



# THE 2023 MOTOGIRO D'ITALIA

## Roaming Tuscan Roads on Classic Motorcycles

Story and photos by Corey Levenson

**T**he Motogiro d'Italia, a legendary event, has been a decades-long dream for me.

Friends who have experienced it raved about the incredible time they had. Riding around Italy for a week on classic motorcycles sounded like pure bliss. However, obstacles like the logistics of traveling from the U.S. and finding a suitable ride kept my dream on the back burner.

But then, towards the end of summer 2022, my good friend Mateo (despite not being Italian) made me an offer I couldn't refuse. He had purchased a charming home in Montefegatesi, a small ancient town near Pisa, and generously offered me a place to stay and use of a classic bike if I registered for the Motogiro and flew to Italy. It was as if the stars had finally aligned, and I started planning my long-awaited adventure.

### Origins of the Motogiro d'Italia

The original Motogiro d'Italia road race ran from 1914 until 1957. The peak years were 1953-1957 when the event started and finished in Bologna with races averaging 3,000km over six days. The Motogiro was the first big event on the annual calendar for Italian road racing. It was held in March/April followed by the Mille Miglia in May and, finally, the Milan-Taranto race in July.

The Motogiro was a prestigious event and competition was fierce with all the major Italian manufacturers competing in classes ranging from 75cc-175cc. In the final 1957 edition, the various classes were won by riders on bikes made by Benelli, Ducati, Laverda and MV Agusta.

As a result of a tragic accident in that year's Mille Miglia when a Ferrari went off the road killing the driver, navigator and ten spectators, the Italian government outlawed all racing on public roads and the Motogiro went dormant for over thirty years.

### Resurrection of the (Modern) Motogiro d'Italia

In 1989, a local motorcycling organization, Moto Club Terni, relaunched the Motogiro d'Italia with sanctioning from the *Fédération Internationale de Motocyclisme* (FIM) and the *Federazione Motociclistica Italiana* (IMF).

It was initially run as a historical re-enactment with entries restricted to bikes made no later than 1957 and no larger than 175cc, but the current version of the event has categories to accommodate all bikes. There's a wide variety of bike classifications allowing for entry of pretty much any motorcycle. This year's groups were: "Heritage" bikes made from 1914-1949, "Historical Re-enactment" bikes of 75, 100, 125 and 175cc, "Vintage" bikes made from 1967-1969, "Classic" bikes made from 1970-1980, "Motogiro" bikes made from 1980, Scooter, and Tourist (any year, any make — not timed).



Just another day  
tooling around  
Tuscany  
on a classic BMW.



A 1955 Moto Guzzi Airone 250 waiting to be inspected before the ride.

### Is it a Race or a Ride?

Although the original Motogiro was a full-on race, the modern version can be ridden in one of two ways: as a timed competitor, where punctuality is more important than speed, or as a tourist in which case there's no need to watch the clock — you just enjoy the ride.

If ridden as a competition, it's a regularity rally with a few low-speed agility tests thrown in. Each rider is issued a timecard every morning with their race number on it. The goal is to start the ride at your designated time, arrive at all the control checkpoints at specific times, and finish at your designated time. At the end of the day, you hand in your card with all the time stamps.

The standings are tallied each night and the leaders in each category are announced. Typically, the Italian riders go home with all the awards. They know the roads and they are damn fine riders. Their advice to us newbies was: "No brake!". And it's true: I followed a few of them through the twisties and rarely saw a brake light come on.

### The Course

The route changes each year. Last year it was in southern Italy, this year was Tuscany, and next year's route will be announced this Fall — it's rumored that it will be at the end of May 2024, and might be in the Northwest. For updates, keep an eye on the event's website: [motogiroitalia.it](http://motogiroitalia.it)

Navigating the route depended on spotting what seemed like a thousand red arrows on yellow cards zip tied to posts along the roadside and at the entrance to each of the dozens of roundabouts we went through. If I arrived at



1929 Rudge Ulster with hand shift and Brooklands silencer — a rare sight!



Getting ready to start the ride in the shadow of the cathedral.



