

SON OF PASO

CAGIVA FRECCIA 125

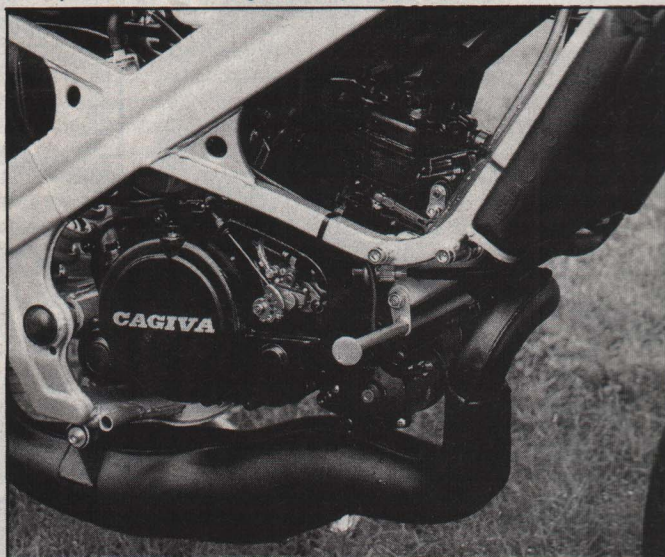
Having seen their Aletta Rossa 125 get all but wiped out on the vital Italian home market by the far more sophisticated Gilera 125KK/KZ as well as the locally-made Honda NS125R and the AF1 Aprilia, Cagiva have responded with devastating overkill. For just a couple of hundred thousand lire more than the rival models, juvenile Italian speed freaks are now able to buy a bike that is unquestionably the most sophisticated and fastest 125cc street bike ever built, wrapped in a mind-blowing package dreamt up by the man who gave us the Paso (as well as a lot of Bimotas before he left them), Massimo Tamburini.

Quite apart from the stunning Tamburini styling with obvious debts to his own Paso (the blind screen and seat), the Freccia, Italian for 'arrow', has an equally dramatic technical specification. The all-new watercooled single-cylinder two-stroke engine draws on Cagiva's successful experience with their world title-winning 125 motocross bikes, but breaks new ground for the company by being the first Cagiva two-stroke engine to feature a gear-driven balance shaft that completely damps out the unpleasant vibes that made the pretty 125 Aletta Rossa such a disappointment. Son of Ninja has given way to Son of Paso, and all is forgiven.

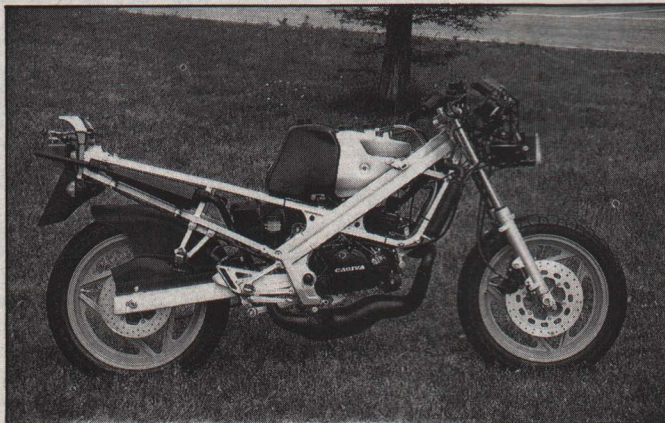
The 56 x 50.6mm Freccia engine has a Gilnilis chrome bore and nine-port barrel (six transfers), and employs reed-valve induction via a six-petal stack of carbon fibre reeds and a single 28mm power-jet Dellorto PHBH carburettor. Cagiva claim an output of 27hp at 10,000rpm, presumably at the gearbox since an independent testbed yielded just over 24hp at the rear wheel at 10,500rpm – remarkable for a 125 all the same, even if the Gilera KK does have a slight power advantage. However, it's the way the Freccia delivers this performance which is so remarkable: thanks to Cagiva's combination of CTS (Cagiva Torque System) power valve, which varies exhaust port timing



A 97mph 125 that looks this good? Wrap it up, I'll take a dozen



Water-cooled single puts out 24hp at the back wheel with Cagiva's power valve



The Freccia looks as good undressed as it does with the bodywork on



All three tanks fill up under petrol tank cover

according to the rpm, and CPC (Cagiva Power Charge) power chamber, which varies the resonance of the exhaust pipe at low rpm in order to improve torque, the Freccia comes on song from as low as 3000 rpm and delivers its considerable output smoothly and progressively – though I do think they got their acronyms the wrong way round!

