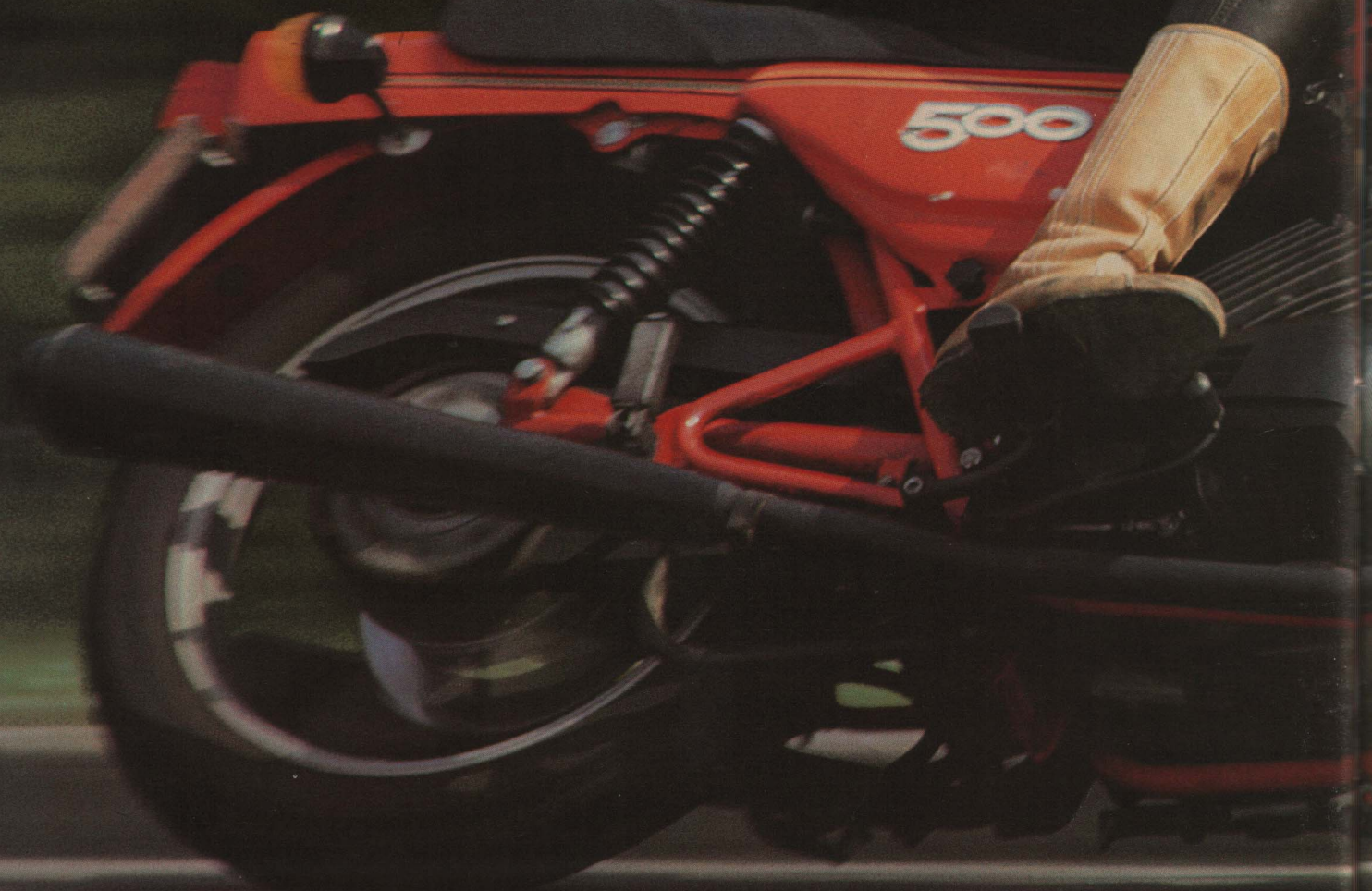


THE POWER THE GLORY



BOLOGNESE SAUCE

Inspiration and simplicity provide the recipe for Morini's six-speed 500cc Maestro



Not everyone is cut out for this sort of work. It's tough enough faking objectivity when empirical standards of What Motorcycling Is All About oblige you to wallow in a sea of prejudice. But when it comes to testing Euro-bikes, I'm your man. Really.

