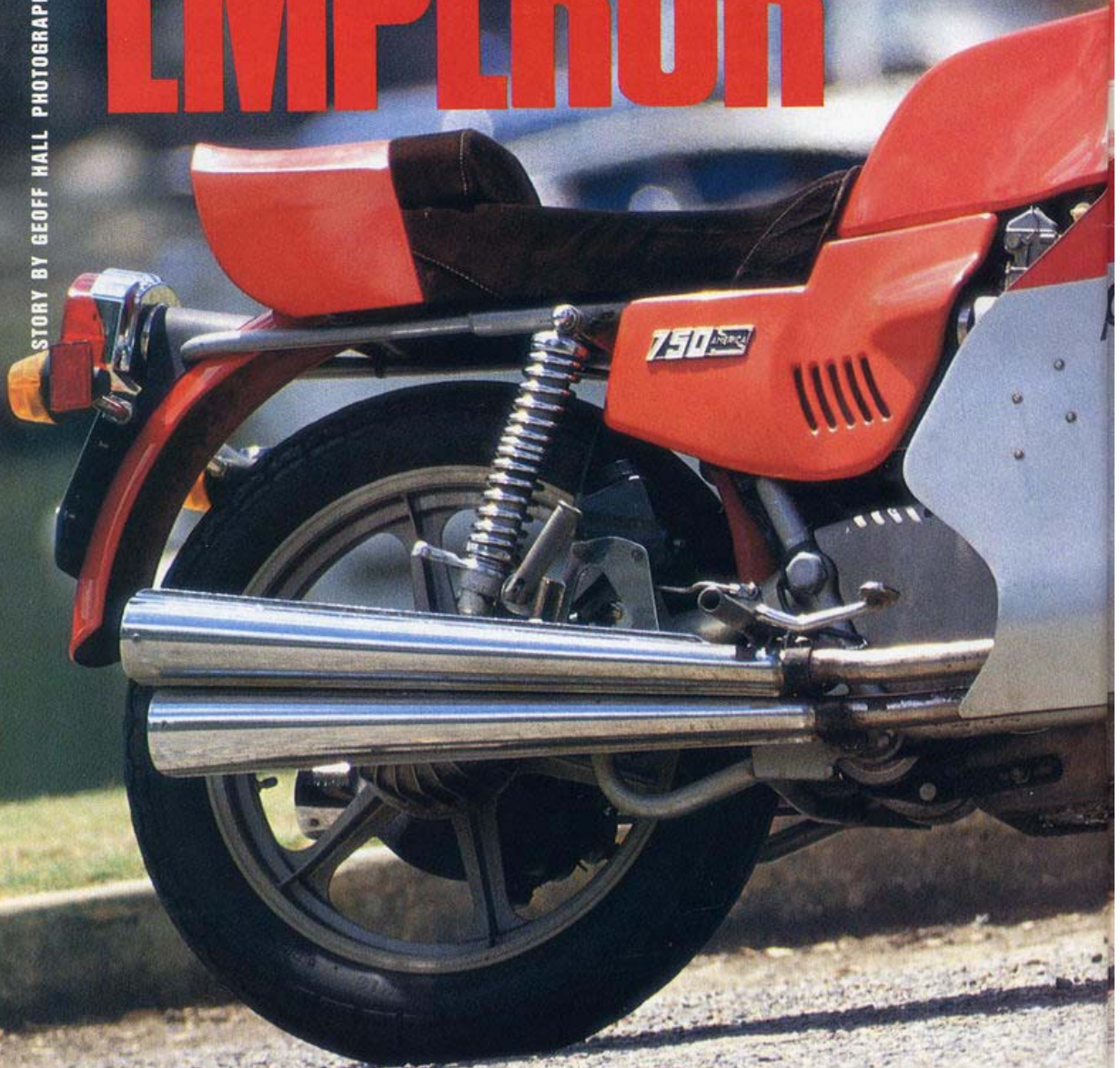


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THE LAST EMPEROR





MV Agusta won no fewer than 37 World Championships with their howling four-stroke race bikes. Every now and again they built a road bike too. We ride the last of the line . . .

High compression motors expel their fury by pounding raw power and an exhaust pulse which can blow a seven-ounce glass over. The four long tapered megaphones of the MV were barking in protest at being awakened from a 24-month lay off. Les, the owner of the MV, was standing three metres behind the bike, smiling as the exhaust gases slammed off the palms of his hands.

"Feel that power!" he shouted. People were peaking from windows, attracted by the sound of a thinly-disguised race engine going about its business. The whirr of gear-driven cams was plain to hear as the engine returned to a coarse idle.

