

MV Agusta 750S America—Shafted by the Count

The old story is that Count Agusta wanted to handicap privateers who might have used chain-driven, 4-cylinder MVs against him on the track

by Ed Milich

MV Agusta emerged after World War II as a premier competitor in grand prix motorcycle racing. Prior to the war, the company made airplanes, but Italy's impoverished economy in the late 1940s prompted it to manufacture cheap two-wheeled transportation in order to survive.

However, racing pursuits followed, and with them dozens of World Championships with riders like Giacomo Agostini, Mike Hailwood, Phil Reed, and John Surtees. Fueled by the wealth and power of its patron, Count Domenico Agusta, MV Agusta was recognized for race-bred machines with a penchant for exquisite design.

The 4-cylinder production MVs derived from almost two decades of prior factory racebike development. The first 4-cylinder production bike—the 600 Four—arrived in 1965 and was displayed at the Milan motorcycle show. The MV's DOHC design predated its similar Japanese competition (notably, the Kawasaki Z1) by around seven years. Development of this model continued until 1980, when displacement reached 789 cc, and the design had evolved into the organic, aesthetic majesty of the 750 Sport America.

Not born to race

It's worth noting that the MV production models were never intended as racers or even café racers. Rather, they were meant as "standards"—exclusive, gentlemanly bikes to be used for everything from errands to weekend rides to touring. To this end, the MV fours originally used a relatively complicated shaft drive. The old story is that Count Agusta wanted to handicap privateers who otherwise might have used his machines against him. But the shaft drive really may have been intended to eliminate the messy roller chains of the era.

The MV four motors are all oversquare, with bore increased from 58 mm to 67 mm over time, while stroke remained 56 mm. Engine bottom ends are built-up units with roller mains, needle bearing crank journals, and one-piece rods. Twin overhead cams are driven from the crankshaft by a removable gear set. Unlike Japanese machines, the cylinder barrels use four separate castings. The cylinder head is a single casting, with two valves per cylinder. The 5-speed transmission is a cassette-style unit that can be removed completely via a side panel. The starter and generator systems are combined into a single belt-driven unit located under the transmission. The cylinders are fed by four Dell'Orto carbs, and ignition is via Bosch automotive-style distributor.

Early bikes used a Grimeca four-leading-shoe front brake and then eventually Lockheed or Scarab discs. Compared to its later Japanese 4-cylinder competition, the MV is a stiletto of a machine; it's both lighter and better handling. The bikes are slightly hefty at 530 lb, but handling is very competent and top speed is around 130 mph.

Sensible upgrades will significantly improve the performance and enjoyment of MV fours. Legendary



MV factory race tuner Arturo Magni has produced a number of excellent performance-oriented upgrades over the years. Magni's tank, bodywork and fairing kits replicate many of the period factory racing pieces. Magni's chain conversion kit fixes the cumbersome shaft drive assembly by replacing the entire engine side casting and the rear differential. This highly recommended upgrade lightens the machine greatly and enables easy gearing changes. Magni's gracefully sculpted racing exhaust systems also beautifully complement the MV's lines. The dry clutch

kit, EPM light alloy and magnesium wheels, and other racing-inspired components are still available from the storied Italian tuner (www.magni.it).

Big improvement over the '60s bikes

As gaudy as the early 1970s 750 America looks, it was a huge improvement over the 1965–70 MV 600 Four. These were black and clunky, with the heft (and jumbo headlight) of a Munch Mammut, a stepped cruiser seat, and the chrome tank/rubber side panels treatment of a 1960s Honda Hawk. Indeed, only 135 were sold. The 750S America reversed all that with a red, white, and blue color scheme and giant, bulbous red seat. I'd argue that the definitive machine is the 750S America of 1975–1980, which features a sculpted tank and bodywork and a fully realized design, not to mention more displacement and better brakes. While the early bikes are rare oddities, the later ones gradually became handsome and usable.

With such low production numbers, it is difficult to categorize common problems on these machines. Southern California SCMer Cory Muensterman has used his '75 750 Sport as an errand runner and weekend blaster for the entire seven years he's owned it, with a minimum of issues. Some final drive failures have been noted, and such a case would be an excellent opportunity to upgrade to the simpler Magni chain system. Bottom ends on these machines are very stout. Any MV Four owner who does not initially speak Italian would be advised to take some lessons, if only to order parts from the homeland.

Soon after the release of the 750S America, the MV Agusta motorcycle division disappeared. Count Agusta, the guiding force behind the company, had died in 1971, and it seemed that the last ambitious design of the 750S America was also a last economic gasp. It wasn't until the Castiglioni brothers—the force behind Caviva—resurrected the company in 1997 that the Agusta name re-emerged, further cementing the monumental status of the MV Agusta 4-cylinder production machines. For more history, check out www.mvagustausa.com. ♦

Details

Perfect MV Agusta Owner:

Orders wine and motorcycle parts in Italian with equal fluency.

SCM Five-Star Rating

Fun to ride: ★★★★★

Ease of maintenance: ★★★

Appreciation potential: ★★★★★

Attention getter: ★★★★★

Years produced: 1969–77

Number produced: 1,865 approx.

Original list price: \$3,500 approx. in 1971

SCM Valuation: \$60,000

Tune-up cost: \$100 DIY

Engine: 600 cc (1966–70); 743 cc (1970–75); 789 cc (1975–80)

Transmission: 5-speed, wet clutch

Engine #: Right side, near distributor

Frame #: On frame rail under seat

Colors: Black; red/blue/white; red/white/silver

More: www.mvagusta.it; www.mvowner-sclub.co.uk

SCM Investment Grade: A