At precisely the moment the tachometer hits 7000 the exhaust note from the twin tail-mounted silencers changes from a buzz to a rasp, and the needle leaps round the dial to 10,000rpm and beyond. That's when the little engine really comes alight, propelling a semi-prone rider in jeans and jacket to over 150kph on the speedo, and over an indicated 155kph flat on the tank in full leathers. Try sitting up though, and you lose 1000rpm instantly! At these revs, the Freccia changes character, sounding even from inside a full

'Such is its success in Italy that it may be a while before it's available in export markets'

face helmet like one of those old-fashioned Latin 50 or 125cc strokers that some spotty adolescent has fitted an expansion box to with the express purpose of keeping the tourists awake at night as he cruises the cafes with his chums.

The Freccia's six-speed gearbox has a slick change and superbly-chosen ratios which enable you to keep the little engine on the boil with ease. However, the clutch action is rather fierce and it's also easy to get a false neutral between fifth and top gears if you're not super-positive with the lever – just the job if you're taking advantage of the only straight bit of road for miles to zap past a delivery van and you hit neutral just as you're alongside him...

The Freccia's handling matches its performance, with the svelte bodywork hiding a rather different sort of skeleton than its Paso cousin's unlovely box-section steel frame. The Freccia's chassis is a thoroughly modern Kobas-type twin-spar affair in chrome-moly steel which enables the bike to look as good with its clothes off as on. I should also report that the fit of the bodywork is of extremely high quality that would have done justice to any Japanese manufacturer, as is the paintwork and general finish of the bike, even on the pre-production test hack I was riding. No squeaks or scrapes from the one-piece seat and tank cover, which unlocks to hinge upwards and reveal three plastic tanks – one each for water, fuel and oil, the latter delivered by automatically-variable Mikuni pump, matching the Kokkusan electronic ignition as evidence that Cagiva will buy the best from anywhere they have to, even Japan.

Even for a tall rider like me who would normally be thought of as too big for a 125 street rocket, the Freccia is surprisingly comfy, though the dip in the seat meant that after a while on my Giro del Lago my, er, personal appendages got tired of being crushed against the back of the tank cover and complained.

Tamburini's bikes have always had a reputation for effortless handling, and the Freccia is no exception: exquisite would be a better word for it. You just have to think a command and the bike has seemingly done it before you matched thought with deed. It steers perfectly, both flat out in top round long, fast sweepers and along winding, switchback

roads leading up into the Junior Alps around the lake. The Freccia surprisingly rides bumps like a bigger, heavier machine. Hit a ridge or an incipient pothole while committed to a line and though you certainly feel the jolt, the Freccia doesn't deviate from that chosen line by an inch. Part of this is surely due to the surprising amount of wheel travel built into the Marzocchi suspension – no less than 140mm both on the M1 front forks and the rising-rate rear linkage. That and a careful choice of spring and damper rates means that unlike every other small capacity bike I ever rode, the Freccia rides bumps rather than gets thrown up in the air by them: you glide, rather than skip. Sadly, though, you can't say the same about the front brake, which after a couple of hard stops early on went on go-slow for the rest of the day: I was surprised that on such a light bike, a single 260mm front disc gripped by race-bred four-piston caliper should prove insufficient to deliver the kind of braking power the Freccia's performance demands. It has a wooden and unconvincing feel that requires you to use the rear 240mm disc to the full to obtain acceptable stopping power: more work needed here – maybe a redesigned front mudguard to let heat out?

But the Cagiva Freccia is unquestionably a *tour de force* from both the design and marketing standpoint. Such is its success in Italy that it may be a while before it's available in export markets, but Claudio Castiglioni says that he and his brother intend to market the bike assiduously not only in countries which have a strong 125cc heritage, but elsewhere to other markets that so far have failed to follow the Latin Way. It's good-looking, even elegant, and fun to ride. What more should a motorcycle be? Well, what we have here is a bike that sounds like a BSA Bantam at speed, has the performance of an LC250 Yamaha of a few years back, looks like a Bimota and costs less than a Suzuki Savage. iMmmm – maybe he's right/
Alan Cathcart

CAGIVA FRECCIA 125	
Price (Italian)	£2190
Bore x Stroke	56 x 50.6mm
Capacity	124.6cc
Power	24hp @ 10,500rpm
Torque	14.4ftlb @ 8250rpm
Weight	270lb (123kg)



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