Today the Japanese factories allow some 'road going race replicas' loose on the public, but none live up to a tradition which was started by MV Agusta in the 'Seventies. You see, the Italian lads at the race shop used to produce 'road' bikes as a sideline to providing the machinery which won 37 World Championships and around 250 Grands Prix. Admittedly they had some pretty handy riders to pilot the red/silver machines — Surtees, Agostini, Read and Hailwood — but the bikes were also pretty hot.

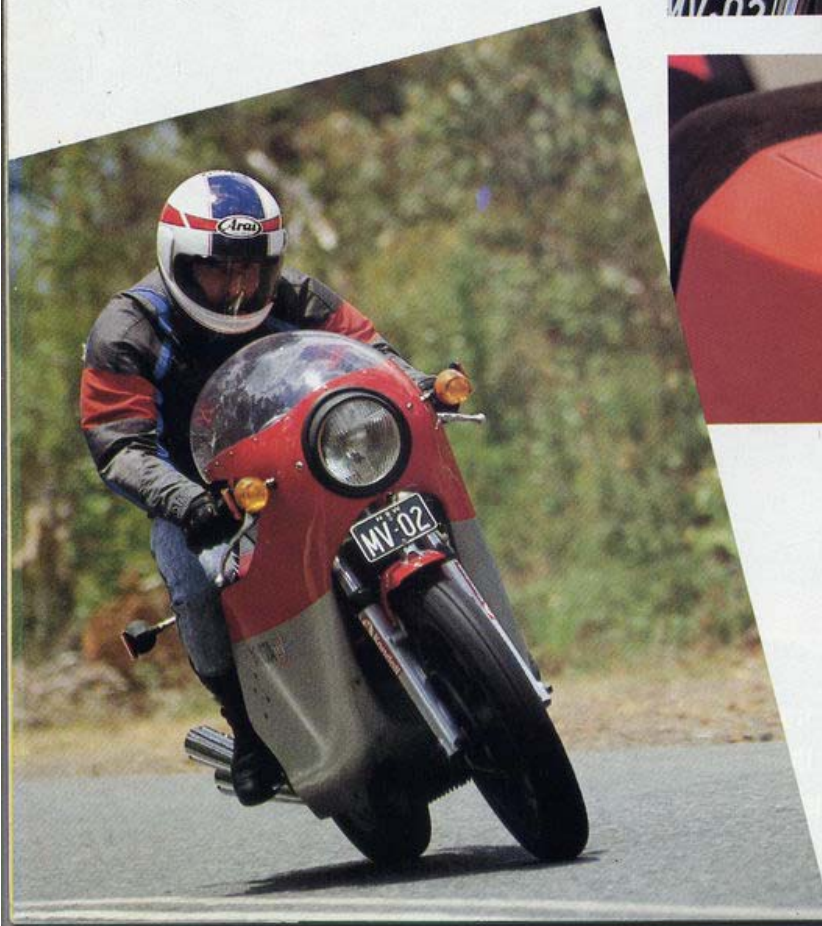
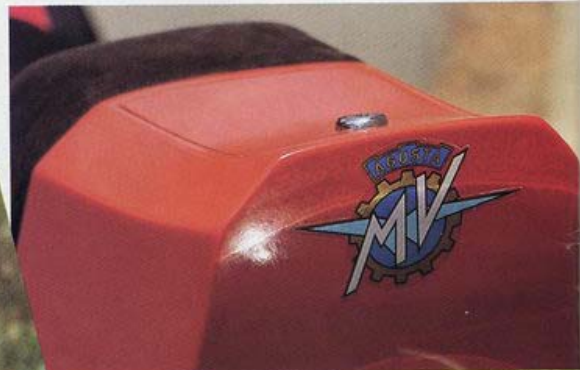
If you look at the design and the specifications of those early race bikes, you realise that the America Sport has a lot in common with the racers. The trouble is the people assembling the road bikes kept making small modifications. As a consequence published information on the bikes with regard to specifications varies considerably. Most of this is due to the factory's *laissez faire* attitude to equipment.

Let's see, perhaps 26 mm Dell Ortos today, or will that be 24 mm? This type of daily lottery can mean large variances

between the machines in power output and components like brakes — some came with Brembos, others with Scarabs.

Whatever the differences, two things remained constant: there can be no mistaking the handsome sand-cast crankcases of the MV and the graceful four-into-four exhaust system tuned for maximum efficiency and power. The engine is narrow by today's standards with clutch and ignition components above or behind the motor. Electric start is provided, but only as an afterthought. Situated

Pure Italian style is backed up by a knitted 832 cc, gear-driven DOHC motor. The noise as it comes on the cams at around 6500 rpm is unreal.



behind the motor and belt driven, its cheap activating button is simply strapped to the handlebars.

