

VINCENT COMET ■ ZÜNDAPP K800 ■ LAMBRETTA!

# RealClassic

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Running, Riding & Rebuilding RealClassic Motorcycles

**ROC  
GOLD**

**KET  
STAR**

FOUND IN  
A CANAL...



**MOTOGIRO  
BY BMW**

MORTONS  
MOTORCYCLES

**A CLASSIC RIDE INDEED**

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# GO GIRO

*For many years, Corey Levenson longed to experience this unique Italian event. Finally, aboard a BMW R90, he gets his chance to savour Tuscany in the company of 200 exquisite motorcycles*

*Photos by Corey Levenson*

**P**articipating in the legendary Motogiro d'Italia has been near the top of my bucket list for years. Listening to my friends rave about their experiences on the ride made me deeply jealous – riding classic motorcycles around Italy for a week sounded like a wonderful dream come true. The logistical and financial challenges of making such a pilgrimage from my home in Texas and securing a suitable motorcycle for the ride had kept my dream on hold.

Miraculously, the stars aligned towards the end of summer 2022 when my mate, Mateo, presented me with an irresistible offer. He'd bought a lovely little home in Montefegatesi, a charming ancient town near Pisa, and generously offered to host me and provide

a loan classic bike if I registered for the Motogiro and got myself to Italy. I realised I was probably never going to get a better offer and I started planning my trip.

## **THE HISTORY BIT**

The Motogiro d'Italia was originally a race on public roads and took place from 1914 until 1957. Its prime years were from 1953 to 1957, during which the event started and ended in Bologna, covering an average of 3000 kilometres over six days. The Motogiro held a significant position as the foremost event on the Italian road racing calendar. It traditionally occurred in March or April, followed by the Mille Miglia in May and the Milan Taranto race in July.

The Motogiro commanded immense prestige, and the competition among major ►





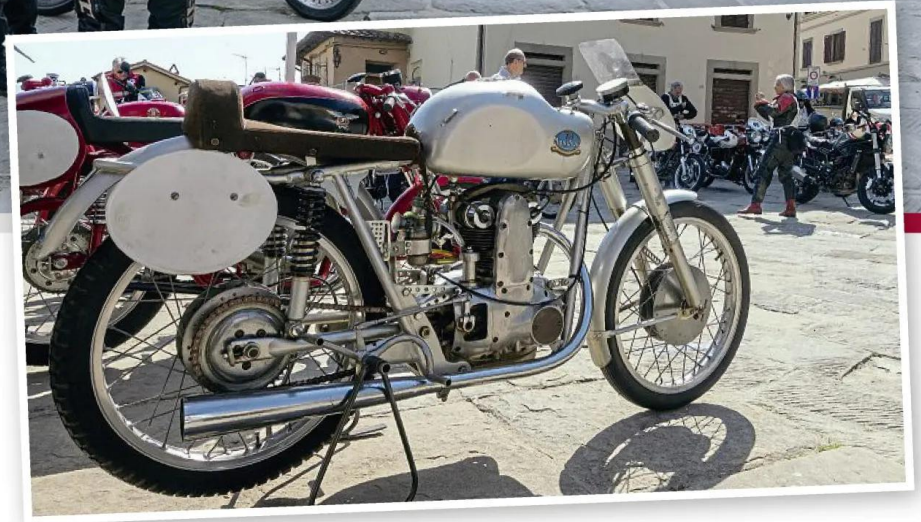




Italian motorcycle manufacturers in classes that ranged from 75 to 175cc was fierce. In the final edition of 1957, riders on Benellis, Ducatis, Laverdas, and MV Agustas emerged victorious in their respective classes.

Unfortunately, the Motogiro's long run abruptly ended due to a tragic accident during the 1957 Mille Miglia. A Ferrari veered off the road, resulting in the deaths of the driver, navigator and ten spectators. In response, the Italian government implemented a ban on all racing activities on public roads, causing the Motogiro to enter a dormant phase that lasted for over three decades.