Take this new Maestro here. Now your average bike hack views Morinis in one of two ways: either they're quaintly outdated and suited only to your older type of rider who yearns for the good old days of Ajays and Daytonas, or they're to be indulged in as an expensive but cheaply-run alternative to blander Jap machinery of a similar capacity. Both schools of bias disincline anyone in his right mind to actually buy one of these medium-capacity vee-twins, unless they can live

with the awful humiliation of being a rather odd person and/or a spendthrift.

But I know better than to berate you with such asinine garf, for I am unafraid to tell you the truth about Morinis. Hell, it's about time someone did. The only possible reason for buying a Maestro, and to a greater or lesser extent its smaller siblings, is to *have fun*. Remember fun? It's what you used to have before Hitler was reincarnated, had a sex-change and called herself Thatcher. It's what you did with an 85p gallon of gas and a sunny day. It's what your right wrist's for. There's nothing wrong with it, except that it costs money. So before I reel off the usual list of facts, figures and fabrications, let's just examine the price of fun.

£1945 is a lot of money to pay for a twin-cylinder motorcycle in 1982. If you shop

around a lot less money will buy you a lot more cylinders and, if fun means thrashing around with your foot-pegs on the deck, cylinders are of the essence. Up to a point. Certainly the Maestro is a fast machine for its capacity; it handles beautifully and stops short of any trouble you're likely to get into of your own making. But the same could be said of quite a few other bikes in its capacity class. But my belief is that people who just want to get on with the business of scratching care about the technical sophistication of their machinery only when it starts to go wrong. I would further contend that if a motorcycle is consistently ridden hard and fast, its maintenance requirements are in direct proportion to the number of bits in its powertrain. So the bloke who chooses, say, a Kawasaki GPz550 or a Suzuki GS550 Katana for his fun is likely to be strapped with repair bills more often than our man with the Morini Maestro or a Guzzi V50. And they're going to be heftier, too. Compared spare part prices recently, chums?

Just before you target me for talking through my trousers, I would point out that one of my colleagues in the American bike press owns one of the aforementioned Kawas, which is now six months old and which he, I and his wife have thrashed the balls... er, used in the ►



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manner intended by its makers. It has already consumed eight spark plugs, one clutch, one chain, one rear tyre, one cam chain and needed a \$300 valve job which was too complex for my pal to undertake... and indeed why should he? In contrast, there's a chap who parks his S-registered Morini Strada down the street and, though it looks a bit tatty after 29,000 miles, all he's replaced are a couple of chains, tyres, two plugs and engine oil. Work it out for yourself.

None of this argument is a thinly disguised and ultimately specious defence of the Morini's several drawbacks, but it *does* provide a threshold against which the following should be judged. So get that into your heads, right?

So, continuing with the arse-backwards appraisal of the Maestro, what are those 'several drawbacks'? Well the Morini has yet to be designed that is an easy ride (in Jap-speak). The gearchange is on the 'wrong' side for all of you too young to remember when *British* traditions dictated legislation, and it's notchy to the point of recalcitrance. A firm left foot and the ability to engage neutral fractionally before coming to a halt are prerequisites of Morini riding. True, the new six-speed is slightly slicker than the three-fifties of yore, but it's still no butter dish.

Next we have a powerband that only spits and burps below 3500rpm if you're trying to make a getaway. A large handful and a slipping clutch are therefore essential to the birth of progress and sometimes that can be a nuisance (eg, two-up, wet roads, heavy traffic). But then you won't be doing much pillion-carrying on wet roads aboard this bike, because it's got a thinly padded seat and the ride is too stiff for most passengers to tolerate for more than five minutes of travel on the tarmacadam bombsites we Brits call roads.

For solo work, the Marzocchi suspension is just about okay, but you won't want to hack it for more than an hour without stopping to rest your credentials. This will not be a problem, since although the Maestro gives average fuel consumption at high average speeds (48mpg, if you're counting), approximately one gallon of its 3½ gallon tank is taken up by reserve. I found out about this the hard way. Having been advised by Hollywood

Yamaha to keep the reserve tap open during fast riding as a deterrent to fuel starvation (necessary, as it turns out), I ran out of juice on the A34. You may know that Morini fit an electro-magnetic main fuel tap which opens when the ignition is switched on – the switch being fitted inconveniently under the nearside lip of the tank. My guess is that its orifice is suited to the demands of the 350

