

A LITTLE TRE

Back in RC10, Russ Gannicott revealed his little treasure; an ohv MV Agusta 125. Two years later he has to admit that the MVs are breeding; a second has arrived to join the other six Italians in his collection. . .

Photos by Russ Gannicott



Purchased 'blind' via Ebay from an Italian waiter who was 'selling it for his brother'. Allegedly it had new cables, clutch, various bits and pieces, all of which I've failed to discover so far. Two extras the seller failed to mention were the severely bent left-hand fork leg and the dead cockroach in the headlight shell!

This model was the last of the 'traditional' styled 125 MVs. Later models started to pave the way for the distinct and final, disc-braked 125 Sport of the mid Seventies. The GTL had the same engine as the Centomila but with a little extra horsepower and a five-speed gearbox which reputedly could propel

the little machine to over seventy miles per hour.

The 125 MVs of the late Fifties to mid-Sixties are a real minefield, so far as recognition is concerned. There were so many versions of them, with so many permutations per model, it is almost impossible to confirm what 'original' or 'standard' should be – no two appear to be alike! Needless to say though, this does not prevent 'experts' pointing out all the faults and flaws in your particular bike. None of this bothers me, as I like my bikes to be typical and evocative of an era rather than being definitive examples of the restorer's art. I would far rather scour period magazines for pictures of teenagers leaning their personalised

bikes against café walls, and use these as references for my refurbishment, than use factory sales brochures. This is why you'll often see little odd bits on my bikes; dropped bars, an extra transfer here, some extra chrome there. Nothing outrageous, just little details which were applied in 'period' to make your bike your own.

One of the best-ever examples of this exists on this GTL. At some stage a previous owner decided that white grips and control cables would look really cool and spent his money accordingly... money which could have been spent on fitting the optional speedo, but no, he chose the grips and cables! I am so grateful he made that choice. I guess that,

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1965 MV AGUSTA 125 GTL

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more than anything I can think of, this gesture sums up just about everything I love about small Italian bikes – image and attitude are everything. Who cares if it breaks down – just as long as it does it next to a café or bar, where you can sit on the pavement and admire it!

Having bought the bike within a week of having a fairly major heart attack, my intention was to carry out a renovation rather than full restoration. I thought the work load would be lighter. Best laid plans, etc, etc...

The first job was to give the complete bike a check over to make an assessment of how much work would be needed. This is where I discovered the badly bent fork leg. Surprisingly, the motor was quite sweet, and the rest of the bike seemed reasonable, so I was able to write up a

short list of jobs and priorities. The petrol tank was seeping fuel, the rims were shot and there were springs sticking through the seat, but nothing too serious.

My first job was to strip the bike down to its major lumps; engine, frame and front forks, and give everything a good clean. At this point, the seat went down the road to my friendly upholsterer for recovering, and I boxed up the various bits of tinware I was going to send off to Triple S for powder coating. The frame was going to be powder coated locally, as shipping costs are so high for sending large items like frames around the country. The rest of the tinware and tank I was going to paint myself, so I set about sealing and repairing the

tank and rubbing down and priming the mudguards.

With such a nice spell of weather, much of this work could be carried out in the garden. Well, to be honest, what I did was move my workmate onto the



Russ Gannicott applies expertise to his MV. Oh; he's applying insulating tape, too...



MV basks in the author's al fresco workshop

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patio next to the French windows. This meant I was able to work on the bike while watching the World Cup on TV and having the odd 'medicinal' beer... nice.

I must admit that I am quite pleased with the way the petrol tank came out. The paint was £1.95 a can Humbrol from my local surplus store, and amazingly was exactly the right shade to match the upholstery. The white graphics and black pinstripes on the tank are applied vinyl and not paint at all, so if they get scratched I can make some more!

As all the bits started to come together, I made the decision to

rewire the whole bike from scratch. This is a pretty easy job and saves hours of headache when you are trying to decode the original factory wiring. One of the great mysteries of Italian electrics is why did they start a wire a certain colour at one end of the loom and then change it by the time it got to the other end? Strange but true... it happens all the time, so the easiest course is to replace the whole lot from scratch.

The engine just had a basic clean-up and check over, with nothing more needed at this stage than a service and a head gasket.

These motors are pretty well bulletproof, a fact born out by the factory's confidence in giving them a 100,000km warranty! I wonder how many made it to 100k before MV closed down?

