

# RW<sup>TM</sup>

# ROADRACING WORLD & MOTORCYCLE TECHNOLOGY<sup>TM</sup>

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## STREETBIKE QUICK LOOK:

**YAMAHA  
XSR900 HAS  
1980s GRAND  
PRIX STYLE**

## WHY INDIAN RACES BAGGERS

**MOTOAMERICA  
SUPERBIKE:  
HAPPY vs.  
DOUR ON THE  
PODIUM**

**MOTOGP: FABIO ON FIRE!**  
**HOW ONE SIMPLE TRICK  
HELPED HIM WIN AGAIN**

## MOTOGP ANALYSIS:

• HOW A MOTOGP TEAM OWNER  
DEVELOPS CHAMPIONS

• ROOKIES CUP TO MOTOGP  
TO MOTOGP TO MOTOGP:  
TWO FOREVER RIVALS

◀ **MotoGP World Champion  
FABIO QUARTARARO**



## COLUMNS:

- Trivia & Numbers
- New Products
- ASRA/CCS Newsletter

## SHOPS:

**BLACK+GRAY**  
Honda Motorcycle Collection

## CLASSIC RACEBIKE:

1955 NSU  
Sportmax



# CONTENTS

July 2022 · Volume 32 · Number 07



**ROADRACING WORLD &  
MOTORCYCLE  
TECHNOLOGY™**

## FEATURES

- Inside Info: Energica Experia electric sport tourer; More surgery for Marc Marquez; Quartararo re-signs for 2023-2024; BMW wins the 24 Hours of Spa; James Rispoli wins in AFT on a KTM, and more... 8
- Interview: Indian V.P. Gary Gray: Why Indian Races Baggers 13
- Historic Racebike Illustrations: 1955 NSU Sportmax 14
- Bike Intro: 2022 Yamaha XSR900 Has Style 16
- MotoGP Analysis, Part 1: Kingmaker Aki Ajo 20
- MotoGP Analysis, Part 2: Bastianini/Martin Are Forever Rivals 23
- Collections: BLACK+GRAY Honda Motorcycle Collection 52**

## RACING

- MotoGP At Mugello, Catalunya, And Sachsenring: Quartararo In Charge 28
- MotoAmerica: Scholtz & Petersen Win At Road America 34
- Seen At The Track: Podium Joy At Road America 45
- World Superbike: Bautista Gets It Done At Misano 46

## COLUMNS

- Letters To The Editor: Cheering For The Old Guys; Building A Wooden SV650 Dash! 4
- 10 Years Ago: BMW Wins A Shootout; Casey Stoner Decides To Retire 8
- The Kids' Page: Jack Beaudry 51
- Racing, School, & Track Day Calendar 54
- ASRA/CCS Newsletter 55
- The Crash Page: Nakagama Takes Out Rins & Bagnaia 62
- Back In The Day: Editor's Scrapbook 63
- Numbers & Trivia: Travel Considerations 63
- New Products: Helite Airbag Jackets; Cardo Communicators 63
- Classified Ads/Advertiser Index 64
- High Performance Parts & Services Directory 65
- Chris Ulrich: Adventures Of ~~X~~ An Ex-Racer 66



16 Quick Look: 2022 Yamaha XSR900



20 MotoGP Analysis: Aki Ajo Develops Champions

Photo by Gigi Soldano/DPPI Media



### On The Front Cover:

Defending World Champion Fabio Quartararo stretches out his MotoGP points lead and explains how he completely turned his 2022 season around, starting on page 28. Photo by Gigi Soldano/DPPI Media.

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# COLLECTIONS

By David Swarts



## BLACK+GRAY Honda Motorcycle Collection

*(Above) André Grasso with one of his two oval-piston 1992 Honda NR750s in what is now his living room. (Below) After 40 years in business, Grasso closed his industrial design firm and converted its building into a home for himself and his 90+ Honda motorcycles.*

Many people in the world collect things, and some of them collect motorcycles. Then there is a guy who collects motorcycles, restores them to pristine original condition (doing all of the work himself), and then parks them in his house—all 90+ of them, all Hondas.

Meet André Grasso and his BLACK+GRAY Honda Motorcycle Collection, which may be one of, if not the, largest private collections of Honda motorcycles in the world.

