

The 350 Dart combines Morini's sheepish old V-twin engine with wolf's clothing from the House of Cagiva. Roland Brown pulls the wool from his eyes

Dear Aunty Agony. Please help me—I don't know what to do about my Italian girlfriend, Morini. Our relationship started off badly and went steadily downhill from there. She all but stood me up on our first night together—throwing a tantrum shortly after I picked her up, making rude noises from under her skirt, threatening to leave me just a few miles down the road and finally making us late for our date at the bright lights of the MIRA timing straight.

We've been out a few times since then but although I enjoy her company things still aren't right between us. She looks gorgeous, with a great body and wonderful clothes, but my mum says that beauty's just

Dart ATTACK

skin deep and even my mates aren't impressed 'cos she's not exactly a "goer". She's expensive, as well—too classy for my pocket. But when I came out of the newsagent's this morning she was standing there all alone in the street, waiting just for me, and she looked so wonderful that I felt all funny inside . . .

Okay, cut the wailing violins (and apologies to female readers, who should substitute a Stallone-type male meathead in the lead role). The bike-as-sex-object metaphor has been used too many times before but it has some value with regard to Morini's 350 Dart, simply because this motorcycle, more than any

other I've ridden, uses looks and charm to seduce you in a way that its more tangible characteristics could never approach.

If the Dart were human and female it would be nearer Sophia Loren than Sabrina: middle-aged at heart; body diligently preserved; wrinkles well hidden beneath designer clothing. (The designer in this case being none other than Massimo Tamburini, original "Ta" of "Bimota" and the Giorgio Armani of bike cloth-



Morini engine predates the architecture behind



PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID GOLDMAN

Helmet: Arai Rapide, £179.95. Leathers: Scotts FS Racing, £239.95. Boots: Frank Thomas SE24 Race Europa, £49.95. Gloves: Frank Thomas Pro-Racer, £26.95.



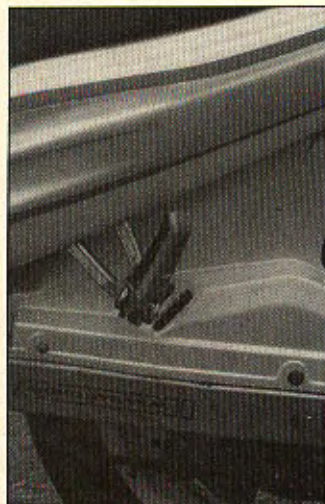
Dart looks almost as horny with its clothes off

cutters.) To look at the Dart it seems hard to believe that its powerplant is not some late-'80s high-revver but an aircooled, 72-degree pushrod V-twin little changed since its introduction in the early 1970s.

For much of that time Morini's Heron-head 350 engine (combustion takes place in the recessed crowns of the pistons) has produced its 30-odd horsepower in a contemporary chassis comprising twin-downtube

frame, twin shocks and styling that has followed fashion with the frantic concern of the average Tibetan monk. When, in *Bike's* September 1986 issue, we compared the then-current K2 model with a 12-year-old 3½ Sport, the new bike's differences amounted to little more than cast wheels, disc brakes, an electric starter, a left-foot gearchange conversion and a petrol tank whose angular shape looked ugly alongside the 3½'s smooth lines.

Development would doubtless have continued at the same pace had not something rather dramatic happened in early 1987: Cagiva made an offer that Gabriella Morini, who'd owned the Bologna-based family firm since the death of founding-father Alfonso, couldn't refuse. Suddenly Morini was being wrenched into the '80s, and while even Cagiva couldn't design a whole new engine in time to launch it the next year, what they could do was lend Morini the chassis from their hot little 125 Freccia.



Rear 'guard looks trick but ours fowled on seat

And a very sharp chassis it is. The frame's silver-painted, square-section steel main spars run from head to swing arm pivot, and are backed up by thinner tubes that loop down on each side. The frame seems to have needed almost no change to adapt from the 125cc stroker to the slim

Morini vee. An oil cooler bolts on in place of the Freccia's radiator, and just about everything else is unchanged: the single Marzocchi shock, its underslung rising-rate gubbins, the box-section swinger, the tyre-hugging rear mudguard, even the M1R forks and single disc brake hidden away beneath the three-spoke front wheel's own massive mudguard.

