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"Historically, the Moto Giro d'Italia was a popular road race for motorcycles between 75 and 175cc, running from 1914 until 1957—a prestigious competition for all Italian marques."

A Passion for Motorcycles – a fitting title for the Moto Giro d'Italia 2025. Combine that with Italian cuisine, landscapes, and historic towns, and you've got the perfect recipe for a fantastic week. This event had been on my mind for years—ever since my days in southern Germany, when a friend and I, vacationing in Italy, stumbled across an impressive group of Moto Giro participants gathered on a large piazza. You don't get any younger, so this year I seized the opportunity to take part and embarked on the 26-hour journey from New Zealand to Bologna. The train ride from Bologna to Imola, heading toward Pesaro—the starting point of this year's Moto Giro—was packed with Ferrari fans in polo

shirts heading to the Emilia Romagna Formula 1 Grand Prix. Once they disembarked, the train ride calmed down until we reached our destination and all was well.

Before leaving New Zealand, securing a suitable motorcycle to ride in Italy turned out to be a bit of a challenge. As a non-Italian citizen, I wasn't allowed to buy a used motorcycle in the country, and some rental agencies in Pesaro were hesitant to lend their two wheeled Bellas to people from outside Europe. Luckily, the main sponsor of the Moto Giro, Benelli, provided me with a bike—part of a fleet set aside for event staff, journalists, and VIPs. As the only participant from Oceania, I'm especially grateful to Michael Cassel, the German liaison for Moto Giro ▶





Motobi Catria Sport

"We were escorted all week by a squad of motorcycle-riding Carabinieri, who guided us out of towns or overtook traffic with lights flashing to clear the way"

inquiries, who was immensely helpful and warmly welcomed me into the German riders' group.

Historically, the Moto Giro d'Italia was a popular road race for motorcycles between 75 and 175cc, running from 1914 until 1957—a prestigious competition for all Italian marques. In 1957, however, a Ferrari driver crashed during the Mille Miglia, killing himself and ten spectators. As a result, the Italian government banned all public road racing. It wasn't until 1989 that the Moto Club Terni-Libero Liberati-Paolo Pileri, which celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2025, began reviving the Moto Giro with support from motorcycle organisations FIM and IMF. Initially relaunched as a regularity rally for

pre-1957 motorcycles up to 175cc, the event now welcomes all types of bikes, either with timed stages or as a relaxed, non-competitive tour.

Each morning, riders were issued a timing card with their individual start time, which had to be stamped at various checkpoints ("Crono Stops") during the day according to specific time instructions. These checkpoints often doubled as sightseeing or refreshment stops, where local clubs served cake, pizza slices, and drinks. Some also included skills tests that counted toward the overall ranking, which was posted each evening at the group dinner. I often chuckled when Italian riders zoomed through villages at 80km/h or more, ignoring the 50 km/h speed limit—

and the speed cameras. We were escorted all week by a squad of motorcycle-riding Carabinieri, who guided us out of towns or overtook traffic with lights flashing to clear the way—prompting many riders, grinning from ear to ear, to follow them like hounds chasing a hare to stay on schedule.

Day one (May 18) in Pesaro was for orientation, registration, and the riders' briefing. The technical inspection was held on

Piazzale della Libertà, right on the Adriatic Sea. There, the motorcycles were guarded overnight, ready for a punctual departure at the timing station on the morning of May 19. I felt like a kid in a candy store—surrounded by eye- and ear-candy: Moto Guzzi, Ducati, MV Agusta, FB Mondial, Motobi, Benelli, along with a handful of Moto Morini 175cc singles, Laverda, and Gilera. Classic Hondas were also present, alongside German prestige brands like BMW and Zündapp. British legends Norton, BSA, Vincent, and Triumph were in the mix too—not to mention Vespa riders. Everyone was gearing up for the ride from May 19 to May 24.

That's also when Pier Paolo Bianchi—three-time 125cc World Champion (1976, 1977 on Morbidelli, and 1980 on MBA)—approached me. Benelli had provided him with a Leoncino 800, but he found it too tall. He was super eager to swap for my Leoncino Trail 500. But once he sat on it, he realised that the longer suspension made it even taller. In the end, a BN125 was arranged for him—a better fit for his shorter stature.

