

Better known for its race machines, MV made nearly 100 different road models in a 40 year production span. Anything from moped and three wheel delivery truck to four pot superbike was fair game for Count Agusta

The great red fire engines from Gallarate were almost invincible in their prime. But it's a long time since the world spotlight has been on MV's stage.

During their 25 years of motorcycle road racing domination, MV amassed 37 world manufacturers' championships, 34 TT victories and 270 grand prix wins. Eight riders won 38 world championships. Agostini alone achieved 13 world titles.

It was every young road racer's fantasy to be discovered and offered a coveted ride on a red and silver beast, but this rarely happened. MV could afford to be choosey. While striving for glory, the firm was known to sign riders and then not use them, negating their potential threat on the track.

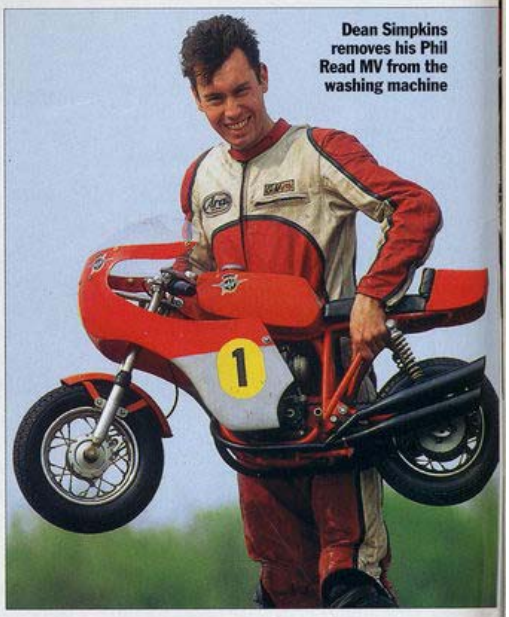
The flipside of MV operation was its civilian motorcycle production. Count Domenico Agusta formed Meccanica Verghera Agusta in 1945 as a way of using his aeronautical factory's resources after the war. A 98cc two speed two-stroke motorcycle christened the Vespa (wasp) went into production. It was the start of a motorcycling legend.

For the next 30 years the firm produced machines that set the pace in motorcycle engineering. But the count insisted that he would never make a replica works racer for fear of a privateer beating MV factory riders.

The closest most of us can come to owning a works bike is the 861cc Magni. Arturo Magni was at the forefront of MV race development from 1950, when he left Gilera, until 1976 when MV could no longer compete against two-stroke racers.

1975 Mini Bike 8

"I WANT ONE" is the usual reaction when people first see the Mini Bike. But many don't realise that this is more than a scale replica. With an automatic 48cc 2bhp Morini-Franco engine, Dello'Orto SHA14-12 carburettor, operational telesopic front forks and rear shocks, it can carry a large adult with ease.



Dean Simpkins removes his Phil Read MV from the washing machine



MV ENVY

Think MV and think multi cylinder red racers. But the Italian firm also made roadster twins that weren't even red

DEAN SIMPKINS & SEAN HAWKER

photography: Kenny P



A 75mph triple disc braked sports learner bike. Want one

Both front and rear drum brakes are operated by levers on the bars. The exhaust is a one into two into four system that gives a big bike look with help from the glassfibre racing seat and traditionally coloured fairing. Two models definitely exist, the 8in and 10in, which corresponds to the diameter of the wheels. But Italians speak of a three speed 12in version.

World Champion Phil Read asked the MV race team to build a bike for his son Pip similar to dad's racer. The idea struck the right chords and the Mini Bike went into limited production. But sales were a problem. The price was considered over the top even for a rich kid's novelty toy. Phil Read's company imported several to Britain and distributed them to outlets including a couple to top peoples' store Harrods.

Verdict: *Conversation stopper and handy paddock bike originally designed for spoilt kids. Ultimate pose for the vertically challenged or those with a sense of humour.*

1974 125S prototype

WITH A 75mph top speed and two disc brakes the 125 Sport is a fitting finale for MV Agusta.