The pearl-white fairing gains a few cooling ducts but retains its distinctive Paso-style solid screen, marred on our bike by a top edge that looked as though it had been shaped by a blind man wielding a blunt pair of nail scissors. The rider views this across rubber-mounted clip-on bars and the flat expanse of the hinged tank-cover, the real fuel container being a plastic affair of dubious legality and, at well under the claimed three gallons, ludicrously diminished capacity. Especially silly when the fuel warning light (there's no reserve) is as compulsive a fiber as the neutral light next door.

It was an unreported lack of juice that came close to terminating my affair with the Dart on that first wintry afternoon, when the bike began misfiring en route to MIRA only ten miles after I'd collected it from its Birmingham base, and just as the fuel light began its first flickerings. After a slow death, then much cursing and some frantic tipping from side to side (luckily, at 150kg dry the Dart weighs only 27 kilos more than the Freccia), we spluttered to salvation on the



Screen aids aerodynamics but not rider's vision

fumes. But the delay and the bike's sloth even with a full tank (not to mention my late start) meant that by the time we reached the test track it was too dark to proceed.

The Morini's reluctance to tread the timing straight became understandable a few days later, when it returned to manage only 88mph in half a mile and took fully 16.3 seconds to cover the standing quarter. Under good conditions a Dart will just about manage a ton but under all that wolfish clothing sits an engine with all the raw savagery of a dead sheep. There's no power band simply because there's hardly any power, period. The Dart chuffs-and-whirs away pleasantly enough from low revs to its peak around the 8500rpm redline but it never stretches your arms, merely gathering pace gently to a flat-out cruising lick of around 85mph that soon becomes boring when the tarmac ahead is clear.

Lack of poke should come as no surprise because the only engine changes from the K2 motor relate to cooling, electrics and emissions. Rocker boxes are redesigned to help airflow in the midst of the fairing; the motor gains black paint and the aforementioned cooler; and the Freccia's old water temp thermometer now tests the tongue of the Dart's oil filter cover. The electric starter moves from between the K2's

MOTO MORINI 350 DART

Price.....	£3995
Importer.....	Harglo Ltd, 462 Station Road, Dorridge, Solihull West Midlands B93 8HB. Tel: (0564) 775835
Warranty.....	12 months/Unlimited mileage
Engine.....	Aircooled pushrod 72-degree longitudinal V-twin
Bore x stroke.....	62 x 57mm
Capacity.....	344cc
Comp. ratio.....	11:1
Carburation.....	2 x 25mm Dellorto
Gearbox.....	6-speed
Electrics.....	12V 18Ah battery; 60/55W headlamp

CYCLE PARTS

Tyres.....	Pirelli Demon
Front.....	110/80V16
Rear.....	130/70V17
Brakes, front.....	Brembo disc
Rear.....	Brembo disc
Suspension, front.....	35mm Marzocchi M1R telescopic
Rear.....	Cagiva Soft Damp system; Marzocchi single shock

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase.....	1390mm (54.7in)
Weight (inc 1 gal fuel).....	170kg (376lbs)
Fuel capacity (claimed).....	13.6 litres (3 gal)

PERFORMANCE

(All figures one way)	
Top speed in 1/2 mile, prone.....	88.6mph
Upright.....	79.7mph
Standing 1/4 mile.....	16.30sec/81.2mph
1/2 mile roll-on from 50mph.....	15.94sec/63.0mph
Top gear.....	11.3mph/1000rpm
Speedo accuracy	
At ind 60kph.....	57.4kph
At ind 80kph.....	75.7kph
At ind 100kph.....	99.5kph



Tiny plastic fuel tank covers beneath hinged lid

vee to keep road crud off the front of the engine and, like the alternator and ignition, is now Japanese (if you can't beat 'em join 'em, and who's complaining?). A network of carb and engine breather pipes keeps unburnt gasses in check.

Not that the modest power output prevents you from having plenty of fun riding the Dart, at least on a windy enough road. The engine is torquey enough to feel pleasantly relaxed, vibrating through the seat and the high footpegs just enough to let you know it's there. The typically leant-forward riding position gave me no aches after 150-plus miles; the controls (once the dry clutch's housing had been cleared of dust by Benji Straw of Croydon specialists Wee Vee) were slick, though the mirrors were as unilluminating as the headlamp. The traditional six-speed gearbox swapped cogs as sweetly as could be expected considering its crossover linkage, and the two-into-one exhaust gave out a nicely moody chuff – at least for a few miles, until this was drowned by a large, loud-farting crack around the top of the front downpipe.

