

SURFACE

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Stuart Parr Owns the Sickest Collection of Vintage Italian Motorcycles

By Sasha Levine



Most people grow out of their childhood obsessions; Stuart Parr simply grew into his. What began with a wooden cigar box full of Corgi and Hot Wheels model cars has, over the course of three decades, evolved into several storage spaces worth of mint-condition vintage Italian motorcycles. “I’ve always been led visually,” says Parr, who—as a designer (Tribeca’s Marble House, Shelter Island’s Clearhouse), film producer (8-Mile, Southpaw), and trademark owner of 1930s interiors talents Jean-Michel Frank and Warren McArthur—has the CV to back it up. “Whether it’s Pininfarina, Bertoni, Scaglietti—the Italians design beautiful machinery.”

This week, 35 of Parr’s 70-some-piece collection of ’60s and ’70s motorcycles will be on view in Miami’s Design District for the second edition of “The Art of the Italian Two Wheel,” which premiered in New York in 2015. In the exhibition, running from Feb. 16 through April 22 at 180 N.E. 40th Street, Parr presents a selection of his most prized models from Ducati, Benelli, Laverda, Magni, and MV Agusta, and, for the first time, shows off one of his own design. Working with constructor Giovanni Magni at Arturo Magni’s shop, Parr will debut his MV Agusta 750 Sport Tributo at the end of March in an edition of fifty. “I already have twelve people who told me they’d take [one],” he says. Ahead of the exhibition’s opening, we caught up with Parr to get a glimpse of his collection up close.

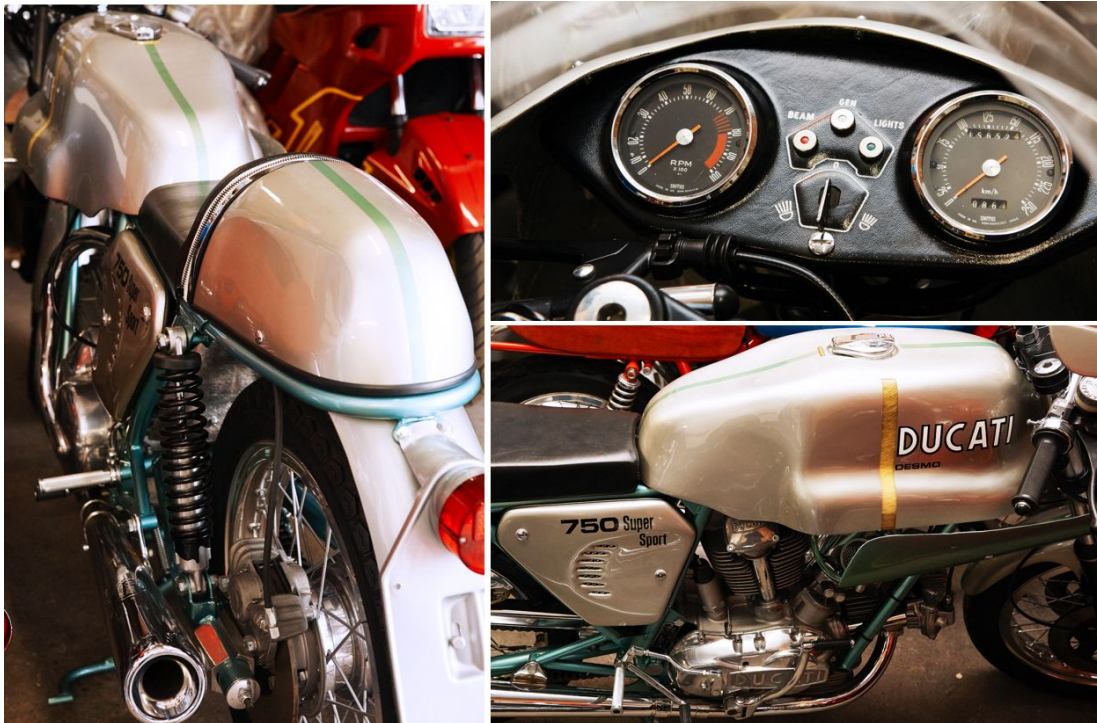


I've been captivated by cars and motorcycles since I was a child—especially the Italian-made ones. I love the way they look, the way they sound, and the way they ride. Their bikes for the street are as close as you can get to the ones for racing. That's my collection: where racing meets the road.

