

Sporting chance

■ *Half the size of an MV four, but twice the fun. If you get a chance to ride MV's 350 Sport, take it* **Mick Duckworth** pics: Jason Critchell

The tax demand has arrived, along with a nasty letter from the bank. The kitchen drain is blocked and oil on your boots has stained the living room carpet. What can you do? Go for a brisk bike ride of course, and forget about humdrum life.

An MV Agusta 350 Sport is the ideal motorcycle for this situation. The twin loves being thrashed, but safe roadholding and modest power output mean you can go wild without risk.

At first it is difficult to figure out the 1973 red and white MV. It carries the name of a factory legendary for exotic dohc three and four cylinder grand prix racers, yet has an engine that looks as innocuous as a Villiers 2T twin. Any MV is considered to be a prestige machine, but this one's chrome plated side panels are tinny and look cheap. Compactly built like a 175, it boasts twice that cubic

capacity and weighs a substantial 330lb.

Turn the ignition key, swivel out the left side kickstart to give it a firm prod and the doubts disperse. When the engine bursts into life, a full blooded roar comes from the twin megaphone style silencers. Heads turn as the slightest tweak of the Tommaselli Daytona twin cable twistgrip instantly flicks the white rev counter needle past 4000rpm. Lean forward to grasp the clip-on handlebars and you are already adopting a racing crouch. Snick the gear pedal on the right down for first, ease out the clutch lever while gently stoking the revs up and you're away.

Despite its unassuming looks, the motor responds eagerly to the throttle with

aggressive acceleration.

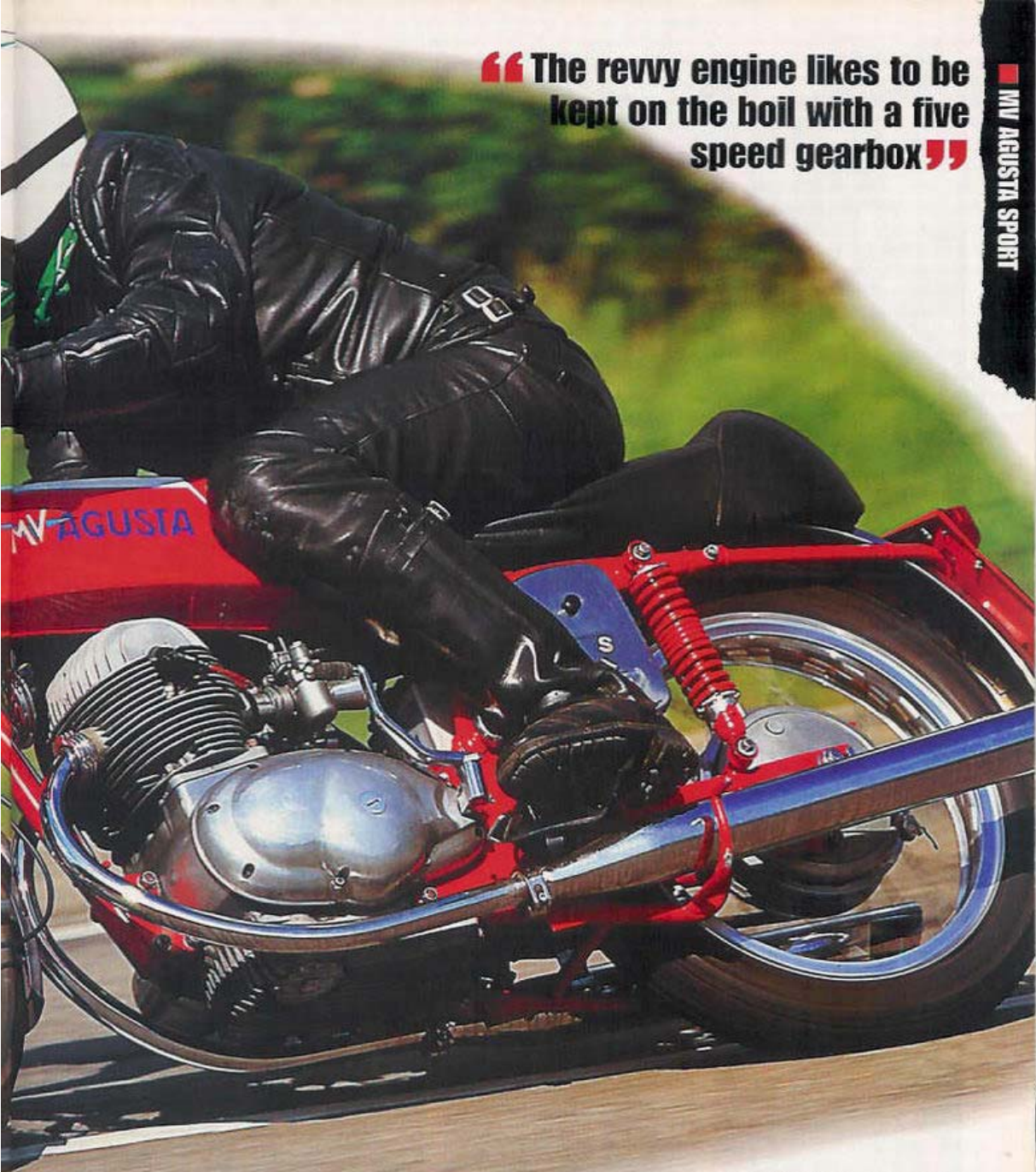
That coupled with the sporty position encourages adventurous riding, especially as the short stroke motor feels smoothest