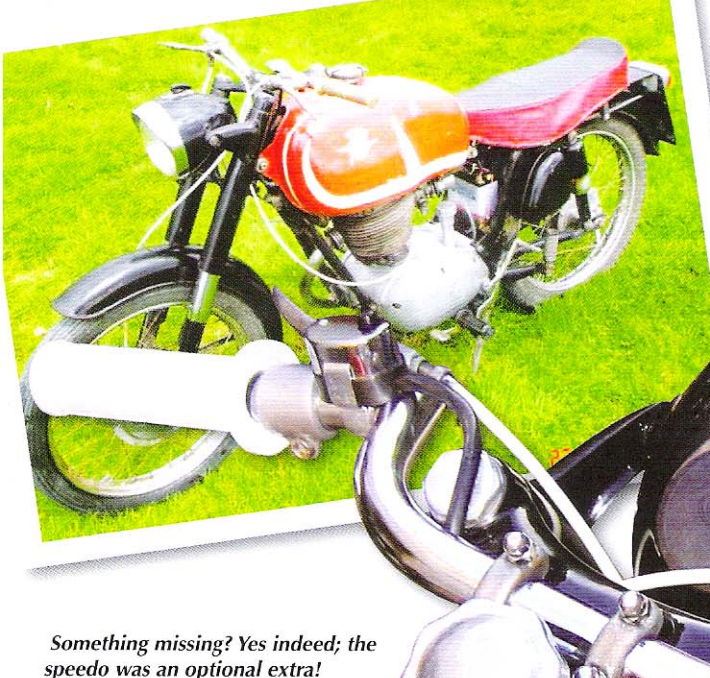
The hubs went off

for their rebuilds into new chrome rims and were back with me inside a couple of weeks. I'd already sourced a couple of 2.75" tyres at twenty quid each from Netley, and these were the means by which I taught my eleven year-old the noble art of tyre fitting. I think I was quite a bit younger when my dad showed me how to repair and refit push bike tyres, and to be honest these aren't much bigger than some mountain bike tyres.

The forks were reassembled, once I'd had the stanchion straightened, and pretty soon I had most of the bike built on the workmate. The new rear shocks were a ten quid Ebay purchase, and as soon as they were fitted I had the wheels in and the bike was once again ready to touch the ground.

One of the great things about lightweights is... that they're, well, light. Pre heart attack I could have lifted the whole bike off the workmate by myself,

'A lot of people fight shy of these Italian lightweights – put off, I would guess, by forty year-old horror stories. None of these bikes were as bad as rumoured...'



Something missing? Yes indeed; the speedo was an optional extra!



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but I got assistance this time and Carole and Ash helped put the bike back onto its wheels.

A few hours later everything was back where it belonged, and I was able to fire the MV up and check the electrics through. Everything seemed fine, and after a few minutes of carb adjustment I was able to give it a quick blast down our private lane. The bike feels like it pulls a lot stronger than my other 125, but as it has an extra one and a half horsepower I guess it should. It may not sound a lot, but when you are starting out with less than ten BHP, a fifteen percent increase is quite something.

A lot of people fight shy of these Italian lightweights – put off, I would guess, by forty year-old horror stories. None of these bikes were as bad as rumoured, and most of the tales about them were born of jealousy or misuse through misunderstanding. These days, when we have the luxury of multi-vehicle ownership, we no longer have to hack them to work in all weathers; we can enjoy them on high days and holidays. With this kind of use, there is no reason why an MV or a Gilera should be any more trouble or more expensive to run than a small British bike.

The big difference is in GPMs (grins per mile). In their day there really wasn't anything that came close to them in terms of style and performance, and even now, forty years on, you still feel you are riding something rather special. Next time you want to treat yourself to a project, have a serious think about something like this. They cost no more to buy than a decent Bantam or a Cub and are no more difficult or expensive to restore than anything else. Bits are readily available through the owners club and there's plenty of help and advice on hand through a world-wide network of owners' forums and websites.

All that remains now is to get it MoT'd and registered and then pile on a few miles before a nut-tightening session.

The GTL on the road lives up to all expectations: it's quick, light and nimble – everything you'd hope a 125 MV would

be. These bikes really were light years ahead of the competition at the time, and in many ways this model represented the pinnacle of Italian lightweight development. Earlier models were still evolving and later ones were being eclipsed by the Japanese onslaught.

Now, to be brutally honest, my impressions of this bike on the road are not going to be totally fair. To get a true opinion you'd need a ten stone seventeen year-old who'd never ridden anything other than a clapped out moped or push-bike. Unfortunately, in the absence of one I would trust, you'll have to take the word of a six foot, fourteen stone, forty-something!

These bikes must have felt so fast. Even now, with me on board this MV is more than happy in modern traffic and can still put a big grin on my face when I crank it through the bends. As a typical small capacity machine, the only way it's going to be quick is by carrying high corner speeds, and in true Italian form this is how it performs best. You have no concerns about up-shifting through the bends as you build up speed, and once you're buzzing along at fifty or sixty you can hold it there for all but the very tightest of corners. There is no mythology about Italian lightweight handling – in my experience they all go round corners like they're on rails, and the lighter the bike the more fun it is!

On this MV there are a few rattles and vibrations to remind me that it's a forty year-old bike that has been tidied up rather than fully restored, and some odd noises from the motor might make me question the wisdom of squeezing the revs out of it that I am, but this bike deserves to be 'nailed'. It was never meant to be dotted around at low revs or cruised all day at forty. It was supposed to be ridden hard by teenage hooligans whose aim was to get from A to B as fast and in as much style as possible.

I may not be a teenager any more, but this bike makes me feel like one again. In fact it makes me feel like the teenager I would have liked to have been if I'd had the money, the skill or the style. You



The 125 MV is a delight to ride, as its owner demonstrates...

might get the same feeling, for the same reasons, from a Bonnie or a Goldie, but the difference is that sooner or later I'm quite likely to throw this down the road, and when I do I'll just sit on the kerb and laugh!

What next? I suppose I should be out every night riding this little bike that I love so much; they deserve it. But to be honest there is something addictive about building them and owning them... you feel you want to own them all, every single one! So, in between nipping through the local lanes I'll either be working on the next one or scouring Ebay for the one after that! **Rc**

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