In 1989, the Moto Club Terni, a local motorcycling organisation, breathed new life into the Motogiro d'Italia with official approval from the Fédération Internationale de Motocyclisme (FIM) and the Federazione



Motociclistica Italiana (IMF).

Initially the event was structured as a historical re-enactment, exclusively open to motorcycles manufactured no later than 1957 and with engine capacities no greater than 175cc. However, the current iteration of the Motogiro includes a diverse range of categories, accommodating motorcycles of all types. A wide variety of

classifications allows the entry of practically any motorcycle. This year's categories included 'heritage' bikes made from 1914 to 1949, 'historical re-enactment' bikes with engine capacities of 75, 100, 125, and 175cc, 'vintage' bikes made from 1967 to 1969, 'classic' bikes made from 1970 to 1980, 'Motogiro' bikes made from 1980 onwards, as well as scooters and tourist bikes (any year, any make, not timed).



*Top dog – on the pillion!*





Bagni di Lucca, a spa town

### RACE, RIDE, ROUTE

The question of whether the Motogiro is a race or a leisurely ride is a common one. While the original Motogiro was a full-fledged race, the modern version allows participants to choose between two approaches: riding as a timed competitor, prioritising punctuality over speed, or riding as a tourist where there is no need to monitor the clock and the focus is solely on enjoying the ride.

For those opting to ride as timed competitors, the event takes the form of a regularity rally with a few low-speed agility tests thrown in. Each rider receives a timecard every morning, featuring their race number. The objective is to start the ride at one's designated time, arrive at specific

control checkpoints within predetermined timeframes, and finish the journey at the designated time. At the end of each day, riders submit their timecard with all the recorded timestamps.

Standings are calculated and announced each night, with the leaders in each category acknowledged. Traditionally, the Italian riders tend to dominate and take home most of the awards, owing to their familiarity with the roads and exceptional riding skills. Their advice to us first-timers was 'no brake!' – a testament to their expertise in manoeuvring through twisting roads, as it was rare to see them applying the brakes during tight turns.

Every year, the Motogiro d'Italia features a different course. In 2022, it took place in southern Italy while the 2023 edition

explored the beautiful region of Tuscany. The route for 2024, the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event, will start and end in Bologna and will take place from 20-25 May. For the latest updates, keep an eye on the event's official website at [motogiroitalia.it](http://motogiroitalia.it)

Navigating the course requires following numerous red arrows on yellow cards, securely fastened to posts along the roadside and at the entrances of the many roundabouts encountered during the ride. If a roundabout lacked an arrow, it meant you'd missed a turn and had to retrace your path to get back on track. During the week of riding, there were a few times when I thought I had missed a turn but I hadn't – sometimes the arrows were miles apart.

During the event, we were accompanied ►



Running repairs on a 1955 Mondial





## BIKES & RIDERS

The ride showcased an impressive assortment of classic and vintage motorcycles; a museum on the move. Participants experienced the rumble and beauty of various iconic brands, including Rudge, Norton, Vincent, MotoBi, Benelli, MV Agusta, Moto Guzzi, Ducati, Velocette, BSA and Mondial. It was an exhilarating experience to ride amidst a vibrant array of these loud, smoky, and visually stunning machines. Alongside the historic and classic motorcycles, there were also a few modern Ducatis, Husqvarnas, Benellis, and others. Additionally, there were several two-person teams participating in both the tourist and timed classes. Notably, one participant even had a modern Norton 961 with a sidecar and passenger.

There were various options for bringing your own bike. You could ship your motorcycle to Italy or, if you reside in Europe, you had the choice of hauling your bike or riding from your location. At least one intrepid chap I met rode his 1969 Triumph Bonneville all the way from England to Pisa, partook in the rally, and then rode back home. Another popular alternative was to rent a motorcycle. Ride 70s (ride70s.com) caters to such events and provided a selection of classic motorcycles to participants. There was also the option to rent something new, such as a Vespa or a modern Ducati.

