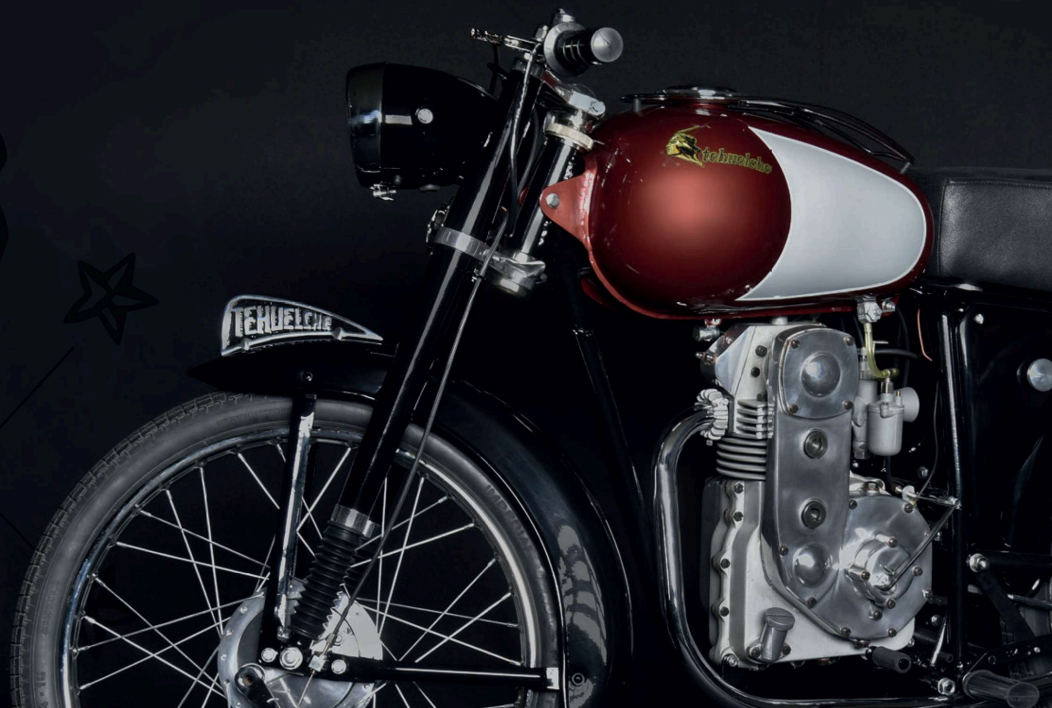


Vladimir Nekola

# *tehuvelche*

LA MOTOCICLETA / THE MOTORCYCLE





In the 1960s, an obscure motorcycle brand called Tehuelche dominated weekend races on dirt and paved circuits in Argentina. Despite fierce competition from larger manufacturers (Rumi 125, Ducati 100, Honda Benly Super Sport 125, Mondial, Sterzi, Puch and Zanella 100), the Tehuelche won the South American Championship in three categories: 75, 100 and 125 cc.



The Tehuelche dominated small-capacity circuit racing in Argentina in the 1960s

It had no real competition in South America until the more efficient two-stroke engines started appearing on the circuits. The challenge that the Tehuelche faced was the same as the one that eventually led to Honda pulling out of factory racing in the rest of the world, around the same time.

A Tehuelche catalog of their unique 75cc OHC roadster: the name is from an indigenous tribe of Argentina.

