Corrado Agusta, who was in charge following the death of his elder brother Domenico in 1971.

Agusta suggested that it was time to use a 500cc version of the four-valve engine, which had been tried out in prototype form. It had been ridden by Alberto Pagani — who Magni didn't rate as a fast rider — and also by Agostini, but the champion had shown no enthusiasm for it.

'Mr Agusta said we should use the new engine, but I said it would be impossible to beat Yamaha with it: it wasn't ready. In the end I had to say "Okay, if you like." With the West German GP less than a week away, Magni could waste no time. I worked solidly, with one mechanic, at Cascina Costa for five days. After many brake tests, the engine produced 93bhp,' he recalls.

'The bike was finished at three o'clock

'It's very important that a rider gets a bike that he likes'

on Saturday morning, loaded into a van and driven straight to Hockenheim for practice that day. Phil Read tried it out. Agostini was very keen to test this machine, but Mr Corrado had not given permission for him to do so. He was very angry that he didn't get the new four for that race — even though he hadn't seemed interested in it before.

Magni remembers watching the next day's 500cc West German GP race on television as he recovered at home after a hectic week. Despite having to use an old-type chassis with drum brakes, Read got ahead of Saarinen's disc-braked Yamaha with its claimed 95bhp, and stayed there until the Finn's chain broke in the closing stages.

The season was marred by the pile-up at the Italian GP, in which Saarinen and Italian hero Renzo Pasolini were killed, but Read went on to win his first of two successive 500cc titles for MV. Agostini signed to ride for Yamaha in 1974.

In the mid-seventies the factory became the sole exponent of the competitive four-stroke in GP racing. Magni is justifiably

SELF-MADE MAGNI

Japanese enthusiasts are snapping up the machines Magni builds today in batches of twenty at a time. His own boss at last, Arturo (who is now 65) presides over busy workshops in Via Leonardo da Vinci, Samarate, only a couple of miles from the Agusta plant, where only aeronautical products are made now.

With sons Carlo (40) and Giovanni (31), he has created his own marque, which produces about 200 handbuilt machines per year. Currently, the main product is a range of sports roadsters incorporating bought-in Moto Guzzi V-twin engines and gearboxes in a Magni-designed chassis.

A distinctive feature of this Magni frame is its Parallelogram rear suspension system designed to extract optimum roadholding, performance and tyre longevity from the Guzzi shaft drive.

When 750cc MV-powered machines formed much of the Magni factory's output, they incorporated a conversion from shaft to chain drive. Still available for fitment on Agusta roadsters, its development dates back to the early seventies, when shaft-drive was found to hamper the performance of MV roadster-based machines used in 750cc racing.

Chrome-molybdenum tubing forms the basis of Magni frames. Arturo dismisses the alloy-box chassis as a passing fashion. Although he started out in 1977 principally as a maker of cast alloy wheels the old-fashioned spoked type is used on the traditionally-styled Magni Sfida, a popular variant of his 1000cc Moto Guzzi-powered machines.

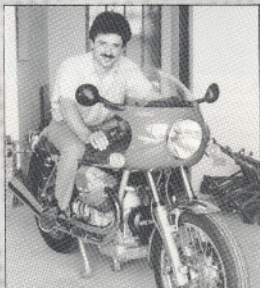
Forcella Italia (formerly Ceriani) front forks are fitted, whilst braking is by Brembo, naturally. Some parts are imported, like the British-made fuel tank of the Sfida. A model name suggested by Magni's Japanese

agent, *sfida* is an Italian word for competitive spirit. Designs for a chassis to house Guzzi's latest ohc V-twin were literally on the drawing board when CB visited.

For restorers of exotic classic racing machinery, Magni offers his magnesium alloy Ceriani-type 230mm twin-leading-shoe drum brakes for front and rear use. They can be ordered ready built into a complete wheel. (Arturo holds a front drum in the photo on page 18).

Few Magni machines are seen in the UK. But with the reputation that has been gained by BMW, Moto Guzzi, and MV-powered versions, that's surprising. Now that prices of £40,000 and more are being put on Magni MVs, it could make a lot of sense to put an order in for a new model: a Sfida costs about £9500, other models are cheaper.

UK Magni importers Rotadale, 34 Selhurst Road, London SE25 (081-684 1141).



Giovanni Magni with a 1000cc Moto Guzzi powered Sfida

Below: machines are readied for shipment to Japan





proud of the bellowing red and silver machines that struck an emotional chord with race crowds all over Europe. But, didn't the factory ever consider reverting to two-stroke engines?

'Mr Domenico made a very strong decision against two-strokes,' Magni says. 'He decided it was not the correct engine.' He too believes passionately in the four-stroke, suggesting that ever-shorter GP races have favoured petrol-guzzling strokers.

'Today's machines have fantastic acceleration, and maybe 150-160bhp, but their maximum speed is not better than 300kph (186mph). Agostini's 83bhp MV three was timed at 298kph (185mph): maybe Japanese horsepower is different.'

Magni is too wise to be drawn into pat judgements on the many riders who achieved the distinction of riding for MV. The nearest he'll get to saying who the greatest of all was is: 'Each one that won a world championship had to be very good.'

Part of his job was ensuring that each machine was right for its rider. 'It's very important that a rider gets a bike that he

likes,' Magni says. 'If they like it they will use 90 per cent, if not they will only use 50 per cent.' It is generally acknowledged that John Surtees' grasp of technicalities contributed greatly to the fours' development through the late fifties, but Magni also gives great credit to Agostini's input in a later era.

'He always wanted to have things right: in Italian we would say he was *puntiglioso*,' says Magni. The word translates as obstinate.

In the Ago/Read era, machines for each rider differed even in steering geometry. 'Agostini liked to be very, very fast on long corners, and always very safe,' Magni explains. 'But Read used a steeper head angle because he wanted easy steering in tight corners.' He recalls Read as a useful test rider who would show enthusiasm for anything new, or experimental.

What about Hailwood, often said to have had limited interest in technicalities? 'With Mike it was important to get the bike the way he wanted it, then there was no more work. He thought only of racing,' says Magni affectionately.

Giacomo Agostini races a 350cc three at Brands Hatch, 1970. His insistence on careful setting-up helped the team

The reliability of MV Agusta machines was legendary, but Magni says that like all teams, the equipe went through bad patches. An example he cites is 1957, a year when no world titles were won, although Agusta secured four in the previous season. 'You have problems with parts, like pistons, which may be good one year, then bad, then good against the next year (MV bought in proprietary pistons). Also, race teams will always have troubles that are impossible to foresee.'

'The only way is to use yesterday's experience to make improvements today, and use today's experience tomorrow.'

At least one of the modern Italian grand prix teams has approached Magni hoping to benefit from his experience. But he's unimpressed by today's equipes. 'It's not a good situation,' he says. 'There are many men with big heads. What they need are big hands' □