The rest stop at the Piaggio museum featured scooters as well as rare Gileras and Moto Guzzis.

a roundabout and there was no arrow, it meant I'd missed a turn and had to backtrack.

We had an escort of a half dozen *carabinieri* on Ducatis and Yamahas. They were awesomely skillful riders and, between their presence and our numbered race bibs, we were somewhat immune to many of the traffic laws. Obviously, no one did anything downright dangerous, but things that are normally illegal like lane-splitting, passing in no-passing zones and treating the KPH speed limits as MPH limits were shrugged off. Mechanics swept the course, so it was important to stay on the planned route or they wouldn't find you if you broke down.

This year's course went through almost 1,000 miles of Tuscany. We started and finished in Pisa and spent six days riding, spending nights in Arezzo, Chiancano Terme and San Vincenzo along the way.

Sunday, May 21, was the first official day of the event and was spent scrutineering the bikes, applying numbers, picking

up credentials/schwag and attending a riders meeting. The riding started at 9 a.m. on May 22 with the first Stage going from Pisa to Arezzo (145 miles). Tuesday was a 143-mile loop starting and finishing in Arezzo. Stage Three took us from Arezzo to Chianciano Terme (139 miles) with a loop starting and finishing in Chianciano on Stage Four (170 miles).

On the Fifth Stage we rode to San Vincenzo on the coast (166 miles) and stayed at a hotel on the beach that night. You could see the islands of Elba and Corsica from the shore. The final day of riding, on Saturday, May 27, we rode back to Pisa the long way via Mateo's tiny town of Montefegatesi (184 miles).

The finish, at the foot of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, was accompanied by lots of hugging and congratulations. With any experience where the levels of risk and reward are elevated, there's a feeling when it ends of both sadness that it's over and fulfillment that the venture was successfully completed. The closing event was a nice final gala dinner at the hotel that night.



Left: The dachshund riding pillion on this 1931 Gilera 150 was extremely brave! Right: A 1955 Mondial Turismo Veloce having its points checked.



Left: A patriotic tricolor scooter rest stop display put on by one of the local clubs. Right: Look closely and you can see one of the thousands of arrows we followed all week.



COPYRIGHT 2023 - DOMENICO VALLORINI



Left: Narrow, steep cobblestone streets were common in the old towns. Right: A lovely mountain road in the Tuscan hills.

### A Rolling Museum

There was an incredible mix of mostly classic and vintage machines on the ride. Everything from Ridges, Nortons and Vincents to Motobis, Benellis, MV Agustas, Moto Guzzis, Ducatis and Mondials. It was pretty cool to be riding in the middle of bunch of such loud, smokey and beautiful machines. In addition to the historic and classic machines, there were a handful of modern Ducatis, Husqvarnas, Benellis and others. There were several two-up teams in the tourist as well as timed classes. In addition, a modern Norton 961 was pulling a sidecar and passenger.

You can ship your own bike from the U.S. or, if you live in Europe, you can transport (or ride) your bike from wherever you live. One chap from the U.K. rode his '69 Triumph Bonneville all the way from England, did the rally, and then rode back home. Another popular option is to rent something. An outfit called Ride 70s ([ride70s.com](http://ride70s.com)) supplied a few machines to people on the ride. You can also rent



Left: One of the time controls at a rest stop — don't be early and don't be late! Right: A typical rest stop spread complete with local bread, cheese, pasta and wine.



Left: One of the group dinners. The food was outstanding! Right: A couple of the British riders at the stage finish in San Vincenzo on the coast.



something new like a Vespa or a modern Ducati.

### The Riders

The Motogiro draws an international crowd. About a third of riders were Italian, a quarter were from the U.K., 12% were from Germany and 10% from the U.S. The rest are Dutch, Spanish, Swedish, Norwegian, Australian, Polish, Belgian and Swiss.