Basic engine design can be traced back to the 1956 Turismo Rapido models because it shares the same 53 x 56mm bore and stroke, clutch design, oil pump features and pushrod layout. Other parts can be easily interchanged. The later powerplant adopts a squarer look and produces double the power of its ancestor with 12bhp at 8500rpm.



Both clocks have distinguished MV logo. Parts for the Scarab disc brake system are hard to find

The feature bike is the same 1974 factory prototype used in the promo-

tional sales leaflet. It differs from production line machines slightly in that the foot peg and tail pipe mount is an A frame whereas production models have a pressed support. Steel side panels with four slots were replaced by plastic ones with five. Headlamp, chainguard and tank also differ.

Arturo Magni bought this machine from the factory for his younger son Giovanni, who added cast EPM wheels and smart exhaust. Martyn Simpkins bought the bike from the Magnis while attending Giovanni's wedding in 1987.

Verdict: *Sharp looking sports lightweight that could burn off bigger bikes of the era. Outrageous triple disc brake set up means the 125 stops better too. Prototype status makes this model a collector's piece.*

1966 Avello 150 Narcea

RESTRICTIONS on importing motorcycles into Spain, designed to protect their own small industry, meant this 150cc Narcea was manufactured in Gijon.

MV struck a licensing agreement with Avello SA to construct lightweight motorcycles in late 1961. Six basic models were produced during the nine year pact.

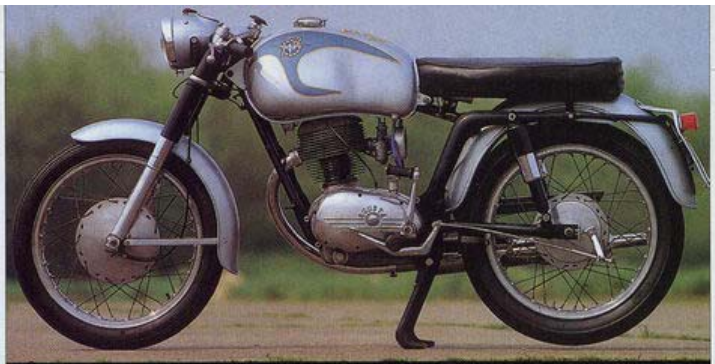
The single cylinder overhead valve machine has bore and stroke figures of 59.5 x 54mm to give 149cc. Peak power of 9.75bhp is produced at 7000rpm. Kerbside weight is 250lb.

This machine was bought in 1984, with no signs of corrosion due to the good Spanish climate. Rebuilt during that same winter, the Narcea was Martyn's first MV rebuild. The restoration caused no major problem because the engine showed little sign of wear.

Verdict: *Mundane roadster looks makes the Narcea a plain Jane made in Spain. No street sleeper either, because it's a bit of a slug. With Agusta's racing achievements proudly displayed on the Narcea tank, Spanish firm Avello milked its MV connection for all it was worth.*

1957 175 CSS

SPORTING the same paint work, decals, polishing and chrome plating as it did when it left the factory, this CSS is a real blast from the past.



Spanish made Narcea isn't red and it's no sports bike. Odd 149cc capacity gives under 10bhp

The 175 CSS is a production racer built between 1955 and 1958 for Formula 3 and Milan-Taranto type events in Italy. With its purpose built five speed gearbox, steep crowned 59.5mm competition piston and 9.5:1 compression ratio, it can reach 93mph in full road trim.

A chain driven overhead vernier camshaft pushes the followers onto the valves and a maximum of 8800rpm can be used to coax 15bhp from the engine before the valves start to float. Hairpin springs are fitted. Standard carburation is via a Dell'Orto 25mm SS1 unit. This was increased to 27mm for full blown racers. Ignition is supplied by the vulnerably positioned Magneti Minerelli magneto on the left hand engine cover. Most roadgoing 175s have telescopic forks as opposed to the leading link units fitted to the CSS.

