

1975 Moto Beta 125 Premier Enduro

Interest in motorcycling expanded considerably in the United States in the 1960's. Baby Boomers had come of age, a host of appealing new, two-wheeled products had appeared on the market, and it seemed that everyone wanted to get in on the sport.

This surge continued into the 1970's, and as the big Japanese companies had not yet quite come to dominate the market, multiple manufacturers and distributors were working to offer products for the lucrative U.S. market.

As a result, there was a proliferation of all kinds of motorcycles available at the time. Products from Japan, Taiwan, Britain, and all over Europe, found their way to small, hopeful dealers in the United States, and eventually into the hands of eager new riders.

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Here's one example of an obscure brand, an ad for which appeared in the early '70's. A Gina? Well, they were Gileras, but the importer decided to try his hand at marketing them through some snazzy advertising. Made them look pretty good, didn't it?

Out in the old strip mines where I used to go riding when I was a kid, we would never know what brand of motorcycle would show up. The many people I encountered in “the mines” provided the means by which I was introduced to many models of bikes for the first time. In those shale-covered hills and deep pits, I saw my first Elsinore, first trials bike, first Cooper, and first Maico, as well as many other bikes – some of them quite obscure.

One which captured my interest, was owned by a fellow I vaguely knew from our general age-group and school class. His bike was a little 125 enduro – quite purposeful-looking, and was unlike anything offered at that time from Japan.

About the same time, I had begun purchasing and collecting motorcycle magazines, and devouring every bit of information contained within, learning about every and any bike available. Then, in the April, 1974 issue of Cycle World magazine, appeared that same 125. Turns out it was a Moto Beta 125 Premier Enduro, to be specific. Although not a spectacular bike by any means, that little Moto Beta nonetheless struck a chord in me. It just had the “right look” – coming across at that time as just what an Enduro bike should be.



Previewing the Premier 125
Who says a decent Enduro has to cost \$1200?/by John Waaser

MANY A NEW woods rider will look over the range of available machines and give up in despair, or settle for a used machine. Considering that the neophyte is least of anybody in a position to pick a good used machine from the chaff he'll find in the newspaper ads, he's likely to be stung if he takes that approach.

But Premier, the Guzzi importer, and part of the Bertone group, has been importing the Moto Beta 125 in Enduro trim for awhile now, and the bike appears ideally suited to the novice. At a retail price of \$595, plus freight and setup, it can be purchased in most areas in the mid-to-high \$600 range. And, while its performance won't match that of a Peaton or a Husky, it will match the ability of a new rider.

If first impressions really do last, you're going to love this machine all the way. Italian bikes show the Latin temperament very well; they look like they're traveling at least 30 mph while they're sitting still. Their chrome plating has improved at least 500 percent since I first got acquainted with a Ducati in the early '60s. The paint is also attractive, and the welding is a work of art compared to that on Japanese and Spanish machinery. The seat on this machine looks soft and inviting; the front end is lean and purposeful, with the headlight held well back by stubby aluminum brackets. Marzocchi suspension units are fitted at both ends, and consist of Ceriani-type, very robust front forks, and three-way adjustable rear shocks with handy built-in levers.

The tank does not exactly match the seat contour; but it nevertheless offers a very smooth ride up, should you happen to get into the sort of predicament that requires that. The tank is also smoothly styled, with continuous compound curves that make it highly resistant to dents. Like the rest of the bike, it should take a lot of abuse without showing it. The side covers are formed of white plastic shaped to look like number plates.

Although in stock form the machine wouldn't win a scramble unless all of the opposition dropped out, it certainly looks like a world-beater. In all fairness, nobody ever called the bike a scrambler, and while it wouldn't win a top-flight enduro, either, some well-respected enduro riders, bearing in mind its low price, have lavished a lot of praise on the bike.

In fact, from a first impressions standpoint, absolutely nothing looks out of place on the bike's left side. On the right side, however, the huge ex->

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Unfortunately, when it comes to “obscure”, there were few other bikes quite as rare as the Premier, and I never saw another one – not in person, not for sale, no other mention of them even in the magazines.

