

1968 Aermacchi Harley-Davidson M65

Many people will remember when Harley-Davidson was selling lightweight motorcycles during the 60's and 70's. The bikes were produced for H-D by the Italian firm, Aermacchi.

Originally Aeronautica Macchi, the company was founded in 1912, and initially produced aircraft: Nieuport monoplanes and seaplanes, for the Italian military. Following World War II, the company expanded to include a motorcycle division. Hence Aermacchi came to be.

Postwar production of lightweight motorcycles to provide cheap transportation in Europe and Great Britain eventually led to such machines appearing in the U.S. Harley-Davidson wanted in on this new market, and initially offered a basic little 125cc two-stroke, beginning in 1947. That machine was followed in 1955 with the "Hummer" model - Harley's version of the DKW RT125, the design of which came courtesy of war reparations from the Germans.

In 1960, Harley purchased 50% interest in Aermacchi, and began importing and rebadging the company's existing models as Harley-Davidsons. H-D achieved sufficient sales success with various two and four stroke models to support purchase of the balance of Aermacchi holdings in 1974, which in turn they sold off to Cagiva in 1978.

There were two versions of the M65 series. This is the more "pedestrian" model, with a semi step-through frame. Also offered was the M65S Sport, featuring a more conventional motorcycle layout, and a racy bump-stop seat. Both models displaced 65cc of two-stroke power, and featured a three-speed transmission, actuated by squeezing a conventional clutch lever, then rotating the left-side grip. Interestingly, a foot-shift conversion kit was eventually offered, which provided for a more conventional means of gear selection.

As with any good restoration, this effort began with a very decent, complete, intact, and (nearly) running bike.





Work began by pulling the bike completely apart, down to the last nut and bolt. Paint was matched up “by eye”, and applied in-house. Other than a totally bugged-up clutch, the engine turned out to be totally solid and was reassembled with nothing more than fresh seals and gaskets. Many of the original parts were reused after extensive cleaning and polishing. Of those parts which did require replacement, I was fortunate to find a good supply of nos components. Every bit of chrome was replated, and all alloy surfaces were cleaned and polished, also in-house.



It has been my experience that Italian alloys polish up extremely well, as was certainly the case with this particular bike. While it is in fact over-restored, this little M65 presents quite nicely, and the final paint and fit and finished turned out quite satisfactorily.



Some build-details are lost to me, such as the exceptionally well-fitting replacement seat cover. I turned over all documentation upon completion to the bike's owner, and just cannot recall all information. One interesting detail is the taillight lens. Research led to determination that it was originally sourced from a 60's(?) era Chevy pickup truck. Note, that is not just a cosmetic match. It is the exact lens, which was originally used. It may sound strange, as the original should be a CEV. Regardless, that's what I found. Graphics are exact duplicates of the originals. Note, the tank graphics in particular are transfers, not stickers. Want to do something tricky? Try applying something like those things, and to get them exactly right.

I've not done a lot of Italian bikes, but from what I've experienced so far, their engineering fascinates me. It seems that, if four parts would suffice, the Italians would instead use ten. Assembly of the levers for example, took two hours – each! Their componentry is absurdly tricky, with hidden, internal springs, separate spacers, and multiple fasteners, all requiring six hands, and incredible finger-dexterity.

Also quite interesting is the tiny, little Dell'Orto carburetor. Initial disassembly revealed some extra bits and pieces, which had me quite perplexed at first. Took a while to understand what the extra pieces were for, but in the end, I figured out the Dell'Orto featured a quite clever choke auto-disengagement. Set the choke, fire the bike, and as soon as the throttle is cracked – the choke disengages. Pretty darn cool. Another neat feature – check out the factory center stand. Quite convenient and practical.



Once completed, the little bike turned out to run like a champ. It is geared quite tall, intended for genuine transportation, and despite featuring just 65cc of displacement, really moves out.

All things considered, I am quite proud of this one.

- Ted Guthrie