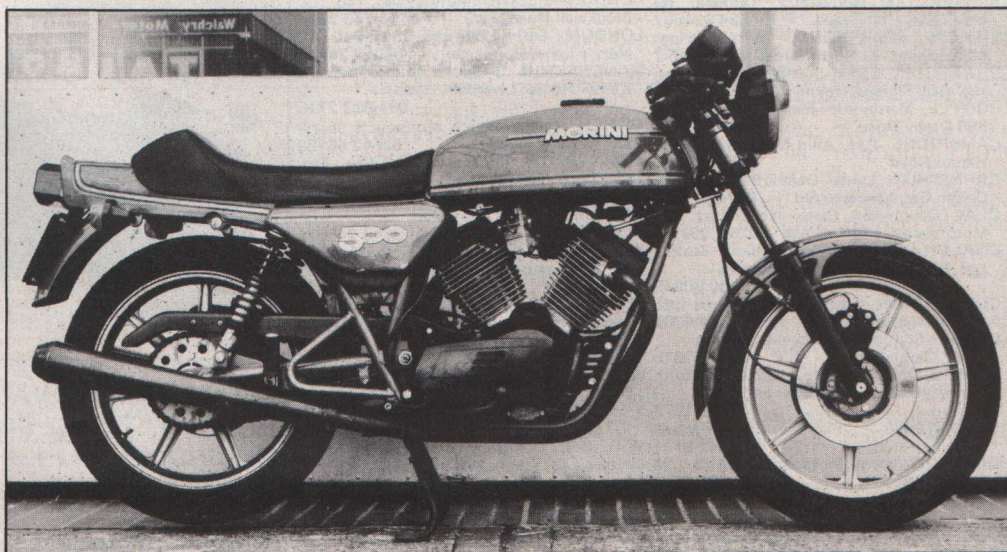
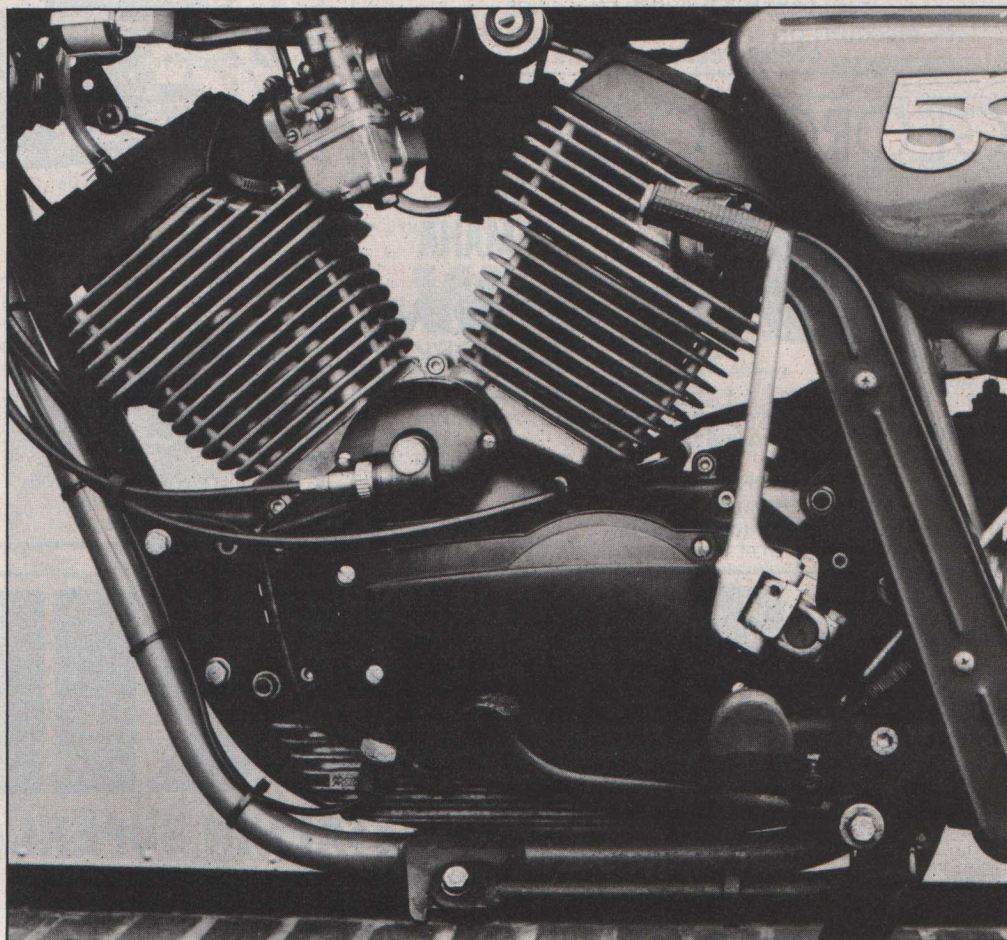
Carb positions are awkward and they have a tendency to fall off. Front-end is tidier but switchgear still looks like a bag of all-sorts. Very slim lines are what make the beast handle.

engine, but not the 500.

