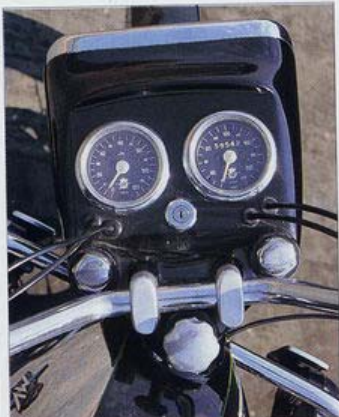


Beautifully UGLY

AUTHENTIC & UNRESTORED

Roy Poynting meets the rectangular MV 600 and
is mesmerised by its sight and sound



Small clocks and giant headlight. Quirky stuff from the legendary Italian maker.

It has often struck me that in the classic era there were some remarkable parallels between the market niches occupied by certain makes of motorcycles and cars. For instance, somebody who appreciated the mass produced value of a Ford would probably have graduated from a BSA. The slightly more sober image of Austin/Morris would attract the AJS/Matchless rider, while the sporting Norton owner might lust after an MG. The possibilities are endless, and could fuel many a winter's club night discussion.

It was meeting Cyril Malem which triggered these ruminations. I learned that Colin Chapman had wandered into the Malem workshop to ask for some welding to be done on early Lotuses. Cyril became involved with other top Formula 1 car racing teams like McLaren and Brabham.

You might expect such a man to drive a Ferrari, but Cyril is a motorcyclist through and through. His first motorcycle was a 350cc AJS, and he jokes that the only reason he didn't



lose his licence was that at the age of 12 he didn't have one! It comes as no surprise therefore to find that his chosen marque is the MV Agusta — surely the exact two-wheeled equivalent of the Maranello fire engines.

So when I ask Cyril what he finds most attractive about his 1968 four cylinder shaft drive example, I expect him to enthuse about its power, its engineering, or its sheer exclusivity. But no. "I'm fascinated by it because it's so damned ugly," he grins, "I still can't believe that MV used that awful rectangular Fiat car headlight. Apparently Count Domenico Agusta himself insisted on it."

He's right about the ugliness. The MV Tourer is what you get when racing engineers make a roadster. They look around at contemporary successes and copy their styling, ignoring the fact that that what looks right on a Japanese lightweight is all wrong for an Italian Superbike. The result is a bit like a Honda Benly which has overdosed on steroids.

At least the looks of the MV attract attention, undoubtedly a part of the design brief, though it's rather surprising that black was the standard colour for such a flamboyant device.

When riding it I was usually sure of being first away from the traffic lights because



Duplex tube frame gives 32in seat height, 6in ground clearance. Weight 485lb.

neighbouring car drivers were too busy gawping out of their windows to notice that the lights had turned green. This is not a motorcycle for the shy and retiring, especially as worn carburettor slides mean that the throttle has to be blipped continually to keep the engine running.

On the odd occasions when I hadn't been noticed before leaving the lights, the exhaust note left other road users in no doubt that they had just missed something unusual. The exhaust system has the four pipes disappearing into two silencers, each of which has two outlets. I don't know what the internals



are like, but the result is a much deeper note than that produced by modern four cylinder motorcycles. If you can imagine two BSA A7s simultaneously accelerating hard, you are getting somewhere near. Absolutely glorious.

Acceleration is, as you might expect, pretty impressive. The power is on a par with that of contemporary 750s, and it comes in a continuous flow from about 2000rpm, with a second surge at about five grand. There is no red line on the tachometer, but peak power is produced at about two thirds of its 12,000rpm peak reading.