In 2012, I traveled to Garrison, New York, to visit with former racer Grasso and learn about his company, BLACK+GRAY, which makes wheel chocks, pit signal boards, tie-down straps, tie-down anchors, the Hi-Per Hanger (with popularity reaching beyond motorcycle racing) and other products.

I learned that Grasso is an industrial designer; that he ran his own successful design firm, Index Industrial Design and Development, (which designed just about everything seen or touched at a Hertz rental car location for the past 30 years, among many other projects); and that he liked collecting Honda motorcycles. He had 32 at the time.

Fast forward to 2022. After

40 years in the design business, Grasso has shut down Index. His last project was designing a John Deere excavator simulator used to train and certify operators for underground digging.

He then designed an expansion of the Index building, taking it from 6,000 to 10,000 square feet. Grasso moved his collection of Hondas from his home (which he also designed) and another shop space to the newly expanded building. Next he sold his house and moved into an apartment he added in the former Index building. Oh, and he tripled his collection of Hondas, which now numbers over 90 motorcycles.

"The idea was to consolidate, over here around the corner, the old end-of-life stuff. 'Where's that wrench? Oh, yeah. It's over at the house and not at this shop,'" said Grasso. "The whole effort was kind of focused on that, getting all the bikes together, getting all my shops together in one place. And that's what I did. It literally took years, between building the building, selling the house, moving the shops. It's crazy!

"Some of the bikes were here, some were there, and that was the thing. The addition that I put



on allowed all the bikes to go upstairs. The bikes I ride are downstairs in one garage, and another garage has bikes in line for restoration. Just yesterday, I said it's still not big enough. But there has to be a limit."

Grasso's collection of Hondas spans from the 1960s to the present day, from a 1960 Honda Benly Super Sport CB92 to a 2021 Honda CBR1000RR-R Fireblade SP. Most are streetbikes and there's a clear focus on sportbikes from the 1980s to the present.

Many of the modern bikes in Grasso's collection were purchased brand new from one Honda dealership—Shawnee Honda Polaris Kawasaki, in Shawnee, Oklahoma. Why from Oklahoma?

"If you go to a New York Honda guy, 'Whatta you want? We



don't got that. We're gonna have to order it for you.' And they suck," said Grasso, a native of New Jersey, who doesn't pull punches. "I used to go to Oklahoma because the Hertz data center was out there, and I used to go out there to work with them. One week I was out there, and I asked if there were any Honda dealers around. 'Yeah, there's one in Shawnee.'

"I was stunned. This was a 60,000 square foot Honda Powersports dealer out in the middle of nowhere. It was incredible. I walk in and they had motorcycles, accessories, and garments. They





*(Above and Below) Before selling his conventional house, Grasso built an addition onto his existing commercial and office building to house his entire motorcycle collection (which includes Honda streetbikes from 1960 to 2021), his personal restoration shop, and his living space all in one place.*



even had a hot dog counter. And they were the nicest people. I said, 'Screw those New York guys. I'll just have the thing shipped out.'

And shipping his personal bikes was a catalyst for Grasso developing BLACK+GRAY's Cam-Sure locking tie-down straps, part of BLACK+GRAY's product line.

In 2010, Grasso purchased a 1992 Honda NR750 (the 748cc V-4 with oval pistons, titanium connecting rods, and titanium valves) in England. During the time he was doing all the paperwork and waiting to ship the bike to the U.S., Grasso developed

what he considered to be the ultimate tie-down straps just for his NR750. Those straps became the Cam-Sure tie-downs.

Grasso still has that NR750 and rides it on the street, while he has a second one restored to mint condition in his collection. "I take it out once in a while, but it's not that much fun riding it," said Grasso. "If a rock hits the windshield that's it. Done. There are no more, and Honda isn't going to make me one. That takes the fun out of it for me. People ask me all the time if I ride these bikes. Are you out of your mind? I would

need a full-time mechanic. I'm not Jay Leno here."

