

racing bikes. Debuting in 1954, the 175 CSS—nicknamed the “Flying Saucer” because of the disk-like shape of its fuel tank—enabled MV’s drivers to win in the sport classes.

Foreseeing a decline in the motorcycle market, MV Agusta purchased Bell helicopter manufacturing licenses, thereby acquiring new technologies for application to motorcycles. Among the many innovations of this period were the construction of a number of prototypes of progressive hydraulic gears, 2T fuel injection engines, and research bikes such as the six-cylinder 500 4T.

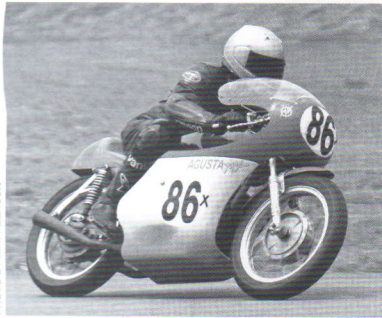


PHOTO BY MATT BENSON

MV Agusta increasingly distinguished itself from other manufacturers through its pioneering research and design, the results of which were applied even to its economy models. In 1956, it introduced the “83,” capable of carrying two people in perfect comfort at sufficient speed with limited fuel consumption. In 1959, it industrialized production of a new lubrication system that permitted its engines to achieve hitherto unknown standards of reliability, and the warranty on MV engines was extended to

100,000 Km. The generation of bikes built with this new engine were in fact dubbed the “Hundred Thousand.”

The growth of the automotive industry in the 1960s, and the consequent shift in consumer spending, challenged MV Agusta to develop even more innovative models—most notably the 600, the first maxi motorbike on the market with a four-cylinder engine. The engine, derived from Mike Hailwood’s 500 GP, gradually developed into the high performance 750 S America, capable of speeds of 220 Km/h.

Shortly thereafter, MV Agusta introduced the 125 Disco, named for the rotating disk distribution of its 2T engine. The late 1960s marked the start of the Agostini era, with the three- and four-cylinder 350 and 500 models remaining popular from 1967 to 1973. The two models were produced first with three-cylinder engines and then with four-cylinder engines to combat the advent of the Japanese two-stroke engines.

After Count Domenico’s death in the early 1970s, the company scaled back its racing projects, and only 2 models were offered: the 350 and the 750. The former was offered in three set-ups: “Scrambler”, “GTEL” and “SEL”, while the 750 was available in Sport and Gran Turismo versions.

In competition, MV Agusta managed yet again to thwart the Japanese invasion of the Yamaha two-strokes and the Suzukis of Saarinen and Barry Sheene—thanks to Phil Read, with two wins in the 1975 season, and of course Giacomo Agostini. Agostini returned from a tenure with Yamaha to ride Cascina Costa machines and win the last MV Agusta victory on the Nurburgring track on August 29, 1976.

Financial challenges required MV Agusta to partner with public financing giant EFIM (Ente Partecipazioni e Finanziamento Industria Manifatturiera) and to suspend its motorcycle production. In July 1986, several leading journalists demanded that the Italian government intervene to protect the MV Agusta legacy as a vital part of the nation’s cultural heritage. However, before

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