Many of the riders had been doing the Motogiro for years, including one Italian fellow who hadn't missed one in 30 years. There were also many folks for whom, like me, this was their first Motogiro. Out of the 190 or so riders, I'd estimate that a dozen were women. As in the classic motorcycling world in general, I'd guess the average rider was a 65-year-old guy.



Left: Checking the class standings each evening. Right: Cheering school kids greeted us as we rode through their town. It really made you feel like a hero!



### My Motogiro

Mateo is a member of an eclectic group known as the "Lucky Bastards." They're a bunch of about a dozen rabid motorcycle enthusiasts spread around the world (mostly the U.S.) who get together for social events like the Motogiro. Most of them were present at this year's Motogiro. I spent a lot of time hanging out with them and learning the ropes. Most of them own bikes which they keep in Italy for such occasions. Mateo arranged for me to ride a low-mileage blue 1974 BMW R90/6 that belonged to a fellow Lucky Bastard who couldn't participate this year.

My relationship with the Beemer was like an arranged marriage. She and I had never seen each other before the first day of riding but, over the course of a few days, Brunhilda let me know how she liked me to shift gears, and I learned what to expect in response to throttle inputs and squeezing the brakes. We got along fine. I made sure her oil level stayed topped up and she got me through some sketchy situations and provided a confidence-inspiring ride.

### The Motogiro Demands Respect

This is not a ride for novices. The Motogiro website describes it as "most beautiful and treacherous." Believe it. Very little of



Tony's been a Lambretta man since the days of Mods and Rockers.



Left: Perhaps the perfect Motogiro bike — A 1949 Moto Guzzi Airone Sport 250 horizontal single. Right: Dining al fresco in the middle of the Motogiro. What could be more Italian?

Tuscany is flat — most of the time we were either ascending or descending the sides of steep hills, negotiating thousands of blind hairpins connected by short sections of straight-ish road with limited line of sight. There was a lot of shifting, braking and accelerating on roads with very few center lines and no guard rails.

The road surfaces could be shady, sunny, wet or dry and varied from billiard table-smooth to broken and potholed to unpaved.

As lovely and distracting as the scenery was, the roads demanded near total focus. We encountered sun, rain and even a little hail during the week.

The Motogiro is an endurance event that tests both riders and motorcycles. Of the 200 riders who registered this year, 189 showed up for the event and 144 finished. Mechanical problems were not uncommon and, unfortunately, several folks left the ride in ambulances.



Entering Bagni di Lucca, popular for centuries thanks to its hot springs.

### Thinking About Doing It?

The registration cost depends on the exchange rate (Dollars to Euros) and whether you ride as a tourist or in a timed class but figure \$1,600-\$1,800. A single room will cost an extra \$250 or so. The fee includes hotels every night, breakfasts, a group dinner each evening, luggage transfers and a nice, embroidered polo shirt, hat and a pair of Domino grips (they're one of the sponsors).

Pisa is seven time zones from where I live in Texas. I had planned to get there two days before the event to get over my jet lag but, thanks to a threatened strike by Italian airport workers, my flight was delayed two days and I got there just in time to start riding. If you go, leave yourself enough time to get used to the new time zone.

The right bike will enhance your riding experience. With an average speed of about 30 miles per hour, a nimble bike with good braking, acceleration, and handling is ideal. Many riders opted for singles up to 500cc displacement, including beautiful Italian brands like Moto Guzzi, Mondial, Parilla, Benelli, MV Agusta, Motobi and Ducati. If you prefer a heavier bike, ensure it has decent suspension and reliable brakes. Of course, next year's route may be less twisty, and a bigger bike might be fine.

Riding started each day at 9 a.m. and was usually over by 4 p.m. Dinner typically started at 9 p.m. and ended at 10:30. This is later than most Americans like to eat, especially since we were up early to get breakfast, check out of the hotel, gear up and get riding. As they say: "When in Rome ..."

If you ride in the tourist class, you can dawdle a bit and spend some time exploring the towns along the way. There were



We saw a lot scenes like this. Narrow roads, no traffic and stunning vistas.



