

By Brent Lenehan



Prototype Canard EB4 that Arturo worked on as a young man, 1944 Arcore, Italy



MAGNI

A MAGNIFICENT HISTORY

It is fairly well known that MV Agusta has a remarkable racing history; winning 75 World Championships and over 3,000 races. Less well known, however, is the name of Arturo Magni, who as crew chief and technical design director for nearly two decades spearheaded the company's efforts in this glorious era of Grand Prix motorcycle racing.

The Early Years

Born in 1925 in the shadow of the fabled Monza race track, one can imagine the young Arturo's formative years were shaped by the roar of engines emanating from the track.

His early interests were in aviation (the Wright brothers had made the first powered flight only 22 years before his birth) and he excelled at designing model planes and gliders. This led to servicing Italian Air Force planes during the war years where he became friends with Ferruccio Gilera, whose father was the head of the Gilera motorcycle company.

In 1947, when Gilera made the decision to field a bike in the 500-cc Grand Prix ranks (then the premium class), Arturo was chosen as a mechanic to work under Piero Remor who was developing their entry for the Grand Prix

circuit. This machine went on to win six world titles and the graceful and powerful dual overhead cam engine design echoed down the halls of many other brands of motorcycles to follow.

MV's Meteoric Rise

After such an auspicious start Arturo had the good fortune in 1950 to be hired, together with Remor, to work for MV Agusta (Meccanica Verghera) headed by the imperious Count Domenico Agusta, and his brother Vincenzo, who amongst other industrial enterprises, manufactured Agusta helicopters. Their interest in motorcycles was born more of passion than economic necessity and they sold street bikes principally to fund their racing endeavors. Arturo remembers that the Count was very demanding but admits that without his passion and drive they may never have reached such great heights and he recalls the Count saying from the days of the first four cylinder engine designed by Remor, "I want a 100 horsepower engine!" This goal was nearly achieved 25 years later with the 500-cc four.

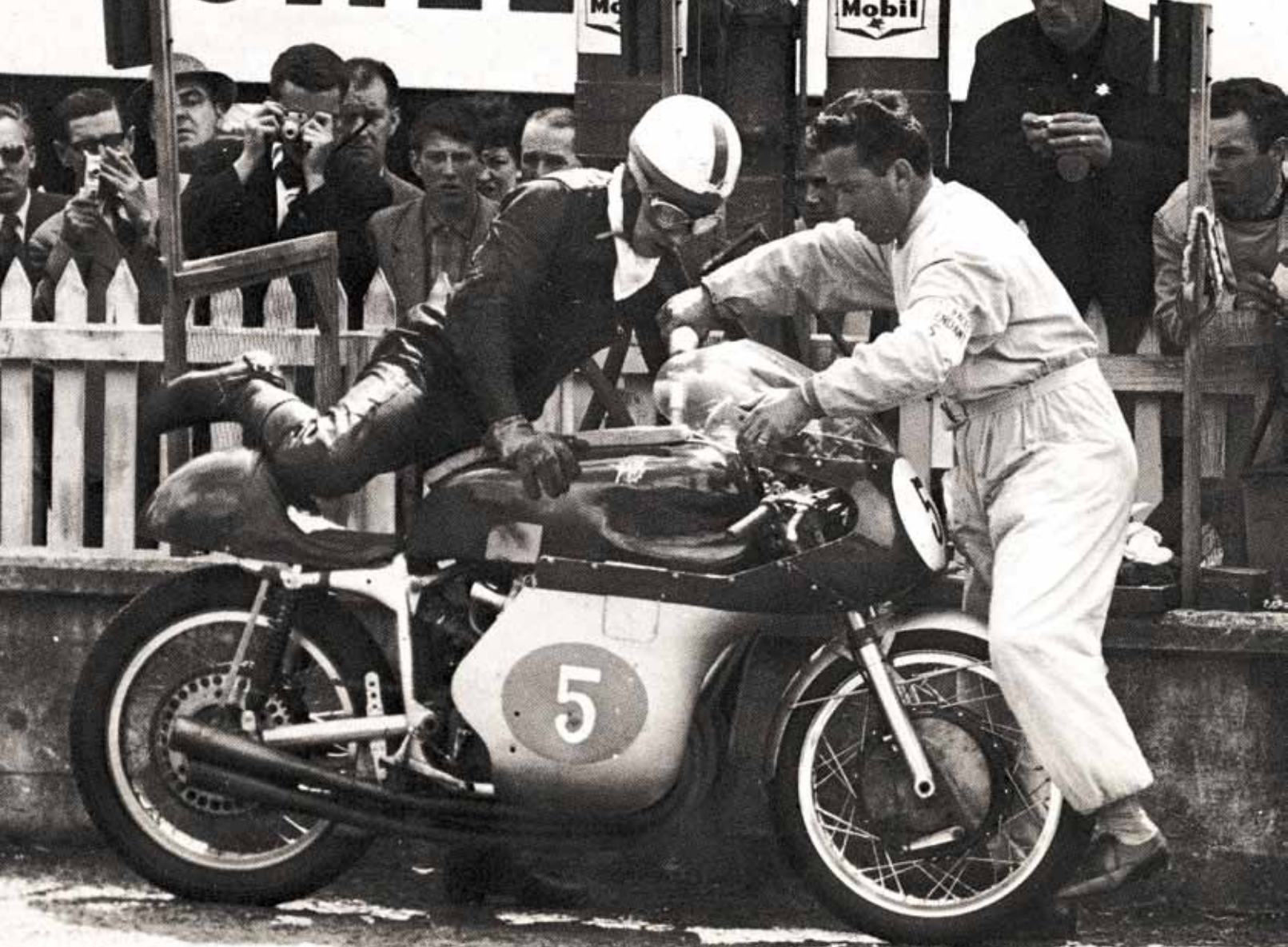
Incorporating the technical advances made at Gilera into a new MV four-cylinder racer they honed the design until they achieved their first World Championship in 1956 with John Surtees. In 1958 they won again and commenced