◀ Decal declares MV as 36 times world champion, but none was with a 350cc twin. Sticker refers to victory tally at end of 1972

on a rising throttle. The twin's fussy and vibratory side only reveals itself at a steady cruise. As the grip is turned, the open bellmouths of the twin Dell'Ortos can be heard sucking air.

Lingering suspicions that the MV is only pretending to be a sportster are





“The revvy engine likes to be kept on the boil with a five speed gearbox”

■ MV AGUSTA SPORT

eased by its superb handling. Predictable and stable, the compact machine can be pitched into the tightest bends until the centre stand grounds on the left.

The revvy engine likes to be kept on the boil by using its five speed gearbox. Changes on the move are slick, but finding neutral at a standstill can be tricky. The rider's handbook advises that neu-

▲ Duckworth forgets monetary grief as he revels in MV's predictable and stable handling. Don't be fooled by Villiers looking engine — the 350 twin cracks the ton

tral is most easily selected before the machine draws to a halt, an archaic instruction in the superbiking Seventies.

Discovering a drum front brake on a Seventies sports machine is a surprise, but the MV's 200mm twin leading shoe drum is effective. Even though the lever on the test bike threatens to pull right back to the bar, a firmer than usual squeeze provokes a shriek from the Pirelli

front tyre. A single leader drum provides steady braking at the rear.

Comfort is not where the 350 Sport wins. The firm seat, clip-on bars and rearsets mark the revvy twin as a mount for quick and furious spins. The test machine's owner has inverted the clip-ons in an attempt to improve posture. Firm enough to maintain the taut handling, the suspension does not jar or jolt on minor roads. ▶

Casas & Riko

JANUARY 1997 45

“ Expensive when new, the roadsters still carry a price premium ”



■ Sport report

Externally like a two-stroke, the engine's top end contains ohv rocker gear with pairs of inclined valves. Pushrods are operated by a single gear driven camshaft behind the cylinders, which have discrete alloy barrel, head and rocker cover castings. A racer style finned oil sump is built into the lower part of the unit construction bottom end and a pair of gears takes primary drive to the wet clutch. The twin's 360 degree crankshaft with roller bearing big ends has a reputation for durability.

Electronic ignition, introduced on MV's 350 in 1972, is triggered from a flywheel on the right side of the crankshaft, with a control box under the seat.

Except for the obvious sturdiness of the front fork stanchions, the chassis doesn't give many clues to its excellent performance. The unremarkable structure has one top tube and a single down-tube terminating at the front engine mounting plates:

The rear subframe has a shape favoured by several Italian makes with members, tubular in this case, running up from the swingarm supports and curving back to run parallel with the road and

▲ CEV clocks housed in large alloy dash. Fuel tank attaches to headstock. Friction damper fitted but not needed

hold the rear suspension units' top mounts. The swinging fork is strengthened by a cross tube ahead of the rear tyre. A compact 52in wheelbase aids agility.

The seat may be unyielding, but it looks dead right for a cafe racer. The legend *emmevi* on its rear hump is curious, because Italians usually pronounce MV as *emmevi*. Nevertheless the lettering is a welcome light hearted touch for a marque that usually takes itself seriously.