One young man started an amazing race career on a bike similar to this in 1957 — 10 times world champion Mike Hailwood.



Blade levers are typical lightweight Italian fitment. CSS 175 is a real thrill to ride

Verdict: *Fast, furious fun — and it handles too. Couldn't believe there's just 15bhp on tap — it pulls like a cracker. Takes a while to get there, but a revelation in the upper rev range. Cramped riding position loses marks.*



Fifteen world championships in just seven years says it all

1967 250 Bicilindrica

LIKE THE 600cc four cylinder roadster, this 250 twin could be purchased in sombre black, but was also available in blue and, of course, red.

The bulbous chrome tank is the first thing to grab the eye, followed by the 19bhp pushrod operated ohv engine. A 10:1 compression ratio and kerb weight of 320lb helps the bike reach a claimed 84mph.

From the motor, attention is diverted over the handlebars, down the unshrouded forks — covers are standard — to the twin leading shoe Grimeca front brake.



Not the prettiest MV, but the 250cc Bicilindrica can hit 84mph — and with a tls Grimeca it stops

This gives an enormous amount of stopping power with very little feel at the lever. For rider comfort there is the novel Radelli stepped seat, giving the passenger full view of the road ahead.

The test machine was owned by an elderly gentleman in Gallarate. It was found by Arturo Magni and kept in his workshop. No paperwork was available to export the twin from Italy, so the bike was stripped down into large pieces, imported to Britain and reassembled here.



Exposed magneto will be the first to go if you low side the CSS on a lefthander

Verdict: *Design echoes the twin cam 600cc four cylinder roadster — one of the ugliest machines ever made. If you can stomach the looks, the engine produces good power, especially for a Sixties learner bike.*



1975 350S GT

THIS MODEL is an ornate spin off from the better known 350 Sport Ipotesi. Both models were made between 1975 and 1980 and share the same tank, forks, engine, exhaust system, and have similar frames. The seat rail is straight on the GT to accommodate the touring seat, whereas the Sport is tilted to fit a glassfibre saddle unit.

With its metallic gold and blue livery, wire spoked wheels, sit up and beg handle bars, comfortable dual seat, polished stainless steel mudguards and crash bars, the GT is styled for touring.

When kicked into life from cold, the four-stroke engine rattles from the top end. This is caused by aluminium pushrods which are known to bend and can cause dropped valves if the engine is pushed hard. Once warm, the noise dies down significantly.

A reputation for vibration has put many people off owning a twin, but the shakes aren't as bad as they're made out to be. A rough patch can be found around 4000-5000rpm, but it's all fun as the twin comes on cam. Weighing just 350lb, the 350S can top 100mph in sports trim.

An ergonomically sound riding position means a steady 80mph can be maintained effortlessly. The two Moto Mozzi front brake calipers combined with 230mm discs give excellent braking.

The GT was never officially imported into Britain. This is one of the first two machines brought in privately. Martyn has used the twin as daily transport to work in Nottingham, a 60 mile round trip.

Verdict: *Useable everyday twin with good turn of speed. Affordable MV and the most practical machine here. Smart sports version styled better. And it's red.*