MV Racing Department at Stuttgart in 1958. Rider – Umberto Masetti



Arturo (with glasses) with a 24-year old Agostini testing for Nürburgring in 1966



John Surtees refueling at the Isle of Man Tourist Trophy – date unknown

their march into the record books. By 1959 Arturo was appointed head of the racing department, a position he held until 1976. The list of riders in this period is the Dream Team of the era with such notables as Surtees (the only rider ever to win a World Motorcycle and a Formula 1 Championship), Hocking, Hailwood, Read and Agostini. It is interesting to have him recount his experience with these riders:

John Surtees: Serious, methodical and down to earth. He did his first test with us in November of 1955 doing 100 laps in the rain and running near the track lap record.

Mike Hailwood: He was able to adapt to every situation. He showed his skills in winning every class of the World Championships. He had a nice personality and was a real crackerjack.

Phil Read: One of the most sincere and funny. He loved new ideas and experimentation. We developed our first disc brake with him.

Giacomo Agostini: He has undoubtedly been the one who brought in the most in terms of brand promotion. His exceptional skills and image he created have made him a matinee idol all over the world.

When asked about the famous rivalry between Provini and Ubbiali in 1958, Arturo relates this amusing story, “They jealously guarded their race settings and it is not a legend that they kept their jets in their pockets until the last moment before having them fitted.”

Pressure from Japanese companies had been inexorably mounting with an array of potent machines, particularly from Honda, who had initially borrowed heavily from European designs, beginning to appear on the GP circuit. Additionally, light and fast two-stroke racers were emerging as the foretaste of things to come. The lights began to fade for MV when the Count died in 1971, culminating in their withdrawal from racing in 1976.



Arturo (center) with Phil Read (right) and Alberto Pagani at Finlandia in 1973

Magni, the Marque, is Born

The racing MVs not only had powerful engines and superb handling but were almost too beautiful to be weapons of war. Their sleek lines, sinuous curved megaphone exhausts and wonderful engine architecture were complemented by the unearthly sound they produced. This was the legacy that Arturo inherited when MV closed and, given his experience, led to his decision to start his own family venture in Samarate, in the Milan area, working with his two sons, Carlo and Giovanni.

Initially the name of the firm was E.P.M. (Elaborazioni Progettazioni Motociclistiche), which specialized in manufacturing aluminum and magnesium wheels; then, in 1977 the name was changed to Magni and they started producing special parts for four-cylinder MVs.

Soon beautiful creations emerged with the redesign of the MV 750, MV 788 Sport and MV America bikes. The engines of these machines were housed in a replica racing frame and were fitted with a chain drive conversion that dispensed with the stock shaft drive. Eventually, a big bore 861-cc kit was offered with the package, surmounted by a hand-hammered aluminum gas tank, sleek body work and the signature “swan neck” megaphone exhaust. All of this was finished in bright red paintwork, a color that is emblematic of Italian style and passion that these machines exuded.

After the supply of MV engines inevitably dried up following the closure of that company, Magni looked for another source of engines and in 1980 commenced producing the MH1 and MH2 models using the Honda CB900 Bol d’Or engine, which had Honda GP blood in its veins and was in plentiful supply.

Both models utilized the race replica double cradle chrome-moly frame with the top shelf MH2 equipped with Ceriani front end, Brembo brakes, EPM aluminum or magnesium wheels and a full fairing in contrast to the un-faired, lower priced MH1. These models proved to be a success, especially in Germany, and they were produced in 1980 and 1981 with a total production of 300.

Following their German customer base and reverting to a European power-plant again led Magni to create BMW-powered designs and the MB1 and MB2 were offered in 1981 and 1982 with the MB1 being the base model and the MB2 bristling with extras. Sales of these models were disappointing, however, and the decision was made to look back to Italy for an engine that kept the Italian heritage intact.