The standard of finish of all Italian bikes is marginally lower than the Japanese norm, and so it is with the Morini – but mainly in areas you'd expect the worst in anyway. The matt-black

exhaust paint doesn't look very jolly, neither does the corrosion seen in several Allen-bolt heads.

Finally we have the control systems, again full of Italian quirks but not really much better or worse than

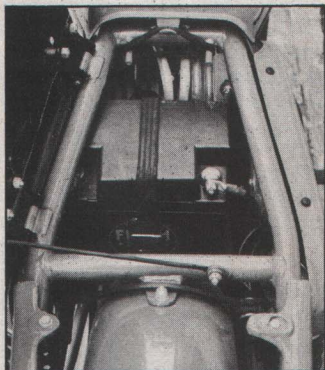


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Jap stuff. I actually took a liking to the electrical switches, even though some folk consider the horizontal tumbler for the trafficators is a menace to society. I found the foot-pegs excruciatingly close to the seat, but they are, with some difficulty, adjustable. But this bike wasn't built for anyone over six foot. If I owned one of these Maestros, I'd chuck away the low slung 'bars and fit *real* clip-ons, which would ease matters considerably, methinks. And when are the Bologna factory going to pension off those jelly-baby idiot lights and fit some decent, grown-up items instead?

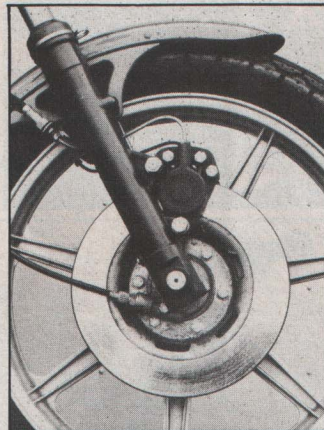
Alright, that's the bad news. Now for the good.

The Maestro is built low and light and, with a claimed 46bhp onboard, the sensation of speed engendered by the bike is even greater than it actually is —



Above: This is all you'll find under the seat. Right: Grimeca discs are chrome plated to look pretty.

and it is pretty damn good anyway. The power is supposed to peak at 7500rpm, with its maximum torque hitting at 5100. But the tachometer happily pulls well toward 8500rpm with the bike following in true train-like fashion. Although the usable (as opposed to actual) powerband is rather limited by four-stroke standards, once you're underway it's no problem. In fact, once you've made friends with the gear-change, it's sheer joy to chuck those cogs about, squirt the throttle and get moving. Understand that this is an entirely different set of ratios to that found in the Sahara, and Morini has resisted the temptation to make sixth gear an over-drive. The engine pulls hard in top up to about 7000, and then it's a bit of a wait for top speed to appear — the dial says 120mph, the reality is about 10mph slower. At 70mph the crank is turning at 5250, which is comfortable



enough, but I found fifth was more suited to fast A-road stuff, the trade-off for vibration being a small one and the resultant flexibility a boon.

The acceleration feels really fantastic once you get out of heavy traffic and apply the welly, and the road-holding — if unencumbered by bumps and potholes — little short of sensational. Complementing this is the Maestro's slightly twitchy handling, although this is often the price you must pay for precision, and Morini continues to fit a hydraulic steering damper for the faint-hearted. (Super-butcher Williams never found cause to use it).

The three Grimeca discs are all you'd expect them to be and, in the case of the rear one, even more so. I occasionally stamped a little too hard on it and got a severe case of the jitters as the back tried to catch the front up. But this was at lowish speeds, and I was forgetting the true vocation of this bike.

Which brings us to where we should've perhaps started: the Morini's engine. Nothing's changed from the 72 degree vee-twin configuration engine of earlier 500s. Combustion chambers are still cast into the piston crowns, comp ratio is still 11.2:1, and the juice hits the fire via 26mm Dellortos, jetted up from the version fitted in the 350 engine. The pushrod-operated two-valve heads are motivated by a belt-driven cam directly above the crankshaft, as is the starter motor which engages the generator via a simple centrifugal clutch. A pesky, nearside-mounted kickstart is still fitted to the Morini, but you shouldn't need to contort yourself into using it, providing the battery's charged up. The choke control is fitted beneath the clutch lever, and can be dispensed with immediately after firing up a cold motor. (Hollywood Yamaha said our test bike was running rich, and I'm in agreement. I think this also contributed to the relatively poor — for a Morini — fuel consumption figure.)