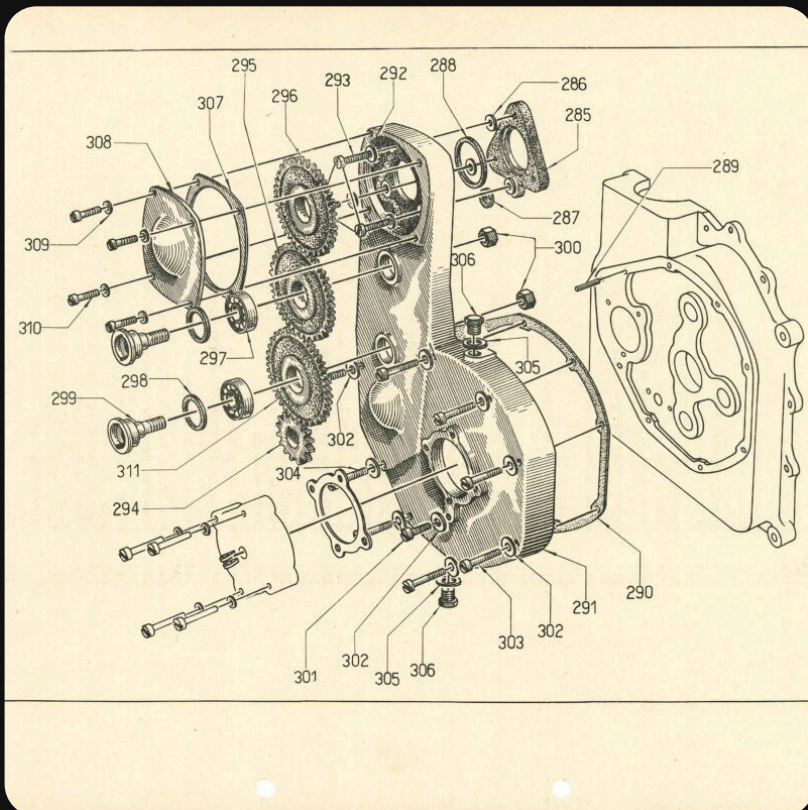


## TEHUELICHE, THE ARGENTINE MOTORCYCLE PAR EXCELLENCE

The architecture of the Tehuelche engine was different from any other engines manufactured in Argentina at that time. At the heart of the minimalist four-stroke all aluminum engine was a gear-driven overhead camshaft. This feature distinguished it from the rest of the motorcycles being made in Argentina. Another feature that makes it special is the lack of an oil pump.



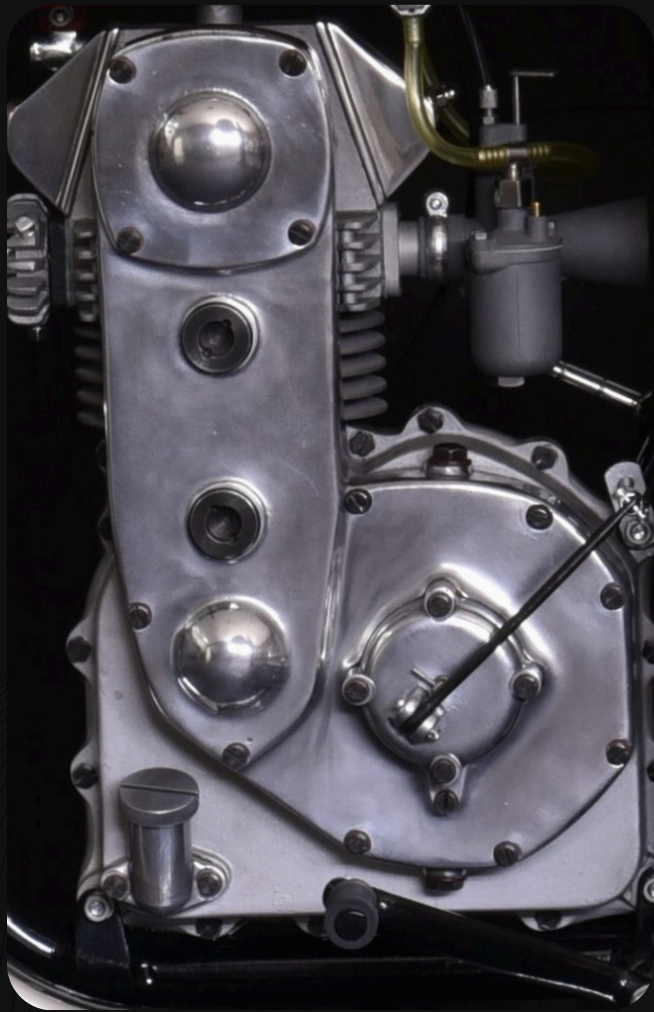
The Tehuelche was a lovely machine with plenty of mechanical interest.