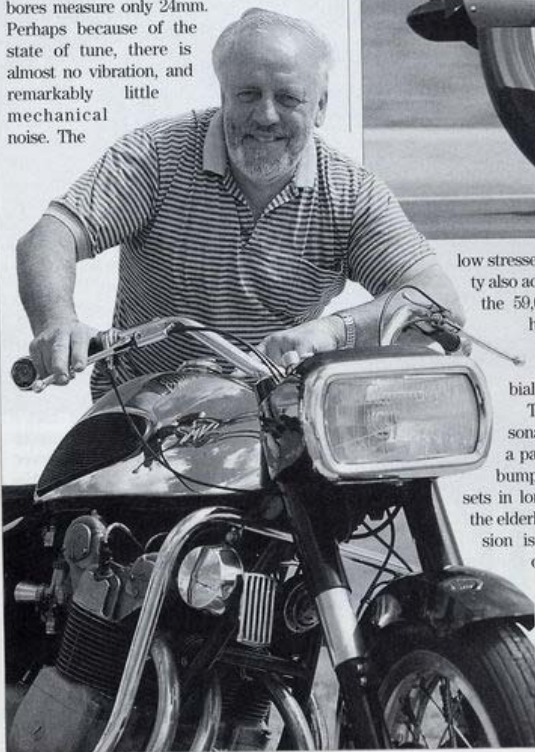
The busy exhaust note makes the gearing

seem low. But judging by the instrument readings, top is actually somewhat overgeared with peak revs corresponding to about 130mph. The claimed top speed is 20mph lower. The five gears are closely spaced, and although downwards changes on the rocking gear lever are a bit clunky, it's the sort of machine which encourages its rider to use gear changes to play tunes on the exhaust. Childish I know, but a lot of fun. Incidentally, the speedometer is still calibrated in kph and reads to 220 which makes the MV look even more impressive.

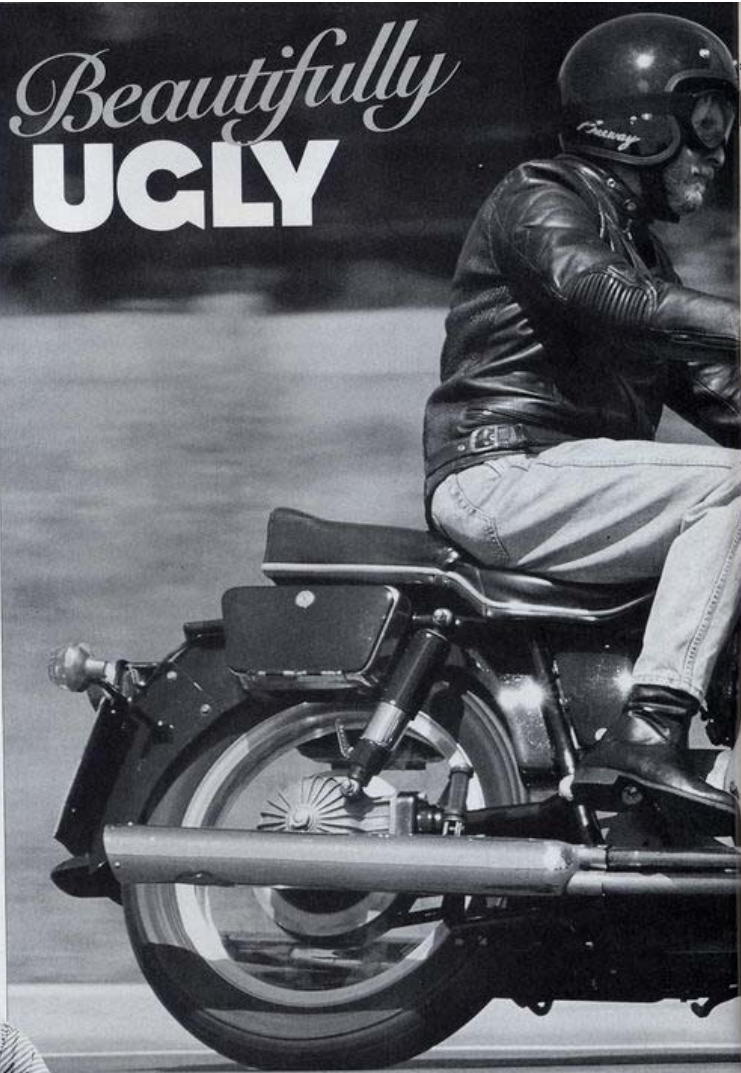
The twin cam engine is recognisably descended from MV Agusta's ultra successful racers. Jokes about the MV's styling apart, the race-bred engine is one of the reasons Cyril likes the MV so much.

He has for many years been a successful sidecar racer. Only last year he had wins at the Nurburgring, and he knows a fine motor when he sees one. He has been tempted to try the motor in a racing frame, but is reluctant to disturb the MV's unrestored state. For the same reason he won't even have the worn carburetors refurbished. He says with a grin: "I know myself too well. Once I got started I wouldn't be able to stop until I had restored everything, and it's just too authentic for that."

