

## 1972 Aermacchi Harley-Davidson 350 Sprint



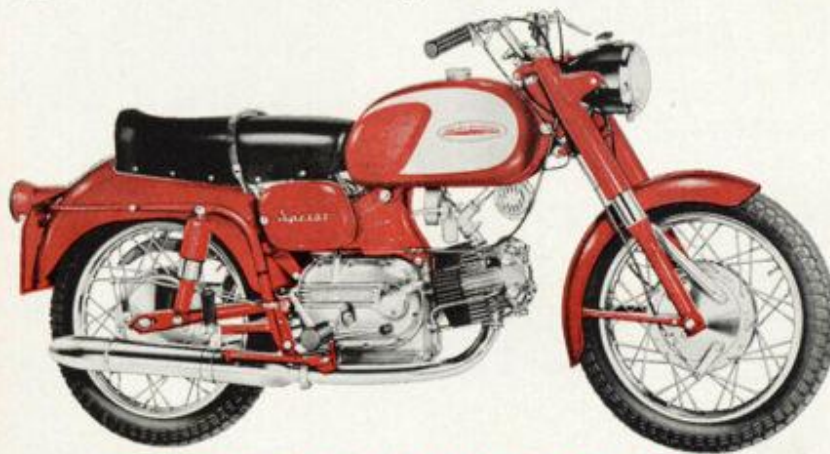
By the late 1950's, Harley-Davidson and other well-established motorcycle companies were quite aware of the potential threat to their market shares by the Japanese manufacturers. Small, inexpensive, lightweight machines from the Orient were being introduced into the U.S. market, and were growing in popularity.

Faced with the choice of engineering and developing their own line of small-displacement motorcycles, or purchasing and marketing products from an existing manufacturer, Harley chose the latter, and in 1960 purchased a 50 percent share of the Italian firm, Aermacchi.



From the Aermacchi products then available, H-D chose to begin by importing the Ala d'Oro "Gold Wing" model, a 250cc, 4-stroke single, with a horizontal cylinder and 4-speed transmission, with the first models hitting Harley showrooms in 1961. The bike was actually fairly well received, as it was a decent-performing lightweight, with a sturdy frame, and plenty of potential for modification.

*See it—ride it at your dealer NOW!*



**THE ALL-NEW 250 CC**  
**HARLEY-DAVIDSON** *Sprint*  
**1962**

Sprint up to a new class of motorcycling with the all-new 250 cc Harley-Davidson Sprint. Here's a flashy "performer" packed with power, style and spirit!

Slim and distinctive, the Sprint commands attention wherever it streaks — on raceway or highway. Smartly styled

in Calypso Red and white. Seats two with ease and perfect comfort.

See your Harley-Davidson dealer now for a spirited demonstration ride. Remember, he's got a convenient payment plan to send you *Sprinting* today! And mail the coupon for colorful literature.

**Check these outstanding Sprint features**

✓ **Power** — 15 cu. in. overhead valve engine provides potent 250 cc power package. Has helical primary drive and down-draft carburetion.

✓ **Suspension** — Twin-action suspension smooths out bumps hydraulically. Telescopic front fork and rear swing arm suspension share the load for riding comfort.

✓ **Footrests** — Foldback footrests offer maximum safety. They get out of the way on contact. Rubber-covered for long wear.

✓ **Handlebar Grips** — Handlebar grips are large, more grip-sure to eliminate hand fatigue on long, tough grinds.

✓ **Transmission** — 4-speed integral. Easy-action foot-shift.

✓ **Brakes** — Large diameter front and rear wheel brakes. Fully enclosed and waterproof.