An exploded view of the Tehuelche timing case, with gear-driven SOHC head.

Instead, it has a “spoon” at the tip of the connecting rod that lifted the oil and splashes it on the gear train and up to the camshaft.

With its three-speed gearbox, the engine could rev up to 6500 rpm and a maximum of 75 km (46 miles) an hour. A well-tuned 100 cc racing engine, with an added external oil pump could easily reach 11,000 rpms and a speed of 132 kms (82 miles) per hour.



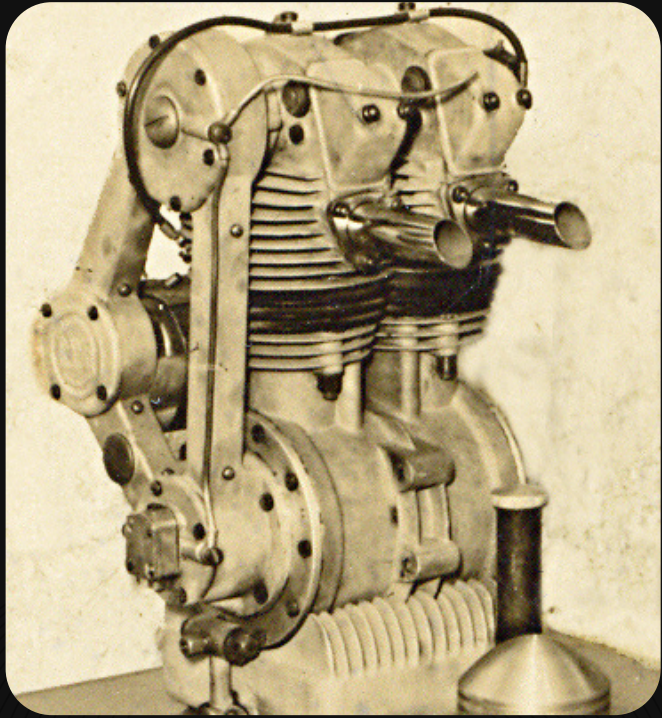
*The Tehuelche cam drive cover and primary case.*

At the end of the second World War, Argentina welcomed immigrants whose countries were suffering from economic and physical destruction. Many of these immigrants were also worried about a possible third World War, and Argentina was looking to populate a vast land full of resources. The Argentine government was especially keen to facilitate emigration from Spain and Italy. Three Italians with technical knowledge and skills to design and build motorcycle engines saw a unique opportunity to start a new life in the new world.

Giovanni Raffaldi, Carlo Preda and Roberto Fattorini left Piacenza in Northern Italy and arrived in Buenos Aires in April of 1948. Their first goal was to complete a prototype engine that they had started to design and build in Italy. Upon arrival, they rushed to finish a motorcycle which consisted of a four-stroke engine of 250 cc, overhead cam, with a separate gearbox, in the style of British motorcycles of the time. They intended to look for investors to support mass production.



*Raffaldi, Preda y Fattorini, recién llegados de Italia en la gran ola de migración italiana a Argentina después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial.*



*The prototype RPF twin-cylinder OHC engine of 1949.*

The prototype, called RPF (for Raffaldi, Preda and Fattorini) was presented officially to the government and the public in October of 1949 at the Argentine Industrial Metallurgical Exhibition in Bahia Blanca. The press and the public were enthusiastic about this new bike. Laudatory articles appeared in Argentine newspapers as well as in Piacenza showing the accomplishment of these three paisanos.