The Motogiro attracts a diverse international group of participants. Approximately one-third of the 200 registered riders were from Italy, while about 50 came from the UK. Germany accounted for a couple dozen of the riders, and twenty or so hailed from the United States. The remaining participants represented a range of nationalities, including ▶

by a group of highly skilled riders from the Carabinieri, riding Ducatis and Yamahas. Their presence, combined with our numbered race bibs, provided a certain level of immunity to traffic laws. While few riders engaged in outright dangerous behaviour, actions typically deemed illegal such as filtering, passing in no-passing zones and interpreting speed limits in kph as mph were tolerated. Mechanics swept the course in a van, underscoring the importance of staying on the planned route to ensure assistance in case of breakdowns.

This year's course spanned almost 1000 miles throughout the picturesque region of Tuscany. The journey began and ended in Pisa, encompassing six days of riding with overnight stays in Arezzo, Chiancano Terme, and San Vincenzo.

The official start of the event was dedicated to bike inspections, affixing numbers, collecting credentials, and attending a riders' meeting. Riding activities commenced at 9am the next day with the first stage covering 145 miles from Pisa to Arezzo. A high point of the first stage was a rest stop at the Piaggio museum in Pontedera. In addition to Vespa,

Piaggio owns Gilera, Moto Guzzi, Laverda and Aprilia, and the museum houses an amazing collection of motorcycles including classic Gileras and even an ultra-rare Guzzi V8.

On Tuesday, a 143-mile loop originating and concluding in Arezzo took place. Stage Three led us from Arezzo to Chianciano Terme, covering 139 miles, followed by a loop beginning and ending in Chianciano for Stage Four, spanning 170 miles. The fifth Stage involved a 166-mile ride to San Vincenzo, a coastal location where we stayed overnight in a beachfront hotel. From the idyllic shore, the islands of Elba and Corsica were visible. The final day of riding entailed a 184 mile journey back to Pisa, taking a longer route via Mateo's tiny town of Montefegatesi.

The conclusion of the Motogiro, marked by our arrival at the base of the leaning Tower of Pisa, was celebrated with hugs, selfies and congratulations. As is typical with experiences involving heightened levels of risk and reward, there was a bittersweet feeling of both sadness that it had come to an end and joy that the venture had been successfully completed. The closing event consisted of a memorable gala dinner held at the hotel that evening.



Overnight stop





Corey hits the street...





how she wanted her gears changed and became acquainted with her responses to throttle twisting and lever squeezing. Our compatibility grew steadily. I made sure her oil level remained topped up, and she reliably navigated me through challenging situations, instilling in me a sense of confidence throughout the ride.

My experience with BMW twins is limited. I had spent a few hours many years ago riding a friend's R90S but my taste in classic motorcycles leans more towards British and Italian machines. If I'm honest, Brunhilda was a bit ponderous for most of the riding during the week. With average daily speeds between 30 and 40mph, I was wishing I had a gear between second and third. At 35mph, she was either buzzing a bit or lugging. I spent a lot of time changing gears. On the upside, she may not have been nimble, but she was steadfast. We encountered all sorts of road conditions, and she took it all in her stride. Amply torquey, she pulled strongly at relatively low revs.

individuals from the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Norway, Australia, Poland, Belgium, and Switzerland.

Among the riders, there was a mix of experienced Motogiro veterans and newcomers. Some participants had been riding in the Motogiro for many years, with one Italian rider proudly claiming not to have missed a single edition in the past three decades. Alongside the seasoned riders, there were numerous individuals, myself included, experiencing their first Motogiro adventure. I estimate that around twenty of the participants were women. As is typical in the classic motorcycling world, the average rider age was probably about 60.