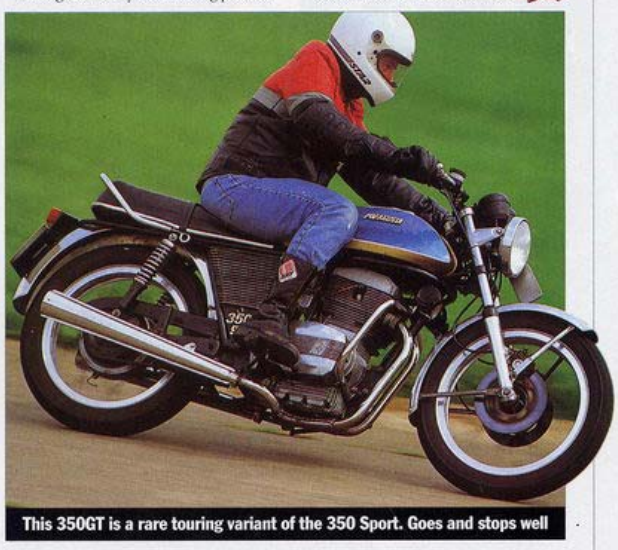
1974 750S America

THE PROTOTYPE for this machine was conceived within 50 days in 1974 under the guidance of Fredmano Spairani.

Designed to take over from the 214 Sport series, the America uses virtually the same frame and forks. The transverse double overhead cam four cylinder engine is bored out by 2mm, increasing capacity to 789cc. Combustion chamber shape is altered to give a ratio of 9.5:1 and the cam lift is raised by 0.5 to 8.5mm. This four needs 9500 revs on the clock to get the full effect of its 75bhp.

"It's the most complete motorcycle I have ever owned. You mustn't be afraid to rev it out," says Martyn, who has owned the America since 1984 and has covered over 40,000 miles since purchase. Replacing a holed piston has been the only major maintenance carried out in this time.

Shaft final drive is the machine's



This 350GT is a rare touring variant of the 350 Sport. Goes and stops well



Achilles' heel. The 90 degree bevel drive can break.

Verdict: *Still overpriced, but what price do you put on that MV howl? Silky smooth power delivery and shaft final drive earmarks America as sports tourer. No Gold Wing, but still feels heavy at low speed.*

861 Magni

MORE TIME, blood, sweat, tears and money has been spent on this bike than any other in the collection. A 12 year dream became reality when the 861cc Magni fired on all four cylinders for the first time in August 1992.

The Magni derives from the 1972 Formula 750 Sport series, which retained shaft drive. Another bike was prepared in 1973 which included a chain drive conversion; special frame designed by Magni's eldest son Carlo; one piece crank carrier and barrel section and a four valve cylinder head machined at an angle to give more room for the inlet valves.

Closely based on the '73 Imola bike, genuine Magni bits on the test machine include frame, swinging arm, tank, EPM wheels, barrels, 9.5mm lift inlet cams, exhaust system and chain drive conversion. Original crankcases were found in the States by MV specialist Dave Kay (01543 377871) who can supply replica parts.

Ignition power is provided by a self-contained magneto system. When set up correctly, the bike can be bump started within a few steps. Handfuls of throttle are needed to move away sweetly and the machine refuses to pull if you wimp around the 2000 to 5500rpm zone. Peak torque comes after 6000rpm — that's when the rocket like power comes in sending the black needle soaring around the white faced counter, topping out at 10,000rpm.

Handling is positive and steering predictable, helped by beefy 42mm Forcella Italia endurance fork stanchions. Stopping is equally reassuring courtesy of gold lined Brembos. The aluminium tank is made by the same Italian who made the tanks for MV's works racers. The seat is a lightweight Read-Ago style single skin glassfibre unit.



Clutch actuating arm and its support bear Arturo Magni's signature

Verdict *The legend lives on. Sticky modern tyres and up to date suspension keeps the Magni planted. Looks more than a million dollars* (B)

MV America was conceived in a short space of time. Styling echoes racers of its era, but indicators look out of place on fairing



MV MANIAC

MARTYN SIMPKINS holds the name of MV Agusta in high regard. He's an engineer and managing director of a stainless steel fabrication company and chairman of the MV Agusta Owners Club of Great Britain.

Brought up on BSA A10s and Triumph T120s, it wasn't until he was 33 years old that he could afford his first Agusta. Now he is one of the leading lights of the movement, not afraid to start an argument with an Italian who questions his knowledge. Martyn has a collection of 18 MVs, eight of which are featured here. His greatest wish is to own and race the last Phil Read race bike — a 1976 500cc four.

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