Left: Downtown 1,000-year-old Montefegatesi as the Motogiro comes to town. Right: Crossing the finish line in Pisa — feeling a bit sad but very satisfied.

also two stages that started and finished at the same hotel so those were good days to take some time off the bike and do some shopping and sightseeing if you wanted a break from riding.

Carry some cash for gas. Attendants take a lunch break between about noon and three. None of my credit cards worked in the automated self-serve gas stations. They did take Euro notes, however, so make sure you have some of those on hand.

Enjoyment of the event depends on having the right attitude. Things are a bit loosey goosey and occasionally go wonky. You just have to roll with the punches and tell yourself it will be lovely, whatever happens. Because it will.

### Reasons To Go

The camaraderie and opportunity to make new friends is one of the best reasons to participate in such events. There were plenty of English-speaking folks to chat with and, between the Lucky Bastards, other Americans and the Brits, I made at least a dozen new friends.

The scenery during the ride was absolutely stunning. From olive groves and vineyards to waterfalls, fields of vibrant wildflowers and jasmine, and charming medieval villages, my senses were treated to a feast. The food offerings such as coffee, pastries, cheeses, cold cuts, pasta, tiramisu, pizza, and gelatos were excellent and surprisingly affordable.

The riding experience itself was incredible. Regardless of your skill level, you'll probably be a better rider by the end of the ride compared to when you started. The hundreds of hairpin turns and diverse road conditions pushed me to improve my bike handling skills.

Most of the roads were small with very little traffic. The variety of landscapes was amazing. One day we were riding through crisp mountain air up to an Italian ski resort and the next day we were riding along the coast with the sun glinting off the water. There were forests of chestnut trees and lush rolling hills topped by ancient stone settlements. We enjoyed rest stops in piazzas shaded by centuries-old cathedrals while eating local salamis, breads and cheese and sampling the local wine while the carabinieri stood nearby chatting with each other.

### The Spirit of the Motogiro d'Italia

Massimo Mansueti is President of Moto Club Terni and Organizer of the Motogiro. When I asked him what made the Motogiro such a special event, his reply was: "The emotion we feel and share with others is the reason we've been organizing

this event since 1989. Getting to know new enthusiasts and forging new friendships is our reward for the huge organizational effort we make. The tearful embraces at the finish line give us the strength to continue."

He also felt it's about carrying on with tradition: "The knowledge that we're organizing a historical re-enactment of the oldest and best-known of Italian motorbike races, which was the driving force behind the Italian motorbike industry for so many years, and which is now known all over the world, leads us every year to always try to improve."

Massimo stressed the fundamental attraction of travel and adventure: "Even in the digital age, the connection between people and the land endures. New destinations evoke powerful emotions, sensations and a yearning for exploration. Travelers cherish the memories of their journeys forever. The Motogiro d'Italia offers enthusiasts a chance to embark on timeless adventures, riding their cherished motorcycles through historic roads and captivating places."

I thoroughly enjoyed the Motogiro d'Italia and my ride in this year's event motivated me to try to repeat the experience. When I got home and my friends asked me what it was like, I told them If heaven exists and I manage to sneak in, I hope to spend eternity rolling through Tuscany on a vintage bike. Who needs wings when you have two wheels and endless Italian landscapes? **MC**

### Discover the Complete Italian Heritage

*A-Z of Italian Motorcycle Manufacturers* is the most complete directory of Italian motorcycles available today. In addition to covering the most famous Italian factories, this is a definitive guide to the marques that have had little or no coverage. Some might be familiar, while others are remembered for their racing achievements, and many will never have been heard of by most readers. Topics covered include the history of the once great factories; marques that build motorcycles exclusively for racing; details of the most important motorcycles each manufacturer built, and each marque's greatest achievement. This title is available at [store.MotorcycleClassics.com](http://store.MotorcycleClassics.com) or by calling 800-880-7567. Mention promo code: MMCPANZ5. Item #10838.