The steel fuel tank combines Seventies style and grand prix functionality in its squarish shape. The white streak and bold insignia beckons onlookers across

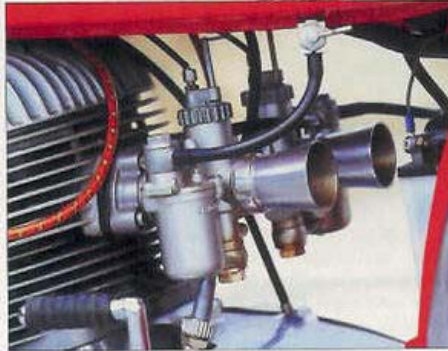


▲ Sidepanels announce flywheel triggered electronic ignition, introduced in 1972

46 JANUARY 1997



▲ Script logo says MV. Rounded looks were changed for next model with boxier image



▲ Remote float chambers supply 24mm Dell'Orto to help claimed power over 30bhp. Note hungee elastic HT leads, an MV trademark





▲ Curved rear subframe is typical of Italian chassis design. MV offered the same machine in GT touring and scrambler versions

the road for a closer look, when they can see the enormous decal on the tank top celebrating 36 world road racing titles. This was the tally at the end of 1972. The pop up fuel filler cap is easy to use.

A neat arrangement of components tops off the front forks. A small CEV headlamp on alloy brackets is clamped to the stanchions and the instruments are housed in an alloy dash. The steering damper knob tightens with a series of clicks and there are knurled adjusters on the shapely Matador clutch and brake levers.

Unfortunately the black faced 180kph — 112mph — speedometer and 10,000rpm rev counter are CEV clocks that look too downmarket for an Agusta. More importantly, their needles waver indecisively. They vaguely indicate that

130kph — 80mph — is easily reached and that power comes on strong from about 5000rpm, but towards 6000rpm vibration becomes more annoying. The claimed peak is above 7500rpm.

■ Double barrels

MV's 350cc parallel twin is a 63mm bore version of a 53 x 56.2mm quarter litre machine launched in 1966. Although styled as a tourer, the early 19bhp twin already boasted a twin leader front drum and unfiltered twin carburetors. A boldly styled street scrambler version has twin high level exhaust pipes, smaller tank and seat and a sump guard.

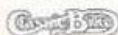
At the 1971 Milan Show, MV dramatically launched its four cylinder 750 Sport into the Superbike arena, with an eye to the affluent US market. As the 350 class was a normal entry level for American motorcyclists, it made commercial sense to offer an MV of that capacity to attract young riders to the brand.

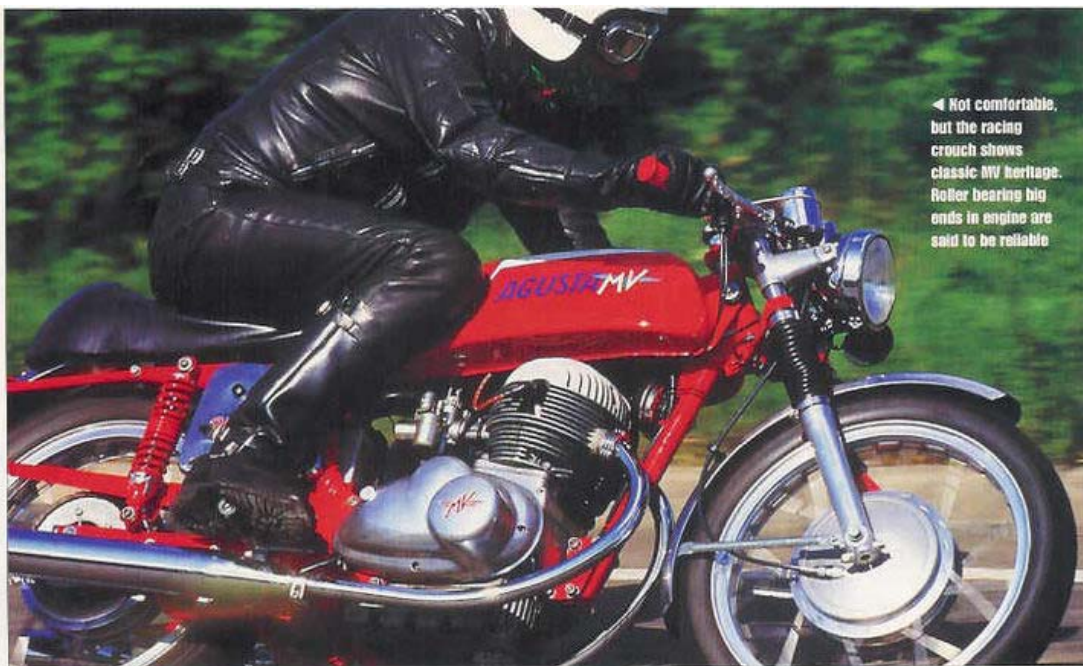
Alongside its four, the factory showed 350cc twins in several guises, including a scrambler and a GT tourer. The 350