There was a wide range of rider / bike combinations including a young Italian woman on a 1964 Velocette Venom, an older British gent on a 1934 sidevalve stick-shift Harley, an Italian guy on an orange metalflake Norton Commando Fastback and a Dutch fellow and his daughter swapping back and forth between their 1949 Vincent Rapide and an Egli-Vincent. It was great to see such variety!

## MY MOTOGIRO MOUNT

My friend Mateo arranged for me to ride a well-maintained, low-mileage blue 1974 BMW R90/6 that belonged to a friend who couldn't participate this year. Although nearly 50 years old, the Beemer had spent 17 years in storage

and turned 10,000 miles during my week of riding. The older Bavarian airheads are not known for their colourful livery, but I must admit she looked good in azure.

My relationship with the BMW, which I fondly nicknamed 'Brunhilda', reminded me of an arranged marriage. Prior to the first day of riding, we had never met. However, over the course of a few days, I got to know





Thankfully, the ergonomics were good. I spent between five and six hours a day in the saddle for six days and nothing was sore or numb after six days of riding.

When we arrived at the Leaning Tower on the last day, I confess to giving her a little pat on the tank and telling her *danke schön* for delivering me in one piece to the finishing line.

## NO MEAN FEAT

Participating in the Motogiro is not for novice riders. The Motogiro website aptly describes it as the 'most beautiful and treacherous' ride, and that's no lie. Tuscany offers very few boring roads. We were constantly navigating steep hills, encountering thousands of blind hairpin turns that connected brief sections of straight-ish road, all with limited visibility. The ride demanded frequent shifting, braking, and accelerating, all on roads with few centre lines and no protective guardrails.

The road surfaces varied greatly throughout the event, challenging riders and demanding their undivided attention. Roads could transition from shady to sunny, wet to dry, and ranged from impeccably smooth to broken, potholed, and even unpaved. As captivating as the scenery was, riders had to remain fully focused on what lay ahead. Throughout the week, participants faced a range of weather conditions, including sun, rain, and even a brief hailstorm.

The Motogiro is an endurance event that rigorously tests both riders and their motorcycles. Out of the 200 registered riders this year, 189 showed up for the event, and 144 successfully completed it. Mechanical issues were not uncommon, and unfortunately, a few participants ended their rides in ambulances.

The cost of registration for the Motogiro varies depending on whether you choose to ride as a tourist or in a timed class and what level of accommodation is desired. An estimate would be around 1500-1800 euros. If you want a single room, expect an additional cost of approximately 220 euros. The registration fee covers accommodation in hotels each night, breakfasts, a group dinner every evening, luggage transfers, and some attractive perks like an embroidered polo shirt, hat, and a pair of Domino grips (sponsored items).

Choosing the right motorcycle will greatly enhance your riding experience during the Motogiro. Given the relatively low average speed, a nimble bike with excellent braking, acceleration, and handling is ideal. Many riders opt for single-cylinder bikes with a displacement of up to 500cc, featuring



renowned Italian brands such as Moto Guzzi, Mondial, Parilla, Benelli, MV Agusta, MotoBi, and Ducati.

If you prefer a heavier bike, make sure it offers decent suspension and reliable brakes. It's worth noting that next year's route may involve fewer twists and turns, making a larger bike more suitable.

Daily riding typically begins at 9am and concludes around 4pm. A nice shower after riding followed by some social drinking and chit-chat segues to dinner which started around 9pm and finished by 10:30pm. This is much later than I usually eat dinner but, as they say, 'when in Rome...'

If you choose to participate in the tourist class, you have the freedom to take your time and explore the towns along the route. Additionally, there are two stages that start and finish at the same hotel, offering an excellent opportunity to take a break from riding and engage in some local dining, shopping or sightseeing.

When it comes to fuel, it's advisable to carry some cash as petrol station attendants typically take a lunch break between noon and three. It's worth noting that credit cards may not work in automated self-serve gas stations, but euro notes are generally accepted.