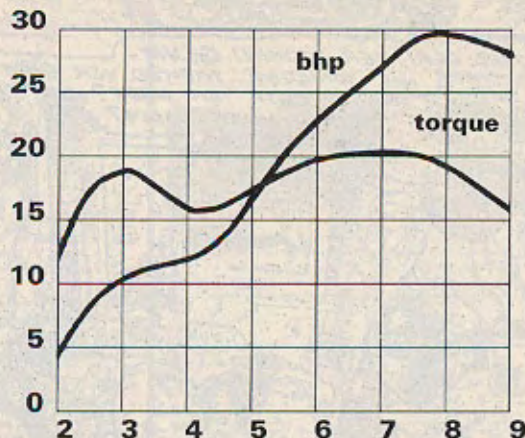
The ever-enthusiastic Benji kindly cured this by replacing the pipe, and would be happy to provide the extra stomp the Dart needs by swapping many

of its components for go-faster gear. Wee Vee's tune-up kit of bigger Dellorto carbs with K&N filters, big valves, oversize pistons, road or track cams, rebalanced crank and less restrictive pipe costs £400-odd plus labour and pushes power from around 30 to a much more respectable 43bhp. (Ring him on 01-683 4662.)

The chassis would be well up to handling it. Steering was as effortless as you'd expect of a lightweight with a 16-inch front wheel, letting the Dart live up to its name with lightning changes of direction. Signor Marzocchi's forks coped well up front, as did the single Brembo disc (although a pair would have been better) and Pirelli Demon rubber. But the shock felt as though it had been set up for an eight-stone Italian teenager rather than my 14-and-counting, bottoming out occasionally, even solo, and allowing the top of the swing arm-mounted mudguard to foul on the rear subframe. Inconsistent shock fitment at the factory has caused problems before, and it seems Morini still haven't got the Dart's rear suspension rate sorted.

Cagiva's resources should make that task easy enough, though if they want to sell many Darts in Britain they'll need to wind its four-grand price down several notches,

Torque (ft.lb) and rear wheel horsepower (bhp)



RPM × RPM × 1000

Maximum horsepower: 28.9 @ 8500rpm

Maximum torque: 20.2ft.lb @ 7500rpm

Tested on Bosch LPS 002 dynamometer at Motad Ltd., Unit 2, Maverton Road, London E3

too. But the Dart appears to be merely a hastily-produced stopgap for the Castiglioni brothers, who these days are doubtless more concerned with completing development of Morini's exciting new watercooled, four-valve 750cc powerplant. Designed by Franco Lambertini, creator of the long-running 350 motor, this uses a narrower, 67-degree vee with Honda-style offset crankpins, is rumoured

to make over 80bhp and to be only a year from production.

Meanwhile, just half that power increase would make the Morini Dart a seriously desirable motorbike; if it went nearly as well as it photographed it'd be a real star. But as it stands, those looks, that chassis and that 30bhp engine make the 350 Dart a stylish, interesting but ultimately frustrating machine.



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	2	76	61	48	43	36	25	25	25	25	25
NOT EXCEEDING 250cc	0	168	141	136	117	88	62	55	51	40	33
	1	144	120	117	99	74	53	47	44	36	30
	2	112	109	95	70	50	44	41	34	28	25
NOT EXCEEDING 450cc	0	217	201	180	153	120	102	85	80	56	46
	1	185	171	153	130	103	87	70	69	50	42
	2	161	144	122	97	82	66	64	48	40	37
NOT EXCEEDING 700cc	0	315	282	217	161	131	113	102	70	59	59
	1	266	240	185	137	112	96	87	63	53	53
	2	251	224	174	128	105	91	85	60	50	50
NOT EXCEEDING 1000cc	0	—	—	—	—	217	180	141	124	75	63
	1	—	—	—	—	185	153	120	106	68	57
	2	—	—	—	—	174	144	112	100	64	54
EXCEEDING 1000cc	0	—	—	—	—	239	191	165	145	100	87
	1	—	—	—	—	215	162	141	123	90	78
	2	—	—	—	—	204	152	132	116	85	69

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