

History of Monark

After 68 Years Of Alternating Obscurity And Brilliance, Monark Is On The Move! / By Geoffrey Wood

TAKE FIVE pioneer Swedish motorcycle firms. Add 68 years of acquisitions and mergers. Subtract a couple of periods when no motorcycles were produced. And you end up with MCB, producers of the current Monark 125 line.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. It all started in 1901 when Lindblad began importing a Belgian motorbike called the Minerva. These Single and V-Twin models were single-speed belt-drive rigs, with an engine that featured an overhead intake valve and side exhaust valve.

Several years later the Wiklunds outfit came onto the scene with the Nordstjernan (Northern Star) motorcycle, which had a Belgian FN engine in Wiklund's own chassis. A great rivalry naturally developed between these two firms and it surprised no one when a race was scheduled in Stockholm to prove which was the better machine.

The big race was held in 1903, with Minerva sending a "works" rider by the name of deJong to compete against local star Emil Salmson. The Minerva proved to be much faster, but the Northern Star won when the Minerva broke down just a short distance from the finish.

After this fine display of stamina, the Wiklunds company went on to greater things. In 1905, FN came out with its famous four-cylinder model with shaft drive. A Single was also produced. Both were single-speed belt-

driven models. The Four, however, had a clutch to disengage the engine. The Nordstjernan (FN) was sold as far afield as South Africa, and professor Erik Nystrom even took one to the University of Peking.

Wiklunds pursued an active racing program in those early days, with such greats as Erik Friberg, Indian Axel, Erik Larsson, David Pettersson, Rickard Svensson and C.G. Wetterstrand winning many races. Wiklunds also imported BMWs and Ariels for the Swedish market at that time.

The next name to appear was Nymans Verkstader, who designed a 2.5 bhp V-Twin called Hermes in 1917. This enterprising company had been producing two-stroke engines since the beginning of the century, with its display at the 1906 Stockholm Exhibition being a milestone in the Swedish industry.

It was not until the late 1910s, though, that complete motorcycles rolled off the production line at Uppsala, with the new Hermes V-Twin using a German NSU engine hooked to a belt drive. This model was known for its speed, but this placed a great load on the caliper brake used only on the rear wheel.

A few years later, in 1920, Monark came onto the scene with its Esse machine, which had a British 172cc Villiers engine. The powerplant was a two-stroke, and the chassis was nothing more than a heavy bicycle. Machines of this type were not required to be licensed or taxed and no insurance was needed, so they became very popular with the Scandinavian riders.

Two Esse models were produced, one with chain drive and the other with belt drive. Lights were an optional extra, and neither wheel had any form of suspension. The ride was naturally on the "rough" side, but the price was "right."

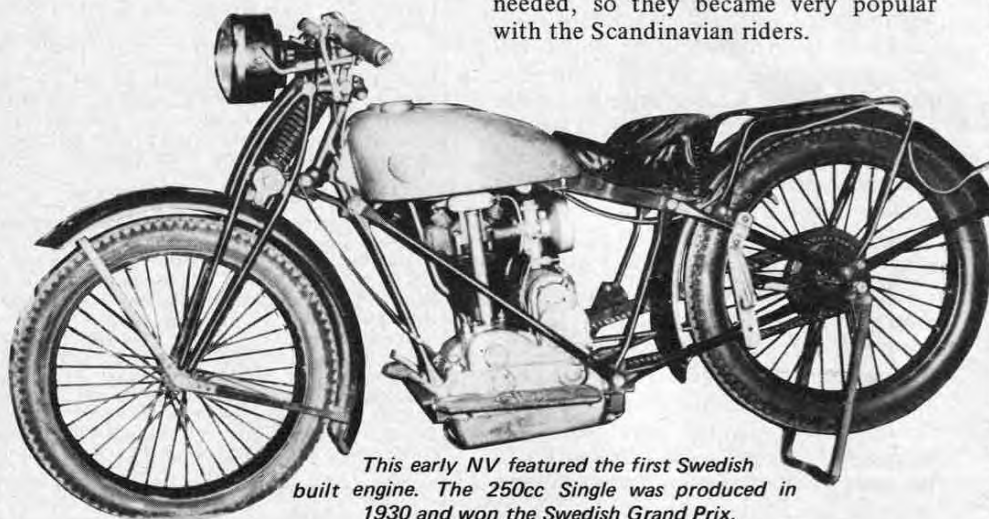
In 1928 Sweden revised its traffic laws and put motorized bicycles into a full motorcycle category, which took away the Esse's sales advantage. This was, perhaps, motivated by Monark improving its motorbike in 1925 with a three-speed gearbox and a kickstarter.