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**HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR CO.**  
 Dept. P-10, Milwaukee 1, Wisconsin  
 Please send me literature on the all-new Sprint.  
 Name.....Age.....  
 Address.....  
 City.....Zone.....State.....  
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Such was the effectiveness of the basic platform that many Sprints soon found their way into competition, which in turn led to a race kit, available directly from the factory. Ordered through Harley-Davidson dealerships, the kit consisted of a frame, front forks, alloy wheels, and an engine built by the Aermacchi factory, specifically for competition. The kit was actually listed as a Harley model – the CR series, available in various configurations for road racing or dirt track, short track or long-track engine setups, and four or five speed transmissions, along with other options, depending on intended application.

Per specs below from the '66 dirt track model, performance was quite substantial, and as a result, Sprints were a force to be reckoned with in the 250 class throughout the 1960's and beyond.

Model .....	CRTT
Year .....	1966
Engine .....	horizontal single, alloy head and cylinder, ohv
Bore and stroke .....	2.83x2.40 in.
Displacement .....	250 cc
Brake horsepower .....	35@10,000 rpm
Transmission .....	5 speeds
Wheelbase .....	52 in.
Weight .....	215 lb. (dry)
Wheels .....	19 in. f/18 in. r
Tires .....	3.25/3.50
Brakes (factory) .....	21s; drum f/r

For more information on CR Sprints, click on the following link, which features plenty of period specs as well as a bunch of great photos: <http://www.vft.org/Sprint/SprintCRPage.html>



As the 60's wore on, Sprints were joined in Harley dealerships by additional models imported from Aermacchi – all of them two strokes. Harley was making a valiant effort against the ever-growing onslaught by the Japanese manufacturers, but compared to the quite-sophisticated models offered by Honda, Yamaha, Kawasaki and Suzuki, Aermacchi products were quite crude by comparison, and H-D was fast losing ground in the small-displacement and middleweight market.

In 1969, the Sprint model's displacement was bumped to 350cc, but at this same time Harley-Davidson was nearing bankruptcy, and sold out to American Machine and Foundry (AMF). AMF did soldier on, and continued to offer Sprints and other lightweights into the 1970's, and at one point, along with some engineering input from an outside firm, some of the two-stroke models developed into considerably improved products. And yet, it was eventually determined within H-D that they were going to concentrate exclusively on their big bikes, and in 1978 sold their entire interest in Aermacchi to the Italian firm, Cagiva.

Harley maintained the Sprint model in their lineup through the 1974 model year. Displacement was bumped to 350cc in 1968, but this and other modest improvements throughout the bike's production run could not keep pace with the ever more sophisticated machines coming out of Japan. By comparison to the products offered by the Big Four, the Sprint, with its roots dating back to the 1950's, was hopelessly outclassed.

The Vintage Movement's Sprint is a 1972 SS350. The "SS" designation identifies it as the street version, as in 1971 Harley had introduced a sister-model – the SX350. Basically, the Sprint road bike, albeit fitted with a high pipe and fenders, and cross-braced handlebars, this model sought to take advantage of the Scrambler-style, which was popular at the time.

We received the bike as a complete, intact, and all-original machine, save for non-correct paint on the tank and fenders. It was non-running, but came with a title, and with all original componentry in place and in quite decent condition, was an excellent candidate for restoration.





Initial evaluation was quite favorable. The bike had not been run in years, but with quite low mileage, most mechanical parts checked out quite well. The engine was leaking oil from virtually every sealing point, but compression was good, and after a valve job, carb cleaning, and replacement of all gaskets and seals, fired up and ran.

Engine disassembly resulted in some very interesting discoveries. Nothing really wrong or hacked up, as there was every indication the powerplant have never been apart. Instead, it was the 1950's Italian engineering, which provided considerable surprise and amusement on more than one occasion. Let's just say that, by comparison to Japanese products, the Italians definitely charted their own course.

Despite the overall good condition of the bike and its parts and pieces, mechanical rebuild, and cosmetics, required that ever single component received full reconditioning. Frame repaint, engine cleaning and polishing, along with going through the entire engine, gave us a good start. I disassembled both wheels, polished the hubs, respoked with stainless, fitted new, vintage-style tires, replaced the shocks, polished the forks and installed new seals, and polished or replaced all fasteners. The stock, cross-braced bars (yes, that style is correct to this model) were replated by the good folks at Reckon Plating. New, correct levers, and correct, Magura grips were fitted, as well as a replacement, correct, Harley-Davidson logo'd speedometer were all fitted.