Moto Guzzi Becomes the Engine of Choice

This led to what would become a long relationship with Moto Guzzi and the production of a varied range of



The Magni 1100 Classico powered by the 1074 Moto Guzzi engine hustles through a corner. It is the essential Italian Café Racer

models using this engine, the first being the Le Mans, which first appeared in 1985 sporting a full fairing and a Magni designed Parallelogrammo rear suspension. This suspension was devised to counter the habit of shaft driven motorcycles of winding up the rear suspension under hard acceleration and now made the Magni Le Mans handle like a chain driven bike. It was a great success, which was soon demonstrated on the racetrack and copied by other manufacturers.

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Gathering momentum now, the company next produced two new Guzzi engined models in 1987; the Arturo 1000 and Classico 1000. Both of these bikes borrowed heavily from their '70s fore-runners with the round headlights, spoked wheels, quarter fairings and polished alloy parts that were reminiscent of the era. These bikes especially resonated in Japan, which resulted in a loyal and growing customer base in that country, which eventually became their premier export market.

The Sfida 1000 (Challenger) followed in 1989 and with its Café Racer looks, its MV and Gilera heritage was apparent and it sold steadily, becoming a company standard.

Proven on the Race Track

Giovanni was taking an increasingly prominent role in the company management since Carlo had left for other ventures and Arturo began to lessen his involvement in daily affairs. At this time an Australian customer, Ted Stolarski, commissioned a Magni race bike that he could campaign in



Giovanni and Arturo displaying the Magni Australia with a Moto Guzzi eight valve engine

the BEARS (British, European and American Racing Series) races, which were becoming very popular and spawned some excellent machinery such as the Britten. Rising to the challenge, Magni constructed a fully faired street going race bike which, in contrast to other retro Magnis, utilized the best modern components that could be found including mono shock White Power suspension and powerful brakes. To give it some teeth the new Guzzi 8 valve, fuel injected, high cam engine was fitted.

This combination of exceptionally good handling coupled with a strong, torquey engine soon proved to be potent on the track and a string of top 3 finishes resulted with rider Owen Coles campaigning in Australia and New Zealand in 1990 and 1991. More than a capable race bike it also looked every bit the Italian thoroughbred and the company named the model Australia to commemorate its on-track achievements. Only 120 were produced and they are now sought after by collectors.

Moto Guzzi's fortunes had been declining steadily for some time and the issues of engine supply dogged Magni as ownership of Guzzi changed hands and supply slowed to a trickle. Eventually the company stabilized and with engines available again the Sfida 1100 was introduced in 1995 with a new frame and other improvements and two years after the Sfida 1100 i.e., which was the first Magni with fuel injection.

1998 saw the release of two new models; the Sfida 1000 4V with a Guzzi four valve engine and the Australia 98, which had a new 102 hp version of the Guzzi V-twin. A limited edition model, The Giappone (Japan), was created the same year to celebrate Magni's 20-year anniversary and the 50th anniversary of Fukuda motors, their Japanese

importers. 1998 also saw an American firm, Commerce Overseas Corporation (COC), which had formerly imported MVs into the country, import and sell a limited number of Magni models into the U.S. market.

The Magni 1200S emerged from the factory in late summer of 1999. This machine, despite the use of the Suzuki 1200-cc engine, was distinctly Italian in design and bore all of the Magni trademarks: light and powerful; four cylinder engine across the frame and the sonorous sound produced by the four curved megaphone exhausts. This machine is still in the product lineup today.

A New Magni Appears in California

In 2010 an American company, Triple Tec's, renowned Triumph and BSA triple specialists based in California, commissioned a Magni machine for a customer using the BSA Rocket 3 engine as the motive force. An engine was shipped to Magni's headquarters and a replica MV 500 chrome moly race frame weighing 24 lbs was constructed to house the engine. Period correct Brembo disc brakes were fitted front and rear and the frame surmounted by signature Magni components including: a hand hammered aluminum tank; quarter fairing; seat; magnesium wheels (7.5 lbs front and 12 lbs rear) and the unmistakable "swan neck" triple megaphone exhaust.

Triple Tec's has spared no expense with the engine, a race bred, heavily modified 930-cc stroker unit producing upwards of 90 hp and utilizing the best components available. Company co-owner Jerry Liggett says, "It has long been my dream to combine the best of Italian design with the Rocket 3 engine, which has always intrigued me. I have realized it in this unique machine, the Magni R3." The motorcycle is a novel experience for Magni as well and Giovanni confirms that this is their first endeavor using a British engine.

The bike will be debuted at *The Quail Motorcycle Gathering* on May 5, 2012 where Giovanni will be present to unveil it on his inaugural trip to the U.S. He will also act as a judge and be an honored guest at the event.

Like with other motorcycle manufacturers since the onset of the financial downturn, demand for new bikes has been very slow and Magni has been kept busy restoring bikes, principally MVs, for customers. Who better suited for this task one wonders and what parts and knowledge of that marque must reside in those halls.

Although Giovanni has been at the helm of the company for some time now, Arturo, at 86 years of age, still takes an interest in proceedings. But he is content now to live a quiet life; the roar and fury of past Grand Prix engines now stilled, but the echoes reverberate down the years and each machine that leaves the Magni factory takes a piece of that glorious history forward into the world. 📌