

AMA VINTAGE MOTORCYCLE DAYS

History of MV Agusta

The Agusta name first rose to prominence in the early twentieth century on the wings of Italian aeronautics pioneer Count Giovanni Agusta. A native of Sicily, Giovanni Agusta founded his company in 1907 at "Cascina Costa" in Samarate, northern Italy. Production of Agusta aircraft soared during the First World War, when the Count enlisted as a volunteer in the Malpensa Air Battalion.

When he died in 1927, the company passed into the hands of his widow Giuseppina and son Domenico, who decided to convert from aircraft to motorcycle production in response to both the post-war decline in the aeronautics sector and the growing demand for motorized transport. Their first step was devising an engine which was inexpensive to produce and operate: a two-stroke with a capacity of 98 cc and a three-port timing system, primary gear transmission, an oil-bathed clutch and two gears.

Unfortunately, the development of this engine was interrupted by the Second World War, and in 1943 Cascina Costa was occupied by German troops. After the war, Domenico Agusta established Meccanica Verghera in order to meet the challenges of the motorcycle market.

In the autumn of 1945, the first MV Agusta was unveiled to the public: the "98," available in both Touring and Economical versions. Deliveries began in 1946, the year MV Agusta officially began competing in the regular races.

Victory quickly ensued—in the first season, Vincenzo Nencioni won a regular race in La Spezia, then again in Monza on November 3, when all the steps on the podium were occupied by MV Agusta drivers (Vincenzo Nencioni, Mario Cornalea and Mario Paleari).

In the wake of these early successes, the 98 Sport was built, featuring a telescopic fork, a shorter frame, and almost 5hp: a record at that time for an engine of this capacity. In 1947, MV Agusta added to its lineup a Luxury version of the 98, along with two-cylinder, two-stroke 125cc bikes and 250cc single-cylinder 4T bikes.

The following year, the 125cc category was introduced in the Italian speed championships, allowing MV Agusta to enter its "125 three-gear" model. In 1949 the "98" and the "125" were replaced by the new "125 TEL," flanked by the 125 type "B" scooter in the same year.

Throughout the early 1950s, MV Agusta became a racing legend through decisive progress in performance and technology. Its racing success brought Cascina Costa increased sales in its lineup of versatile, economical models that perfectly responded to the demands of the market. Agusta designers also applied race technology to consumer models, such as the 125 Motore Lungo (named for the lengthened crankcases covering its ignition magnet), the most popular sports bike of its day. In 1953, MV Agusta reached a new peak, producing 20,000 bikes for the first time, thanks to its complete range and to the introduction of the original model 125 Pullman. In addition, the first plant licensed to produce motorbikes for export was opened in Spain.

After the reintroduction of competitive racing for mass-produced motorcycles, MV Agusta industrialized production of the 124 single-shaft, a bike derived from Cascina Costa's legendary