Morini motors are known to be pretty reliable but, like Harleys and Triumphs, they are easily rebuilt when the time comes because they evolve from a simple design that has not been changed for change's sake. Think about that when you're considering buying a new XZ550 — will you be able to buy valve guides and camshafts for it in five years' time? And at what price?

MODEL:	Morini Maestro 500
Price inc taxes	£1945
Warranty	12 mnths/unltd
Importer/Manufacturer	Harglo Ltd., 462 Station Rd., Dorridge, Solihull, West Midlands B93 8HB Tel: 05645 5835

ENGINE	
Type	Ohv 72-deg vee-twin
Capacity	479cc
Bore/stroke	69 x 64mm
Comp ratio	11.2:1
Lubrication	Wet sump
Carburation	2 Dellorto 26mm
Ignition	Capacitor discharge
Power (bhp)	46 @ 7,500rpm
Torque (lb-ft)	32 @ 5,100rpm

TRANSMISSION	
Primary drive	Helical gear
Clutch	Dry multiplate
Gearbox	Six speed
Final drive	530 chain
Overall ratios	18.0, 11.1, 8.53, 7.0, 6.1 & 5.5:1

ELECTRICS	
Power source	Flywheel magneto
Battery	12V/25Ah
Headlamp	45/45W tungsten

CHASSIS	
Frame	Tubular duplex cradle
Front susp	Telescopic fork
Rear susp	Swing arm with Marzocchi shocks and 5-pos spring preload adj.
Front brake	Twin 10.23in (260mm) discs
Rear brake	Single 10.23in (260mm) disc
Front tyre	Pirelli 100/90H18
Rear tyre	Pirelli 350H18

CAPACITIES	
Fuel tank	4.3gal (15½ litre) inc 2½ litre res 3 litre
Oil	

DIMENSIONS	
Wheelbase	56.8in (1433mm)
Seat height	29.0in (740mm)
H'bar width	na
Grnd clrnce	6.0in (150mm)
Rake/trail	na/na
Dry weight	367lb

EQUIPMENT	
	Elec start, turn sigs, str lock, tools, seat lock

PERFORMANCE	
Top speed	104.6mph prone (mean) 98.6mph upright
St ¼-mile time	14.35 @ 89.4mph
Speedo	30 (28.3)mph Indicated/50 (46.6)mph (actual) 70 (65.7)mph
Speeds in gears	32, 51, 67,
@ max power	81, 93, 103 mph
Test weight (full tank)	385 lb
Fuel consump	48mpg average worst 43mpg best na
Tank range to reserve	142 miles

Yes, the Morini is a bike in the old tradition — a bit sharp at the edges, but designed to give long service to the caring owner, and lots of fun into the bargain. Buying one should not be a lightly taken decision — requiring a careful assessment of your riding needs — but no amount of digital control, liquid cooling nor multi-valvegear will provide a more satisfying riding experience within sensible performance parameters. Now where's that turbocharger, Luigi? After all not *everybody's* sensible. **WB?**

SECOND OPINION

Despite Williams's thinly veiled reasons (masquerading as truly comparative testing, viz: the foregoing polemic on digital control versus intuitive input) those thinking of buying a Morini are hardly likely to be considering purchasing the ubiquitous Jap half-litre mini-moog anyway — for that reason the Morini has to be justified on its own culturally specific terms, ie, against other eccentric Eye-tie products.

As such, it'll probably deliver quite a few pleasant surprises to the equivocating test-ride pilot. It's really quite fast when you wind it up, it handles like a charm (despite the small scratching threshold set up by the low-slung footrests), it stops on a pasta shell and the finish is actually quite reasonable. Thus Willy might have got it right, if

on the wrong methodological grounds.

To its detriment, the Morwinny pays little attention to the considerations of wimps — the gearchange is hardly delicate, the seat is akin to sunbathing on an RSJ and the controls still look and feel like a bag of Tooty-fruits.

At around £1950 it's a cute alternative to the more evocative Pantah and Montjuic, which might deliver around 6-7mph more but to my mind don't handle that much differently. What'll stop you buying it is precisely that — it doesn't have the kudos of 'a legend in its own lifetime'. And that's a pity really, because despite the absence of a swarm of Morinis in the proddie series, it's really quite a fine machine.

Colin Schiller