Growing up in Sacramento, California, we had an empty field next to our house, and the greatest part about that field was that you couldn't see it from the kitchen window. My neighbors had minibikes—ironically, their father was a bone doctor and a surgeon—and at six, seven years old, I would go ride them, as long as we didn't get caught by my mother. When I was around nine or ten years old, my father got a moped. My brother and I would go all over. (This was at a point where there weren't really laws—you didn't have to have a driver's license.) That was my first taste of freedom. We would just go as fast as humanly possible and just pray that we didn't get a flat tire. In high school, I would borrow friends' bikes. My friend Barry Robinson [Smokey Robinson's son] in L.A.—I'd moved down to L.A. then—would lend me his FJ1100 all the time. The bike was so screaming fast—for a 16-year-old, it was nuts. Thank God we didn't get hurt.

I was 21 years old when I bought my first bike. I had gone to Ghost Motorcycles in Port Washington, New York. They were the best dealer and importer of all the Italian motorcycles. There was a '74 Ducati Green Frame, but I couldn't afford it. It was nine thousand dollars. (Today they're two hundred thousand and more.) So I found a picture-perfect '71 Triumph Bonneville: oil in the frame, black and gold, really pretty. I rode that until somebody ran a stop sign where Sullivan meets Prince in SoHo, New York. I smashed right into him and went over the hood. I ended up having to get some knee surgery. Very lucky. But I didn't get another bike for a long time.

I started building a collection of Italian bikes from the '60s and '70s about fifteen years ago, buying Ducatis, MV Agustas one at a time. Now I own around forty bikes [for personal use], and another twenty-five that I buy and sell. I collect bikes that are for road use, so I'm not precious with them. If it says you can rev them to nine thousand RPMs before redlining, I go out and run them like they were made to be run. I don't have any vehicles that I have to apologize for, only bikes I want to ride. I ride a motorcycle almost every day in New York City. I'll ride in thirty-degree weather, just above freezing. You can't get anywhere in a car anymore. In a bike, I can get somewhere.



1974 Ducati 750 Super Sport

This commemorative bike is the bee's knees of the '70s Italian bikes, and one of the most important street bikes. What most people don't realize is that Ducati was not a very successful company at that point. In 1972, motorcycle racer Paul Smart got a call at his house. His wife picked up. Somebody from Ducati wanted Smart to race their bike in the Imola Desmo. At that time, drivers were looking for a gig—an annual salary [from a manufacturer] or as a privateer. They needed the money, so his wife took the job for him. Grudgingly, he went to race this bike, which he thought was going to be a complete piece of shit, a waste of time, embarrassing. I believe he broke the lap record for that track on the first lap of a practice run. He went on to win the race, way in front of everyone else. That's when Ducati took a turn as a company. It's just such a great story.



1974 MV Agusta 750 Sport

The bike I ride the most is an MV Agusta 750 Sport. It's just the most beautiful, essential shape. Funny enough, it's red, white, and blue—it looks like Captain America or something; it's fantastic. It drives incredibly and it's got the best sound of any motorcycle I've ever heard—like the unleashing of bottled lightning. I had pined for it since I was a kid. I bought one that had been originally registered in Germany and tracked it down from the dealer probably ten years ago.



1988 Ducati F1

This was owned by a really close friend of mine, [the artist] Christopher Brooks. He and his wife, Amanda, decided to move to England, where Christopher was from. He asked me if I wanted to buy this motorcycle he had. It had a thousand miles on it. I loved it because it was his, and because he bought it at Ghost Motorcycles, the same place I went when I was 21 and couldn't afford anything.



1977 MV Agusta 750 America

I have probably nine of these models, all different. This one came from Austria, and then was in Switzerland for twenty-five years. It was just incredibly cared for, and in incredible condition. It has a four-cylinder engine and an electric start (no kick starter). It was considered the top bike of its time—and cost that. I'm pretty sure it was the most expensive bike you could buy at the time. They all came with suede seats, the same quality as a Gucci jacket.



1975 MV Agusta 350 Scrambler

This is just a fantastic bike to ride, especially around a small beach town or in Upstate New York. You can ride this bike in the dirt—you can go right off the road—it's fantastic. I love it as an object, as part of the collection. A lot of hands went into making it.

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