Monark decided to go into the full-size motorcycle, so Robert Ebe-Karlsson was hired from the famous Amal carburetor company to design the expanded range of machines. The idea was to produce a complete line in 250, 350, 500 and 600cc sizes, with the British Blackburn company providing the single-cylinder engines.

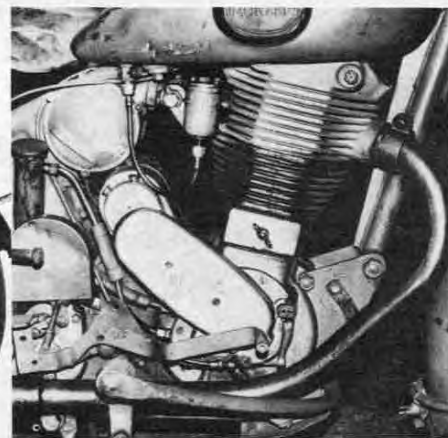
Three models were produced in each displacement, one with a side valve powerplant for economical transportation, a faster overhead valve "Sport" model for touring, and a "Super Sport" model for those who wanted the ultimate in performance. These bikes all had rigid frames and girder front forks, and a hand shifted three-speed gearbox was still in vogue. At first an internal expanding brake was used on only the rear wheel, but the increased speed soon necessitated a binder on the front wheel.

During these years Monark entered many enduro-type trials as well as some speed trials. Exceptional reliability gave the marque a respectable reputation, with its finest win being in the 1929 November-Kasan by Rolf Gulich.

Meanwhile, Nymans Verkstader had been busy designing the first all-Swedish motorcycle, which made its debut in 1927. The new NV had ohv single-cylinder engine in 250 and 350cc sizes. The engine featured exposed valve springs (for cooling), a cast iron cylinder and head, and unit construction of the



This early NV featured the first Swedish built engine. The 250cc Single was produced in 1930 and won the Swedish Grand Prix.



The Albin company produced this 500cc engine for Monark's army model in 1940.

engine and gearbox. This last feature was very progressive for its day. A change was later made to a foot gear-shift on this model, but the lack of a front brake on the earlier versions seems rather backward. The new NV proved to be tough and dependable, and it was seen on the roads until after World War II.

About this time road racing caught on like wildfire in Sweden, and NV began building some special works models for the blacktop. This was followed by some replica models in the early 1930s, and in the 250cc class they established an enviable reputation. Erike Bohlin was the star rider, and in 1930 he won all three of Sweden's biggest races—the Stockholm, Tvetaloppet and Onsalaloppet. Other riders were Helmer Lindstrom, D.F. Nyman, Erik Salomonsson and Gosta Roden. By far the greatest performance came in 1931, when Bohlin won the 250cc Swedish Grand Prix over all the European stars. After that the NV racers faded away, since their competitors became faster every year.

A decline in the Swedish industry came after these golden years. The culprit was worldwide economic depression, which was felt very severely in Sweden. This naturally cut into motorcycle sales, especially the larger and more expensive models.

The NV concern was the first to feel the pinch. In 1932 it dropped its larger motorcycles to concentrate on a new 98cc motorized bicycle, which used a German Sachs two-stroke engine. Bicycle pedals were used for starting and for braking, and no method of suspension was provided on either wheel. A clutch was fitted to disengage the engine, but the two-speed drive limited the 2bhp engine to about 20-25 mph. This 98cc model was sold to the tune of 20,000 by 1939, at which time a 125cc model was added to the stable.

A few years later, in 1936, Monark dropped its 250, 350, 500 and 600cc Singles to concentrate on its 98cc motorbike. This one used a German ILO engine, with the bike having an amazing similarity to the Whizzer motorbike that was so popular in America after World

War II. In 1939 Monark added a faster 118cc model to its range, and then the war shut down the production of motorcycles.

There was, however, one other name to add to the five makes that ended up in MCB after the war, and this was the Mauritz Berlin and Company in Varnamo. This concern was founded in 1934, and three years later the first Sachs powered Apollo motorbikes rolled off the production lines. A switch was soon made to a Husqvarna 98cc powerplant, which used a Bosch magneto and a two-speed gearbox with chain drive. As with the other Swedish manufacturers, production ceased in late 1939 with the advent of war.