Engine design reflects practicality. The crankcases split horizontally (12 bolts) allowing you to lift everything (crankshaft included) out of the frame in one piece without removing the lower cases. The later America motor differs from early 750S donks here with a flange being added for strength. Double overhead camshafts are driven by gears, located in towers between the cylinders. A pressed-up crankshaft runs on roller bearings. In fact the only bearing

in the whole engine which isn't can be found in the oil pump. The gearbox shares oil with the engine and is driven via a five-plate damp clutch. Access to the gears is relatively easy. The dip-stick is not even screwed in — simply a thick piece of wire with a rubber sealing grommet. This is after all a racing motor.

Eyeball the chassis and suspension components and you find Ceriani front forks with a massive under-mudguard fork brace. There's Scarab twin discs up front with a single disc at the rear. Sebac Athens twin shock absorbers with 5 pre-load positions are fitted to the rear of the frame. The names are from the past, but they were among the best in their day. The double-cradle frame is steel tube with a large spline, cross-braced to the steering head. Nothing is going to flex although there is a weight penalty for all this engineering.

Bodywork is different from the naked standard 750S. A less bulbous tank is fitted along with a racing fairing of very thin fibreglass which unfortunately obscures that beautiful engine. It's tacked on using rubber grommets too.

This America Sport is particularly special, because the previous owner installed an 832 cc kit in the engine, a modification which provides an extra 11 bhp at 8500 rpm.

Starting the high compression motor is a get-it-right-first-time affair. We missed out, pushed it 10 metres, found second gear and the MV finally shattered the tranquility. Light clutch, clip ons, big Smiths instruments (branded MV Agusta) and a lot of gear clatter from beneath your chest. High first gear, 3000 rpm, no better make that 3500 rpm to be sure, gently out into the traffic, changing at 4500 rpm — a long way from maximum power at 8500 rpm and the 9500 rpm redline. Think . . . and the bike responds. It's a stable yet light steerer which wants to hug the apex and drive out of the corner.

The rust has gone from the cast iron disc and I chirp the front Avon without even trying or realising it. The brakes have excellent feel, even the rear brake works well. Balanced with lovely weight distribution, the MV feels like it wants to be ridden. There's little power below 3500 rpm but there's promise of a wild 2000 rpm powerband lurking below the redline. Time to go hard.

Clip the bike into third at 7000 rpm and the rear tyre screeches as it tries to regain traction. Published acceleration figures indicate slow quarter-mile figures courtesy of the high first gear, however the best kept secret is a raging top end. There's no



MVAGUSTA



doubt that the 832 kit contributes. Once the tachometer passes 6000 rpm the MV starts to show its best.

All along the megaphones are wailing, 'drowning out the drive whirr, thundering back off the rock walls. Back off and the exhaust note changes only slightly — the howl returns to a rumble from the depths and the gears can once again assert their presence. That lovely indestructible motor is just beginning to enjoy the task, but some deference has to be given to a 14-year-old machine.

A shiver of pleasure runs down the spine, there's nothing like the sound of a real motorcycle excited by hard work. Italian motor machinery of almost any description appears to be designed to bring on hot bloodedness and MV Agusta certainly hit the mark with their 750 cc bikes.

If you ask Les why he's into MVs, his answer is so logical: "I saw one of these engines stripped down and the quality of the engineering was on a par with Bugatti and just eclipsed by the excellence of a Ferrari Grand Prix engine — acknowledged as the best. I had to have one." I suspect that the wail of the megaphones and the urgency of a race-bred engine also had something to do with it.

The grin was still subsiding on my face 24 hours later as I read the history of MV Agusta — the racing factory which allowed a chosen few to savour a real motorcycle. ●

ENGINE AND TRANSMISSION

Air-cooled, four-cylinder four-stroke. Cast iron liners, aluminium-alloy cylinders and head. DOHC gear-driven by pinions between the middle cylinders. Primary drive by helical gears. Eight-plate clutch lubricated by oil mist. Five-speed gearbox with shaft final drive.

Capacity.....	832 cc
Bore & Stroke.....	69 x 56 mm
Compression ratio.....	10.2:1
Carburettors.....	4 x 26 Dell'Orto VHB
Ignition.....	Bosch distributor/coil
Starting.....	Electric and push
Torque.....	68 Nm at 7500 rpm
Maximum power.....	86 bhp at 8500 rpm

FRAME AND BRAKES

Tubular-section, steel, double-cradle frame. Ceriani telescopic forks with hydraulic damping. Twin undrilled cast-iron Scarab 250 mm discs up front, single rear.

Constructor.....	MV Agusta
Wheels.....	Ceriani mags
Value.....	Priceless