The enjoyment of the Motogiro event largely depends on having the right attitude. It's important to embrace the slightly unpredictable and flexible nature of the event. It's Italy after all and things may not always go according to plan, so it's crucial to go with the flow and maintain a positive

mindset. Regardless of any unexpected occurrences, the experience is ultimately bound to be delightful.

Participating in events like the Motogiro offers a wonderful opportunity to forge new friendships and experience a sense of camaraderie. There were lots of English-speakers to engage in conversations, and I had the pleasure of making at least a dozen new friends through connections with fellow Americans, British riders and others.

The breathtaking scenery encountered during the ride is an absolute standout reason to participate. From picturesque olive groves and vineyards to captivating waterfalls, vibrant fields of wildflowers and jasmine, and enchanting medieval villages, my senses were treated to a feast. The culinary offerings, including delicious coffee, pastries, cheeses, cold cuts, pasta, tiramisu, pizza, and gelatos, were excellent and surprisingly affordable.

The riding experience itself was nothing short of incredible. Regardless of your skill level, undertaking this journey will likely enhance your abilities as a rider by the end of the event. The countless hairpin turns and diverse road conditions presented an opportunity for me to refine my bike handling skills and grow as a rider.

Most roads we travelled on were narrow and relatively devoid of traffic, allowing for a very enjoyable riding experience. The variety of landscapes we encountered was truly astonishing. One day, we were navigating leaf-covered roads with snowy verges in crisp mountain air as we ascended towards an Italian ski resort, while the next day we were riding along the coast with the sun glistering





on the water's surface. We passed through chestnut forests and traversed lush rolling hills crowned by ancient stone settlements. During rest stops in piazzas shaded by centuries-old cathedrals, we indulged in local delicacies such as salami, breads and cheeses, and even had the opportunity to sample the region's renowned wines while engaging in friendly conversations with the carabinieri who stood nearby.

The Motogiro promises a remarkable experience filled with scenic beauty, culinary delights, personal growth as a rider, and the chance to establish lasting connections with fellow enthusiasts.

As an American, it was remarkably refreshing to ride in a country where motorcyclists are treated with respect. We

were made to feel as if we had as much right to be riding on the roads as any other vehicle. The Italians recognise and are proud of their motorsport heritage and were happy to see their traditions being celebrated. In a few towns, we were cheered on by throngs of school children as we rode through! It made us feel heroic!

### A SPECIAL EVENT

Massimo Mansueti, the President of Moto Club Terni and the organiser of the Motogiro, shared his insights on what makes the Motogiro such a special event. According to him, the event is driven by the emotions that participants feel and share with others. Since 1989, the organisers have been

motivated by the reward of getting to know new enthusiasts and forming lasting friendships. The tearful embraces at the finish line serve as a source of inspiration to continue their Herculean efforts year after year.

He also emphasised the importance of carrying on the tradition of the Motogiro. The event is a historical re-enactment of the oldest and most renowned Italian motorbike race, which played a crucial role in the development of the Italian motorcycle industry. Its global recognition motivates the organisers to strive for continuous improvement with each edition.

Finally, Massimo highlighted the inherent allure of travel and adventure. Despite living in the digital age, the connection between people and the landscape remains strong. Exploring new destinations evokes powerful emotions, sensations, and a deep longing for discovery. Travellers cherish the memories of their journeys forever. The Motogiro d'Italia offers motorcycle enthusiasts the opportunity to embark on timeless adventures, riding their beloved bikes along historic roads and through enchanting places.

Taking part in the Motogiro d'Italia was the fulfilment of a long-standing wish and it left me wanting to do it all over again. When my friends asked about the ride after I got back home, I told them that if there is a heaven and I somehow talk my way in, my perfect eternity would be spent cruising Tuscan roads on a classic motorcycle. With two wheels beneath me and the boundless splendour of the Italian countryside on all sides, I won't need any wings. **Rc**



The finish line in Pisa