During the war Monark produced a military motorcycle for the Swedish army, which was a 500cc ohv Single of remarkable durability. Special alloy frames were made with a plunger rear suspension, while the girder front fork used a pair of telescopic tubes to house the springs. The engine was the same as used by Husqvarna in its 112 TV model from 1934 to 1936, and it produced 22 bhp at 4200 rpm. Bore and stroke was 79 x 101mm, and the four-speed Sturmey-Archer footshift box had tall ratios of 4.55, 5.75, 7.7, and 12.1:1, although lower three-speed ratios were employed for army use. This Albin engine had an alloy head and could be tuned to develop 30 bhp at 5000 rpm by fitting a sports cam. Top speed of this model was 74 mph in stock trim and 93 mph in tuned trim. An interesting feature of the M-42 TV was the automatic clutch attached to the gear shift lever.

NV also designed a unique military machine which used a pair of Albin cylinders on its own V-Twin crankcase. This model developed 36 bhp at 4000 rpm and had a telescopic front fork and shaft drive. A special drive was provided to power a sidecar wheel, and hydraulic brakes were used. Only three of these 1000cc monsters were built, since the Army decided that the American Jeep was a better proposition.

After the war, both Monark and NV resumed production of 98 and 125cc models, and these remained in production until 1950 when a range of vastly improved motorcycles was introduced. The first was Monark's 150cc Blue Fighter, which weighed under 165 lb. and thus benefited from the "motorized bicycle" laws. This Single used a two-stroke ILO engine and was known for its reliability.

Next came the Blue Arrow, which by 1952 looked as modern as anything in Europe. A sleek 250cc twin-cylinder ILO engine was housed in a swinging-arm frame, and a big dual seat and telescopic front fork provided a new standard in rider comfort. This was followed in 1954 by the Blue Stinget—a 200cc Single known for its sparkling performance. The Stinget used an Ardie two-stroke engine from Germany.

The NV concern was also busy, and in 1952 it brought out its 125cc Red Ant model that soon established a great reputation in trials and scrambles events. This was followed by 150, 200 and 250cc two-stroke Singles. The 125, 200 and 250 had DKW powerplants, while the 200 came from Sachs. After this, NV, like the other three companies, was merged into the MCB name, so that its name gradually faded away. Before the merger, NV was able to win several gold medals in the ISDT—a fitting end to a make rarely heard of in America.

Meanwhile, Monark had become infatuated with competition, especially enduro type events where its superior quality could be proven. Swedish steels have always been the best, and the well-designed Monark was tough.

The company began competing in motocross, trials and enduro events in their homeland in the early 1950s, but they soon changed to international events when their riders developed into championship contenders. Ove Lundell and Bengt Svensson were especially successful in Swedish Championships. >

The Monark works 50 and 500cc road racers are sleek models which have scored some fine "places" in GP events in recent years. The big 500 uses the Crescent outboard boat motor tuned for 70 bhp at 9000 rpm.



The Monark Blue Stinget had a German Ardie engine and a leading-link front fork. Performance was peppy for 1954.



Monark

This led to Monark entering a team of eight riders in the 1954 ISDT, which was held that year at Llandrindod, Wales. The team consisted of Sven Falk, Bernt Hasselrot, Sven Berg, Bengt Svensson, Ove Lundell, Bengt Winberg, Hasse Ring and Bengt Johansson. These eight riders started, all eight finished, and all eight won prestigious Gold Medals. This is a remarkable achievement, which may never be equaled.

Monark followed this up by winning three Gold Medals in the 1956 Swedish Six Days Trail, with Lundell, Svensson and Allan Eklund doing the riding. These bikes had 250cc NSU four-stroke, ohc, single-cylinder engines, which remained in limited production for several years.

During the 1950s Monark made small year-to-year improvements in its range, with virtually its total production being sold in the Scandinavian countries. The Singles were actually a very good motorbike and probably would have sold well in foreign markets, yet the company seemed content to satisfy home needs and concentrate on other industrial products.

This policy ultimately proved fatal, at least for a few years, since the market for motorcycles completely fell apart in 1960 when economical small cars made their debut. The standard of living had risen so much that the automobile displaced the motorcycle as a means of transportation. Consequently, Monark's sales fell drastically. In 1960 the company decided to cease production, and the name looked as if it were dead.

The economy of Sweden continued to expand, however, so that by 1967 it appeared as though a great many people could afford a bike as a "plaything"—much like in America. Monark sensed this new market and decided to get back into the bike business with 50 and 75cc models. This was followed in 1970 by a 125cc version, all of which used Sachs two-stroke engines. These bikes found a ready market, so the MCB-Monark name was truly on the road to fame again.

There was, however, a great change in the new five-speed 125, since it was produced in the popular enduro or street-scrambler trim. The idea was to produce a model suitable for both street use and off-road play, which seemed to be the trend all over the world.

