

Duc/Cag Travels ... cont.



down. This was to be only time I did anything to the bike in over 1,000 miles. I didn't even have to add oil.

I soon became quite comfortable with the bikes handling and took the many switchback hairpin turns with increasing abandon. The torque was excellent and shocking for a 350. I rarely had to shift down more than one gear on a steep incline and there was a usable powerband from 3,000 rpm right up to redline. Braking with the Brembo drilled discs was on par with a race bike. The only casualty late in the day was my left hand from operating the clutch. Though the clutch pull was light, negotiating some 1,000 gear changes per hour on perhaps 100 switchbacks takes its toll.

Despite the clutch discomfort I was loving every minute of the ride! What more could anyone ask for? The most beautiful scenery in the world, the smoothest, curviest roads, perfect weather, exotic locale, and a thoroughbred Italian motorcycle. Great combination for anyone who is a true enthusiast of the sport.

People accustomed to riding in rugged terrain in the States would be shocked by riding the same terrain in Europe. There are virtually no guardrails and no warning signs. I guess they figure that it would require too many signs and that the guardrails would detract from the view. I tend to agree with them, if that is the case. It seems so much more natural without the signs and the obstruction. Many would argue that the rails would be more dangerous, I don't know. I felt that somehow you were left to judge your driving skills and determine what speeds are safe for you. Additionally, you can pass almost anywhere in Europe. There are few double lines telling you not to pass. You either know what is safe or you pay the consequences. A rather mature and sobering attitude, if I may add.

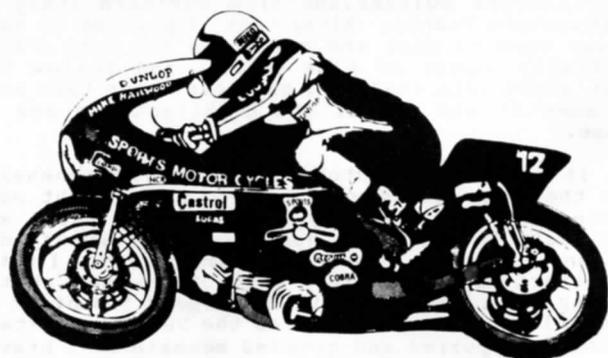
It was quite pleasing not to see highway police troopers lurking amongst the scenery or cruising up and down the roads. I can't remember seeing one in 1000 miles of travel. Perhaps it's because a different type of environment exists here. One in which you are treated as an adult and not as some nitwit. You are expected to act as an adult and they treat the people as such. No one is telling you how to take each curve, how fast to go, when to pass when not to pass. No one is there watching, using radar, patrolling or harassing the motorists. In our country everyone is so afraid of liability lawsuits that our lives are becoming more and more regulated, controlled, checked, tested and watched. Our lives are being made safer but at the same time more restrictive and worst of all, more boring. Somehow touring in Europe seems so much more exciting, adventurous and rewarding than it ever was in the States - this was especially so in Switzerland.



I soon reached the St. Gothard pass and paused to look back at the many miles of climbing roads I had traveled. The view cannot be captured by any photograph, nor can the smell of the clean, crisp air be described. As you overlook the small villages on an early morning you can take a deep breath and inhale the alpine vegetation, or the morning fires from the homes climbing up through the chimneys and filling the air with small streams of blue smoke. You stood there and somehow you felt warm inside and at peace with yourself and the rest of the world.

Motoring my delightful Alazzurra through the mountain roads I continued on to Hospental, a beautiful town at the head of a long valley. It was a quaint little town I had stayed for the night some 14 year prior. In the town was an old Roman observation tower that overlooks the valley like a lighthouse oversees a coast. Standing there you

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