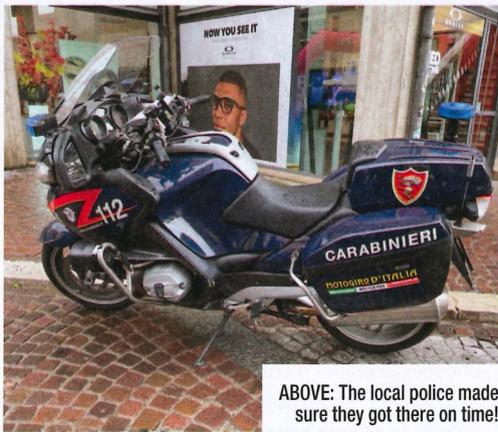
The variety of nationalities was impressive. Among the 16 countries represented, Italians made up the largest group, followed by German riders. A Dutchman and several Belgians joined in—some on Morinis, one on a 125cc Zündapp, and two young Belgians even on 50cc mopeds. There were also Swedes, four Norwegians on Triumph ▶



Julien's MV 350

The 2026 Moto Giro d'Italia will take place in Sardinia, from May 24th to 30th. Registrations via www.motogiroitalia.it.

ABOVE: Outside the walls of Urbino



ABOVE: The local police made sure they got there on time!



BELOW: Always an impressive line-up at each check point

RIGHT: Irish rider rented this classic Motobi





MV Agusta
Raid 250

BELOW: American Hugh Schink
Motobi Zanzani 6 Tiranti 250
1965



Vittorio's
Dachshund



Bonnevilles, French, Brits, an Irishman, Spaniards, Poles, Austrians, and a few Greeks. From overseas came riders from the U.S., Canada, Argentina—and myself from New Zealand, with the longest journey of all. No Australians in attendance this time.

The Moto Giro route changes every year. In 2024, it began in Apulia. This year, the event wound through the regions of Marche, Emilia-Romagna, Umbria, Lazio, and Abruzzo—a scenic blend of plains, hills, lakes, coastlines, and mountains totalling around 1600 km. Lead organiser Massimo Mansueti and his team of 60 volunteers handled route markings (yellow/red arrows before every turn), mobile medics, breakdown services, mechanics, and overall logistics—so riders could focus purely on the joy of riding. The route mainly used backroads, country lanes, forest paths, and mountain passes—full of endless curves. The road surfaces were often rough—earthquake cracks, dips, potholes, and sunken sections required constant focus. But the stunning surroundings made up for it: fortresses, cathedrals, palaces. The oldest village I recall dated back to before the 11th century—alongside gorgeous old-town piazzas and fountains. At some checkpoints, like in Terni

and Narni, we were welcomed like rock stars, with local folk troupes, drums, trumpets, and flag-waving parades. In Italy, motorcycling still enjoys a deep cultural appreciation.

There were so many highlights, it's hard to choose. Standout moments included the scent of blooming broom flowers on a ridgeline with ocean views, visiting the National Motorcycle Museum near Rimini, the Benelli Museum in Pesaro, riding through Tavullia with its Valentino Rossi mural, the mountain road to Lake Campotosto with the snow-capped Apennines in the background, the walled city of Urbino with its brick architecture, a stop in Misano, a visit to a military airfield, and two nights on the coast in San Benedetto del Tronto—famous for its mineral water. It all added up to a fantastic week with a global crew of vintage motorcycle enthusiasts.

We rode between 250 to 350km daily. My start time with number 86 was 9:33 AM every day, and I usually reached the day's finish time by around 5:30 or 6:00 PM. Michael Cassel's tip to bring cash in €10 and €20 notes was invaluable—some gas stations didn't accept cards. Twice I found the vending machine didn't give change if the tank didn't take the full amount paid.

Different country, different habits. I also had to constantly remind myself to ride on the right side of the road—unlike in New Zealand, where we drive on the left. Dinners after each stage were typically Italian—late, starting around 8:30 PM, with multi-course meals, lots of pasta, and both red and white wine served at the hotel.

My Benelli Leoncino Trail 500 press bike, start number 86, with its spoked wheels and retro styling, fit in beautifully. The long suspension handled rough roads better than the standard version, I suspect—though I didn't try the standard Leoncino 500 to judge this accurately. The bike ran well, had plenty of power, sounded great—and was totally reliable until about 50 kms from the finish. Then the engine began to misfire. As it was already evening, I called the event's breakdown service, which still got me to the closing gala dinner in Pesaro on time. Also worth noting: the fuel injection was a bit jerky at low revs, and the fuel gauge was inaccurate—especially in the first half of the tank. I did not have time to hear what wasn't right with the engine, but after a week with the Benelli, I could easily see a Leoncino 500—or even the 800—in my own garage. Great value for money, in my view. ■■■