Other than the unreliable tickover, the engine is a joy. It is of course quite detuned from its racing ancestor. An indication of its heritage can be seen in the wired up bolts holding the Dell'Orto carburetors in place. But its touring role is proven by the fact that they number only two and their bores measure only 24mm. Perhaps because of the state of tune, there is almost no vibration, and remarkably little mechanical noise. The



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low stresses and high build quality also account for the fact that the 59,000 kilometre engine has needed no attention and runs as sweetly as the proverbial sewing machine.

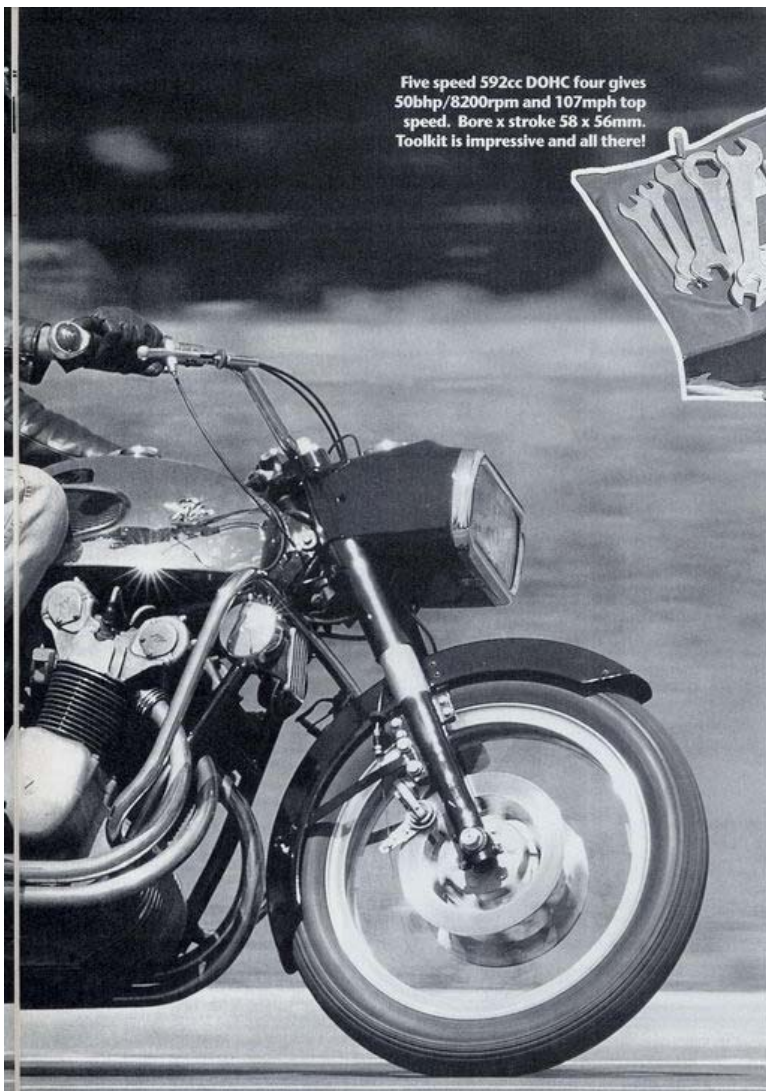
The roadholding is reasonable, but not really on a par with the engine. On bumpy bends, wallowing sets in long before the limit of the elderly Metzeler tyres' adhesion is reached. A steering damper is fitted but doesn't seem to

Cyril Malem's ugly joy. He is a member of the MV OC at 39 Belvue Road, Northolt, Middx. 0181 841 3286.

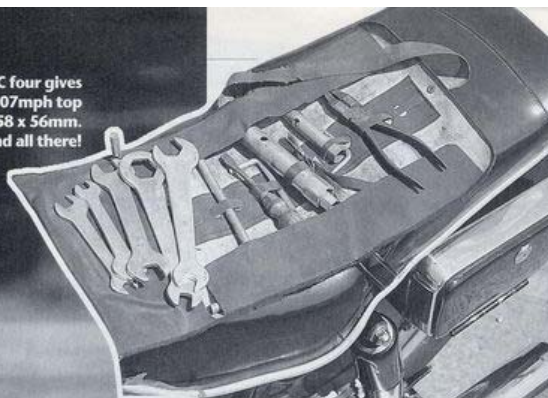
make much difference. To be fair, the frame design looks competent enough with full cradle duplex tubes and the MV rides on reasonably sized tyres on the alloy rims, so the weaving could be caused by the rear suspension units which cannot be expected to be perfect after nearly 40,000 miles. Also, I suspect that the sit up and beg riding position doesn't help hairline steering.