■ 1973 MV Agusta 350 Sport

Engine	ohv parallel twin
Capacity	349cc
Bore x stroke	63 x 56mm
Compression	9.5:1
Carburation	2 x 24mm Dell'Orto
Output	32bhp @ 7650
Electrical	12v battery, electronic ignition
Clutch	multplate, wet
Primary drive	gears
Gearbox	five speed
Frame	tubular, open cradle
Tyres	front 80/90 x 18in Pirelli Mandrake rear 3.25 x 18in Pirelli Mandrake
Brakes	front 200mm (8in) ds drum rear 200mm (8in) ds drum
Wheelbase	52in (1321mm)
Fuel capacity	3.5 gal (16 litres)
Kerb weight	328lb (149kg)
Top speed	100mph (est)

Sport with electronic ignition was unveiled as a mini version of the 750S, with an optional racer style fairing, in the spring of 1972. It was imported to Britain in tiny numbers alongside the fabulously expensive fours by London MV Agusta concessionaire Gus Kuhn Motors.





◀ Not comfortable, but the racing crouch shows classic MV heritage. Roller bearing big ends in engine are said to be reliable

◀ By the time our test machine took to the road, MV had supplanted the round case 350 with its disc braked twin launched for 1975. The Ipotesi, translating as the odd model name Hypothesis, had modern styling by Giugiaro of Turin but its new look square engine was similar to the earlier unit, having the same 63 x 56.2mm dimensions. In a sophisticated market the later 350 was outclassed which helped puncture the Agusta mystique, which was also under attack from two-strokes on race circuits.

An unusual looking dohc 300cc roadster was made by MV in 1955, but it did not go into production.

■ **Price premium**

The MV Agusta name is clear proof of how a factory's racing success boosts the reputation of its roadsters. The Gallarate product never sold in the Guzzi and Gilera league, and most of its machines were a country mile away from MV's fabulous and costly GP weapons.

It was said that Count Agusta made sure the fours could not be competitive racers, so that his team machines would not be threatened by privateers. Yet, the factory's roadsters, which were expensive when new, still carry a price premium purely because of the MV name.

Race engineering has helped make the 350 Sport a rugged, oiltight machine, and at least one example performs creditably in UK classic racing. Anyone parting with the £1800 to £2200 usually asked for the 350 today needs to know it is not an outstanding motorcycle by Seventies' standards. But it is a smart little bike that can make the most disgruntled rider feel good again within a couple of miles. ●

Also available...

The MV Sport was not imported in huge numbers and cost around £600 in 1973 if you could find one. The 1974 model was even more salty at £900. We investigated what other hardware you could get for

your money in 1973. For example, Yamaha's RD350 is in the same cubic capacity and cost just £455 — read about the two-stroke on page 102.

Clearly the MV would not depreciate as rapidly as some machines, but then would the 350 twin keep its finish as long as a BMW? You pays your money...



Honda CB350

Dealer HGB of Harrow Road, Middx, was flogging the £405 350 twins for £389 in 1973. They lack the style of MV's sportster, but Honda could trade on an ohc design and equally impressive tally of grand prix wins.



Norton Commando 750

The 850 version was out by 1973 priced at £723, but you could buy a discounted 750 Commando for £646. Only 40 quid more for one of the all time classics with nearly 60bhp of raw power. And a disc brake.



BMW R90S

For the wealthy Eurobiker, BMW's R90S was launched in late 1973 priced £1799. The flat twin was in a different league from the MV — and nearly everything else. Holds its value well and can boast more race pedigree from boxer engine than MV's parallel twin.



Moto Guzzi V7 Sport

The V-twin was priced around £1350 in 1973 — if you could find one — so you could have bought two MV 350s. But you wouldn't have got lime green paintwork, swan neck bars and shark gill silencers. Developed from tourer, so zero race pedigree. Who cares?