Fast forward some 30+ years. I was in the market for a Yamaha CT175 Enduro, and had made the acquaintance of a fellow who owned a large collection of Yamaha Enduros. We were digging around in one of his garages, and over in the far corner I spotted a distinctive outline. I knew in an instant that it was one of those Premiers, and left that day not only with a CT175, but the Moto Beta, as well.



So, I started working on the bike, and a year later we're down at the Reliability Run Dual Sport Ride, which I helped to put on, and amazingly, someone had brought out a Premier to ride the event. I immediately introduced myself to the owner, who turned out to be John Agostinelli, a collector of unique Italian motorcycles. John and I have since become good friends, and I learned much from inspecting and photographing his complete and original bike.



So, what did I have to work with, on the Premier I had purchased? A lot of good stuff, to be sure. Aside from the lights, speedo, and one side cover, my bike was very complete and original. It even still had the original battery in it, plus the original Metzler "Six-Day" knobbies. Additionally, the bike was not all torn up. In fact, all indications were that it had been ridden very little. The steel fenders were not bent or kinked, the seat was not torn up, bars not bent, the tires were worn very little, etc.

The not-so-good? It was rusty. Quite rusty. Plus not running, of course. Wouldn't kick over, either. Can't recall if the top end was stuck, but I did find after engine teardown that the main bearings were rusted. Water had gotten into the bottom end – or at least condensation.



Quite complete, aside from the lights and speedometer. Everything was original – bars, grips, levers, fenders, tank, seat, shocks, sprockets, even the tires. Note that despite considerable rust, the fork tubes were not pitted – a real bonus. I even ended up with an extra fuel tank!


So, how to go about restoring a bike this rare? Well, this is where I really lucked out. First, a few steps back, though. The Moto Beta company was founded way back in 1905, in Florence, Italy, and was known then as Societa' Giuseppe Bianchi. Their product back then was bicycles, which carried the company through until after World War II when, like other European manufacturers of transportation products, they turned to producing lightweight motorcycles. The company exists today as the Beta brand, which continues to expand in the U.S. market, offering exceptional Trials and Enduro bikes.

Now, my little Premier, along with a modest number of others, made their way into the United States back in the 1970's by way of the Berliner Motor Corporation, importer at the time of brands such as Moto Guzzi, Ducati, Norton, Matchless, Zundapp, and Sachs, as well as Metzler tires. However, with Berliner long gone by the time I acquired my Premier and began searching out parts, the hunt was on. To my great good fortune, I eventually found that the late, great Domi Racer group had acquired an extensive inventory of Moto Beta parts – likely from Berliner, when they closed up shop.

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Founded in 1969, Domi Racer was for years a great source of parts and accessories for British and European bikes. Sadly, the business closed its doors in 2013, and the resulting auction offered up a tremendous cache of classic bikes, parts, and memorabilia.

Work on my bike followed a standard course of action. I took it down to the bare frame, and began to evaluate what I had to work with. Not bad, not bad at all. While it did not appear the MB had been left to sit outside during its life up to that point, it nonetheless had likely been poorly stored, as rust was quite extensive. And yet, there was much indication the bike had been ridden very little. Nothing was gouged up, torn up, bent, damaged, etc. The original seat cover was still perfect. No dents in the tank. Metal fenders not bent, twisted, or kinked. And then there were the tires – Metzler “Six-Day” models, and while a bit hard, they were like brand new – with totally sharp edges!



Here is a cool old ad I managed to find. Sure looks read to go, doesn't it?

As with other bikes I've re-done, I do not necessarily rebuild *exactly* along the lines of how the machine came from the factory. Not much deviation mind you, as original appearance is the general goal. However, I do take some liberties with mild over-restoration. Alloy pieces may be polished up to a finer finish than original, paint may deviate slightly from stock for a more appealing look, and in the case of this Premier in particular, I actually had some parts chromed which were not originally finished as such.

So, the frame was painted a nice metal flake silver, then clear coated. Some pits, but all in all, a nice finish. Original wheels were Radellis, and I sourced a replacement pair from Walridge Motors, out of Canada. New, stainless spokes and nipples from Buchanan Spoke and Wheel in

Azusa, California, cleaning, buffing, and polishing of the hubs, and before I knew, there was a rolling chassis. Big, big advantage with this little bike is that almost every original part was still present. It's awfully difficult to determine what parts may be missing on an old bike, when they're not there in the first place.