Research suggested that SS350's in the 1972 model year were offered in two colors – yellow, and red. We opted for the yellow version, and with photographic reference in hand, I matched the color up by eye from the hundreds of options available in the gigantic PPG paint catalog. Local automotive resto-mod pro, Mario Salvino, laid down the paint, and we feel it turned out pretty darn nicely.

Final assembly returned the bike to as-from-the-factory, save for just a couple of alternate elements, as we changed out the funky, one-into-two exhaust system with a much-abbreviated stainless header pipe + shorty muffler. Also, the fuel tank features custom graphics, provided by Quinn Wentzel Designs.



Final appearance of the bike is very well detailed, although the somewhat tacked-on-component look which typified Italian bikes of the era is quite evident. Unlike the Japanese, Italian manufacturers did not go to great lengths to conceal elements such as the coil, air cleaner, wiring, etc. Check out the alloy(!), right-side kick stand – supposedly to avoid interference with the left-side-mounted kicker. Bike features a dry clutch, too.



Paper-element air cleaner hangs right out in the breeze, partially hidden behind that chrome cover. Fuel tank is actually dished out a bit to make room for it. Carb is Dellorto, of course.



With the single exhaust, left side of the bike looks a bit naked, but quite clean. Very nice replacement seat cover was provided by Mac Motorcycle Seat Covers, which custom made it specifically for this bike. Many original components of the bike were reused after simple basic reconditioning – such as the alloy trim at the base of the seat.



Check out the groovy, ultra-mod, '70's-style logo on the battery cover. Original – just cleaned up. Also, get a load of the big-ol' exposed springs, which hold the fuel tank down. Big cable serves the rear brake.



No, that is not puddle of oil under the bike. Just a clump of dried grass, which fell out from under the mower. And check it out – she’s right-side shift. Yep, Federal mandates for left side-only shifters had not yet come about in '72.



Italian alloys polish up quite nicely. Note the friction-type cable ends. Funky! Grease fitting on brake shoe pivot is a nice touch. Remember, in the European market, these motorcycles were intended to serve as reliable, durable, daily transportation.





Minus its stock pipes, the Sprint sports some serious ground clearance. Genuine Ceriani forks hold up the front end. The distinctive frame is quite evident in this image. A “spine” type, with the engine suspended below, and held in place with just three mounting bolts! It nonetheless gets the job done, as the design is said have been quite sturdy.



Absence of factory turn signals back in '72 make for quite abbreviated switchgear. Lights are activated at the key switch, so all that's left is a beeper-button, and hi-low beam selector. Anyone who has been around Aermacchis from this era will recognize the control mounts, levers, and big, fat grips.



Rear hub reflects more of the extensive polishing efforts I put into the bike. Little “tooter” silencer provides excellent, classic single-cylinder sound. There’s a couple more grease fittings. Many of the bike’s alloy components required only cleaning and polishing – a testament to decent, original quality, plus suggesting the bike had been well-stored.



Overall design is almost “haphazard” in its layout, even by standards of the day. Every time I work on an Italian bike from this era, I am left scratching my head at the unusual engineering which was employed.

In the end, the bike turned out quite well. It fires right up, runs nicely, and shows well. I'd been wanting to do a Sprint for a number of years, and finally got my chance with this one. Sprints are a distinctive series, which provide insight into 1950's Italian engineering. And, given that the basic design lasted for, and sold for, some twenty years, that's a pretty darn good record.

What's next? Oh, there are several more Aermacchis squirreled away among The Vintage Movement's extensive inventory. I'll just have to see which one ends up getting rolled into the shop next.

Ted Guthrie