The man behind these new Monarks was Ove Lundell—the great motocross rider of the 1950s and early 1960s. Ove had been the manager of a service station and cafe near the factory, but he quickly dropped this to return to Monark and design some sporting motorcycles. He would also head up the competition shop, which was destined to make a name for itself. Lundell's touch was especially obvious in the frame design.

In 1970 new 125s made their debut, with a Sachs engine being mounted in an MCB chassis. The two-stroke powerplant was a Single with a bore and stroke of 54 x 54mm. The piston-port engine churned out 18 bhp at 7600 rpm on a 9.0:1 compression ratio, but this was later pushed up to 21 bhp on a 10.8:1 ratio. The first models used a 26mm Bing carburetor, but this was increased to 27mm on the more powerful version.

A five-speed gearbox with ratios of 25.0, 14.9, 9.9, 8.2 and 6.8:1 came next, with the 1972 models featuring one more gear in the light of works experience in competition. The ignition was handled by a Bosch 6V flywheel magneto.

Two models were produced—one with lights called the Enduro and the other a stripped-for-action motocross bike. The Enduro has been the most popular, since it is a delightful street legal, dual-purpose rig for both street use and off-road play.

The double-loop cradle frame has a Ceriani fork at the front and a pair of Girling shocks on the rear, with a wheelbase of 52.2 in. Tire sizes are 3.00-21-in. front and 3.50-18-in. rear on both models, with ground clearance being a generous 10.5 in. With a weight

of 198 lb. in Enduro trim and 180 in Scrambles trim, the new Monarks have established a reputation for fine handling and durability.

The company has also produced a 50cc Schoolboy Scrambler since 1967, since Sweden has a program to train boys to be motocross stars of the future. A Sachs 38x44mm engine is used, which churns out 8 to 11 bhp, depending upon the stage of tune. A six-speed box is used on this little buzz bomb.

When MCB began production of its new 125s in 1970, it decided to sponsor a works team in the big enduro-trials all over Europe. With a wee bit of extra tuning and preparation, the standard models were remarkably successful. To begin, Monark riders won the Swedish 175cc reliability championship, and from there they went to the ISDT where they won three gold medals, four silver, and one bronze. Kurt and Bengt Gustavsson and Bo Thornblom all had "clean" sheets, and Kurt finished a strong 3rd in the 125cc class.

In 1970 a Monark rider also won the 50cc Swedish MX championship, which was repeated in 1971. Monark's record in enduros all over Europe began to be impressive in 1971, and in 1972 it achieved many successes in all but the ISDT, where it ran into some bad luck for the first time.

During 1972 the new Monarks began to show up all over the world. The company had set up an aggressive export program, which was aided by the publicity emanating from its competition successes. Plans were also laid to produce a new 125cc road model with a sporting image, and then it is hoped to produce a genuine trials model for this popular sport. Prototypes have been built, and a thorough testing program is underway. With a healthy export rate to America, France, Belgium, Holland and England, the future looks bright for MCB.

In 1971 the company also decided to get into the road racing game—a sport

The 1952 Blue Arrow was a well-built model with a 250cc ILO twin-cylinder engine. The Blue Arrow was available in both street and enduro trims.



The 1959-61 Monark 500cc motocross model was a beautiful Single with a 312 lb. weight. A Norton fork, Manx hubs, BSA gearbox, and either an Albin or BSA-Albin engine was used. Monark won the Gold, Silver and Bronze medals in the 1959 November-Kasan with this bike.

they had never been involved in. The idea was to build a works 50cc model and a 500cc sidecar rig. Next came a 500cc solo model, all of which have turned in some impressive performances. The 50 even won the 1971 Swedish championship with Lars Persson on board.

The little 50 featured a Sachs six-speed powerplant converted to a rotary valve design by MCB. The engine produced 15 bhp at 15,000 rpm, using a Krober electronic ignition. A 28 bhp 125cc model was then added to the team, which also had a modified Sachs engine. The bikes have been used with both a disc front brake and a double TLS Fontana binder.

The two 500cc models have used Crescent three-cylinder outboard boat motors. These are water-cooled and very fast. The engine develops about 70 bhp at 9000 rpm, and it is coupled to either a Norton Manx four-speed, Quaife five-speed, or Schaflietner six-speed gearbox, depending upon the circuit. The amazing thing about the sidecar rig is its 275 lb. weight, which compares to the 418 lb. of the typical BMW rig and 484 lb. of the Munch-URS Four.

With a very low profile and a speed of 164 mph, the Monark has proved to be a formidable contender. Driven by Rudi Kurth and passengered by Miss Dane Rowe, the Three has gained many fine "places" in grand prix events, often finishing in 4th to 8th places against the world's best.

