



*Benelli four
at the 1964 TT*

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Benelli: Alive and well in Urbino

ANYONE who thinks that Benelli, like Guzzi and Gilera, is now just a pseudonym for de Tomaso can think again. And those who imagine that the Benelli family have dropped right out of motorcycling since the company's surviving founder brothers sold out to the Argentine-born motor magnate have never been inside the bright, new factory that nestles near the tiny railway station on the outskirts of Urbino, 20 miles or so southwest of the old Benelli works at Pesaro. If they had been, they would know that the Benellis are not only still one of the most essential links in Italian motorcycle production but that they are well on the way to even greater involvement in both the industry and the sport. . . .

The little, fortified city of Urbino perches on a hilltop, nearly 1,500 ft. above the nearby Adriatic—God's gift to brickmakers, and to art lovers all over the world. For its city walls and narrow, brick-paved streets of towering mediaeval houses huddle, as if for protection, round what is reckoned to be the most splendid residence in the whole of Europe, if not the world—the palace of the Grand Duke Federico da Montefeltro, built, like every other structure in the city, almost entirely of brick. Here, at Urbino, Raphael was born. Here, too, from 1444 to 1482 Federico ruled the surrounding region, which straddled a main trade route from Rome to the Adriatic and beyond. It was a profitable position and he prospered, while at

The "old" firm is well on the way to even greater involvement in both industry and sport





The most splendid residence in Europe—Urbino's ducal palace. Photograph by courtesy of the Italian State Tourist office (ENIT). Below: A modern upstart—Benelli Armi 2

the same time spending a fortune in patronising the arts and filling the palace with priceless paintings, sculpture and wood carvings.

You can't see the city or the palace from the railway station, hidden away discreetly at the foot of the hill. But the infrequent trains slide by quietly, almost apologetically, like servants bent on performing some essential, if servile, task without disturbing their sleeping master.

A modern upstart, built barely six years ago, the factory is less respectful. Suddenly, and without warning, rapid staccato reports will ring out, echoing down the valley and scattering the birds from the branches. It is the sound of

a five-cartridge automatic repeater shotgun, main product of Benelli Armi, a smallarms company started by the family shortly before they sold their motorcycle business to Alejandro de Tomaso in 1971.

"My uncles were always interested to make guns", says Dr. Paolo Benelli, one-time competitions manager of the Pesaro factory and now general director of Benelli Armi. "They made one as long ago as 1920 and another in 1940, just to try it.

"Always they see a connection between motorcycles and smallarms. Perhaps it is that after a war arms factories have to make other things and turn to producing motorbikes since the people are then too poor for other forms of motorized transport. Anyway, more than one big company have made both things, such as BSA in England and FN in Belgium.

"So we started Benelli Armi to make shot-

guns in 1967, four years before we sold the Pesaro factory. But, with us, motorcycles are a tradition that goes back 60 years."

He points to a painting hanging behind his desk. It is of a helmeted motorcyclist crouching low over the handlebars of his racer. "This is a picture of my father, Tonino, given to him by his barber as a wedding present. My father was killed on a motorcycle, but his brothers Giovanni and Mimo are still living."

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To emphasize the point, he leads the way to the factory itself, along with his cousin, Innocenzo Nardi Dei, also a director and the Pesaro factory's competitions manager when Kel Carruthers won the 250 c.c. world championship on a Benelli four in 1969.

As we cross the sunlit space between offices and works, with the hillside towering up to unseen Urbino and the valley stretching away in the opposite direction towards distant purple mountains, I turn to admire the view, and ask why they chose to build the factory here. "Yes", says Paolo, a twinkle in his eye. "Eees not Beermingham. But, with the railway so near, communications are very good." The old duke's trade routes again!

For a shotgun works, Benelli Armi make an awful lot of motorcycle frames. About half the floor space is given over to nothing else. Stacked on their sides in piles seven or eight feet high, they stand in countless profusion awaiting dispatch to Pesaro, Mandello del Lario and Varese.