However this is a bike for show as much as for go, and the upright seating position is just right for making sure you are seen as you cruise up and down the seafront at Rimini. And, while it is on the hard side, the sculpted shape of the Radaelli dual seat provides adequate comfort for such modest duties. The effortless roll on centre stand and prop stand enable you to park in front of the trattoria without any unseemly struggle.

The Sin drum brake on the back of the MV works well enough, but the front unit is a disappointment. It's a twin disc set-up, common



Five speed 592cc DOHC four gives 50bhp/8200rpm and 107mph top speed. Bore x stroke 58 x 56mm. Toolkit is impressive and all there!



enough now, but a real novelty on a mid-Sixties motorcycle, especially since it is cable operated. A single cable passes round a pulley in a neat block on the handlebar to share the pull between callipers on each disc. For all his expertise, Cyril has been unable to get it to provide any bite at all. He showed me a new set of the tiny brake pads saying ruefully: "It's not surprising it doesn't work is it?"

Where the MV Tourer does excel is in the refinement and standard of its fittings. Imagine yourself back in the era when it was something to boast about if your new 650 had a main beam warning lamp, and consider the boldness of the MV Tourer's specification — an electric starter (without a backup kick-start), a main beam flasher button, indicators on the handlebar ends and beside the rear number plate, and not one horn but three. A small one is intended for polite toots, while twintones mounted on the crashbars — yes they are another standard fitting — are for

really making your presence felt. Having experienced Italian driving I doubt if the small horn ever got used in its native land. All this lot, together with side/head and dip selection, is controlled by thumb-operated switch blocks just inboard of the handlebar grips.

You would need a lot of practice to hit the right button in a hurry. Even Cyril had to think hard before he could describe what all the switches did. But the remarkable thing is that after nearly thirty years and a high mileage, everything works. You can forget all those jibes about Italian electricians when they are on a machine of this quality.

I have probably said enough to give an impression of the schizophrenic character of the MV Tourer. The fittings are superb, if a bit gimmicky, and the cycle parts match the touring tag. But the engine is simply too good for such mundane duties. It cries out to be fitted into an out and out sportster. That however, is exactly what Count Agusta wanted to avoid.

These days, 600cc is a common enough capacity for a mid-range sportster. In 1965 when the MV was introduced, it was normally only seen on old machines — basically overstressed bored-out five hundreds — from the stop gap era before full blown 650s took over. MV technology could certainly have produced adequate power from a standard half litre engine, but having set out to produce the ultimate roadster, the last thing Count Agusta wanted was to see it being stripped of its fittings and used for racing. So he deliberately specified a capacity which was not eligible for any mainstream event.

Shaft drive was specified for the same mixed motives. Dirty chains needing frequent adjustment didn't fit in with the luxury image, but it was also calculated the difficulty of changing drive ratios would deter track use.

When the tourer was announced, one can just imagine the awe it must have inspired in enthusiasts. At the time there was nothing else with more than two cylinders on the British market. Mind you, it is doubtful whether the MV could really be claimed to have been on the market. In Italy its cost was over one million Lire, and even given the chaotic state of that currency its price here would have bought several Triumph Bonneville. Small wonder that few, if any, were sold here. Cyril Malem has seen a letter to the factory from the would-be importers — Gus Kuhn — complaining that they had no chance of finding buyers at such an exorbitant price.

The small numbers of 600cc MV Tourers produced ensure that today it is ultra rare. Cyril reckons that his is one of only two in the country and its \$12,000 value reflects its exclusivity. The later and more conservatively styled 750cc version is comparatively numerous — about 100 Cyril says. He should know, he is an arch enthusiast for all things MV, owns quite a few different models, and was chairman of the MV Agusta Owners Club.

Cyril's MV is authentic as well as rare. He bought it in 1988, complete with the original documentation, direct from its only other owner, a Garage proprietor named Decour in Liege, Belgium. The garage nameplate is still affixed to the rear mudguard, and the bike is complete down to the packed tool roll. It says quite a lot about the quality of manufacture that both the tools and the nuts and bolts on the MV appear untouched. ■