The 50cc Single and 500cc Three have also been entered in selected classics, but the success has not been quite as good as the sidecar rig. The Monark-Crescent 500 does seem to have genuine potential, but usual "teething" troubles and a lack of rider talent have so far kept it from the winner's circle.

There is one final chapter in the history of Monark, and for this we must

return to 1958 when company executives decided to make a bid for the prestigious world motocross championship. Big and classical looking 500cc Singles ruled the roost in those days, so it was obvious that Monark would have to come up with a truly great motorcycle.

Monark did not produce any big four-strokes then, so it was necessary to go back into the past for a powerplant. During the war they had produced the Albin-powered Army bike, so perhaps here was a suitable engine to work on. According to what little information is available from the factory archives, the 79 x 101mm engine was de-stroked to 99mm for 490cc, which allowed several rebore before the 500cc limit was exceeded. Stronger steel flywheels were also made up in the process. Monark then hand built an alloy head and cylinder, since the original cast-iron parts were too heavy and did not dissipate heat fast enough.

This beautiful 1935 vintage engine was then dropped into a twin-loop cradle frame with added gussets at stress points. The front fork was a Norton unit, although Sten Lundin sometimes used one of the very first Cerianis. The front and rear hubs were conical magnesium units from a Manx Norton, while Sten sometimes used Horex hubs from Germany. The rear shocks were Girling, while a BSA scrambles type gearbox was fitted.

In an effort to reduce weight, the fuel tank was made of aluminum alloy, and the centrally mounted oil tank was held in place by a strap, as was the fuel tank. Ignition was by a BTH competition magneto, with the carburetor being a 1-3/16-in. Amal monobloc type. The 3.00-21-in. and 4.00-19-in. front and rear Dunlop "Sports" tires were mounted on steel rims. Dry weight of this bike was 312 lb., which compared favorably with the 350 lb. BSA Gold Star and FN singles. The 36 bhp at 6000 rpm was below what 1958 champion FN was claiming, but so was the weight!

During the following few years Monark built a modest number of motocross specials in its competition shop. Probably no two were alike, since these were "works" specials to the extreme. A BSA Gold Star crankcase and cylinder was even used on some models, mated to homemade 99mm flywheels and the Albin type head. BSA Gold Star primary cases and clutches were also used. The end result was always a magnificent and beautiful bike, which the world would soon hear about!

The battle began in 1958 with Lundin and Lars Gustafsson making up the works team. Sten did well the first year, winning the final grand prix of the season and finishing 3rd behind Rene Baeton (FN) and Bill Nilsson (AJS-Crescent) in the world championship.

In 1959 Sten hit his form on the big Single and swept everyone aside on his way to the title. Lars also finished 8th that year, which was the first win in the championship by a Swedish engine. The competition was intense in those days, with many fine riders and fine bikes competing. Sten lost his title in 1960 to Bill Nilsson, but his 2nd place was followed by a Husqvarna in 4th, a Lito in 5th, and another Monark in 6th—all of which used the Monark-Albin engine.

Sten came back strong in 1961 to again take the title, only this time his bike had "Lito" on the fuel tank. A Husky and another Lito took 2nd and 3rd places. These Litos were actually the Monark engine in a lighter 265-lb. package, and were produced by a small group of Swedish motocross enthusiasts. In 1962 Gunnar Johansson finished 2nd behind Rolf Tibblin's Husqvarna with Lundin in 3rd and Lundell on an old Monark in 4th. In the team Motocross des Nations that year, the Swedes, on their Albin engined bikes, did their famous four-abreast finish to completely smash the opposition.

In 1963 Tibblin again won on his Albin-Husqvarna with other Monark powered models placing well, but in 1964 they began to slip behind the new and lighter BSA 440cc and CZ 360cc Singles. Monark had not produced motorcycles since 1960, of course, so its interest in motocross naturally dropped off. The era of two-strokes began in 1966, so the technically interesting four-strokes faded away to a dull era of noisy two-strokes. The great Swedish era had ended.

But not quite ended, for in 1969 Sten reappeared in Continental events on a lighter Monark to score a surprising 22 wins against all the two-strokes. He followed this up with 21 wins in 1970, which really staggered the "experts." The idea was to gain some publicity for the new breed of two-stroke that MCB was producing. It was all very nostalgic.



The 1972 Monark 125cc Enduro featured a 21 bhp Sachs engine with a six-speed gearbox. This rugged little bike won eight Gold medals in the 1970 ISDT. Monark has won 47 Gold medals up to the end of 1972.