Grasso says his other "riders" are a 2007 ST1300 sport tourer, a 2000 RC51, and a 1993 CBR900RR. "My original [CBR900RR] that I bought in 1993, after about 20,000 miles on it, I brought it in, detailed it, and it's upstairs now," said Grasso. "Then I found a crappy one, a decent crappy one, and I bought that to ride around. It's a fun bike. It's all original."

Grasso started the collection in the mid-1990s when he acquired a 1971 CB350 from a friend and later restored it. And when you talk about Grasso and restoration, the phrase "attention to detail" doesn't do the process justice. "If you saw what I do to these bikes you'd think I was ri-

do it, so in the end I just prefer doing it myself."

Grasso has even built his own engine stand where he can make sure an engine and entire electrical system, from the ignition key to the taillight, is operating together perfectly. Only after the "dirty work" is done, will he install things back into a freshly refinished chassis says Grasso.

"Once I'm done restoring them, draining the fluids, pulling the battery out, and putting them upstairs they don't come back out," said Grasso. "I would like to ride some of them more, but it's too much work to get them in that condition and then to ride it through a puddle."

One bike that is a crowning jewel of Grasso's collection is his 2016 RC213V-S, Honda's MotoGP racebike converted and homologated for street use. "Honda insisted that it be delivered to a Honda dealer," said Grasso. "I said, 'Well, let's do it out there [Shawnee Honda]. It's midway between you and me, California and New York. We'll give them the splash.'

"It was fun. It was a big party. And the coolest thing was Honda sent Kevin Erion [of Erion Racing] out with a giant truck and the one bike. And [long-time Honda race team member] Ray Plumb came out along with some American Honda honchos. It was fun."

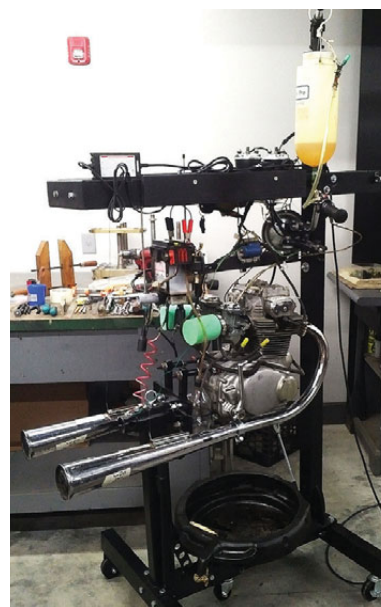
Inevitably, Grasso is always asked, why only Hondas? "As a product designer, a lot of what I do with the bikes is about design and manufacturing. I love the story of Mr. Honda and the beginnings and what the company evolved into. I have great respect for their product. They're not always the most exciting, and they've done things over the years that I questioned. There's sometimes I'm working on their bikes and I go, 'What the hell were these guys thinking?' But I really like their stuff and I like their company. They're cool guys."

"Then the other thing that keeps coming up, I keep getting bombarded with the same question—'What are you going to do with it? How about a museum?'"

"There's only one museum in the country, Barber [Vintage Motorsports Museum], that I would even consider [selling the collection to]. And they called, but even those guys, would cherry pick it. They don't need them all. Do they need a CB350? I don't think so."

"So, I don't know. It becomes a weird kind of thing. It raises the question, why am I doing it? And I guess the answer is, I like doing it, and I'm pretty good at it."

*(To schedule a visit to see the BLACK+GRAY Honda Motorcycle Collection, call (845) 424-4505 or visit [www.blackandgray.com](http://www.blackandgray.com).)* **RW**



*(Above) Grasso does all his own restoration work and designed this free-standing engine test stand.*

diculous," said Grasso. "A friend came in the other day and said, 'What are you doing?' I said, 'I'm cleaning these Honda bolts.'

"'Why don't you just put a new one in?' he asked. 'Honda bolts are very specific,' I said. 'There's certain markings on them.' So, I sandblast these bolts to put the original finish back on them, even the washers, everything. It's crazy. My goal, like I said, is to make them correct."

And Grasso doesn't just clean the bolts for his restorations. He does everything himself down to the engine work, the upholstery, the electronics, and the paint—sometimes paying hundreds of dollars to have a few quarts of perfectly matched paint produced.

"One time I sent a tank out to have some paint done on it, and they screwed it up," said Grasso. "Forget it. I have the capability to