The motor didn't go too badly. Split the cases, replaced the main bearings and seals, crank and rod ok, and a bore job and fresh piston, rings, and gaskets from Domi has us back in business. Ignition was not a problem, either. All components were in good shape, so new points and a new condenser provided spark. Of note, the MB was fully street-legal from the factory, and as such is equipped with a key switch, full wiring harness, a big-ol' voltage regulator, switchgear, brake light switches, and so forth. When it comes to my efforts on rebuilds, there are times when a bike is never fully, fully completed. Case in point – when the Premier was finally up and running, I could not get the lights to work. I'd sourced a new battery, and had everything hooked up, but just could not figure out the wiring configuration, between the key switch and the voltage regulator. Much searching eventually turned up a wiring diagram, the color-coding of which does not match my bike, and although I tried for quite some time, I have yet to put forth the time and effort sufficient to generate lighting. Could be a failed voltage regulator – which I've yet to locate and purchase.



The original exhaust pipe was complete and intact, including heat shield and spark arrestor. I filled in the rust-pits on it with JB Weld, sanded it out, and applied high-temp coating. Not perfect, but not bad.

Much additional effort eventually resulted in acceptable cosmetics. The missing parts – lights, speedometer, etc, were sourced and installed, and what with having two fuel tanks to work with, I decided to go with a non-factory color on one of them, along with abbreviated graphics. End result is somewhat impressive, and definitely distinctive.

So, does it run? Do I ride it? Ah, yes and, very little. Keep in mind that these were not great motorcycles to begin with. Riding the little Premier is better than walking, but not much. That might sound kind of cruel, but let's face it, there's a reason the Japanese put all these other brands on the trailer back in the 70's. Plus, right now the MB is stone-stock – other than the cosmetic liberties mentioned earlier, and that stock-ness extends to the Dell'Orto carburetor. Not my favorite. I like Mikunis. They're clean, efficient, and work perfectly. As it sits, I can't get the Premier to run properly with the original D'O carb, so it's on there for appearance sake. I have tried, but it's just not cooperating. For purposes of riding, I'll swap in a Mikuni.

Ok, does this have you interested in a Moto Beta Premier 125 Enduro? If so, good luck. It appears there are very, very few of them around. There's mine, John Agostinelli's, and my buddy Mike Gallagher has one.



Mike's bike is quite nice, and very original.

Surely there are more of these bikes floating around. I just have not come across them. Parts are scarce, too. With the closing of Domi Racer, someone evidently purchased their stock of Moto Beta parts, as there are some to be found on eBay. Plus, items do pop up here and there at swap meets – if you know what you’re looking for. Walking around Vintage Days one year, I came across a complete Premier engine, for example. So, you never know. Putting one of these bikes back together now though, with zero reproduction parts available, and a diminishing stock of nos stuff, would be a most uncertain proposition.

So, I’ve got a bit of an orphan, but it is a cool little bike, definitely reflecting an era now long gone. Below are pictures of my finished product, along with a couple of other archival images I’ve managed to dig up. Note the true “Enduro” version. I sure would like to locate one of those, but I highly doubt any were ever imported into the U.S.

- Ted Guthrie







So, here's a picture I found on the internet, of what appears to be Moto Beta's true-Enduro version of the bike – possibly even an ISDT model. Note the larger (quieter) exhaust pipe, shouldered, alloy rims, centerstand, toolbag, larger, likely-fiberglass tank, and other features, which differentiate this one from the basic Premier. Same frame though, and it's still equipped with metal fenders.



Another picture I found on the internet. Possibly this is an in-between model, bridging the gap between the more basic Premier, and the possibly-ISDT version in the previous image. Note that while this one does have the larger tank and toolbag, it's got steel Radelli rims on it, plus it does not feature the blacked-out top end of the ISDT bike. Additionally, it features passenger-peg mounts, as does my bike, which are absent on the ISDT bike. Obscure European enduro bike trivia at its finest.