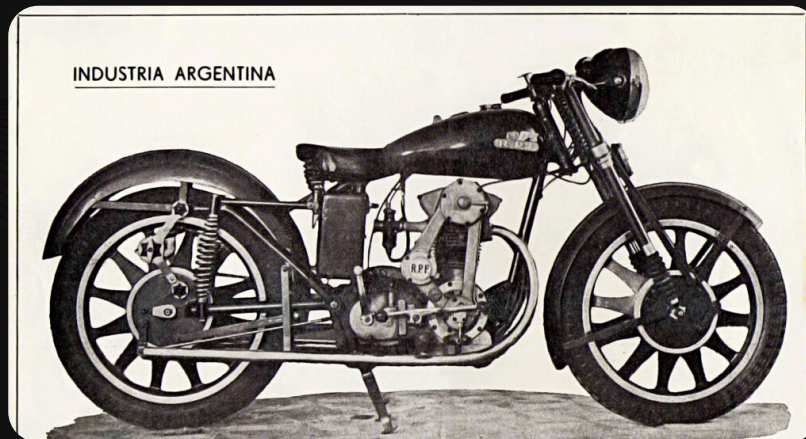
Juan Péron, president of Argentina at that time, was present at this event. The governor of Buenos Aires gave the Italians the Gold Medal and the Stimulus Award for having produced a motorcycle that was 100% Argentine. Peron was impressed with the three Italians' endeavor and personally invited Preda to write a proposal to mass-produce the bike. A proposal was submitted but it was eventually rejected.



*The press was enthusiastic about the new prototype from the recent Italian immigrants. [*

Four reasons may stand behind the refusal for financial support. First, none of the three partners had any connections inside the government. In addition, their political tendencies were not compatible with that of the government. The second reason was due to corruption; as the proposal moved from one ministry or department to another, the budget was increased to benefit individuals. As a result, the total cost of the project got so inflated that it became impracticable. Third, the gearbox and magneto had to be imported from Italy or England, which also complicated matters. Finally, the proposal was submitted for the production of only 30 bikes a month! Quite naïve thinking by the partners, especially when there was a need for thousands of bikes a month.

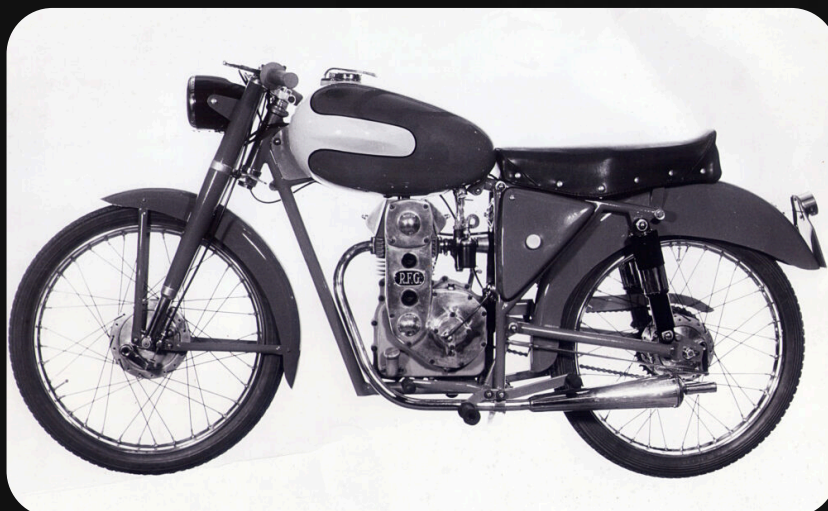
When the project came to a standstill and the partners realized that the prototype, RPF, had no future, the partnership was dissolved. Raffaldi and Fattorini moved to Rosario in the province of Santa Fe, where they had friends. There, Raffaldi started to design and manufacture another engine, this time a 125 cc two-stroke. This engine would be more practical for a utilitarian motorcycle. However, this project also came up short, again for lack of financial support. As had been the economic state of many Italian immigrants before them, Raffaldi and Fattorini were financially ruined.



*An all-Argentinian 250cc OHC twin-cylinder motorcycle with cast aluminum wheels – very advanced specification for 1949.*

## **¡TEHUELICHE!**

Not having lost their motivation, the two Italians moved once again and settled in San Martín, Buenos Aires, an area that had a substantial community of Italian immigrants. They found work in different factories in order to support their families since they were almost bankrupt from their previous projects. In their scarce free time, in 1954, Raffaldi and Fattorini started fixing motorcycles for the neighborhood. At the same time, Raffaldi began working at a new project that was realistically closer to what the country needed for utilitarian transportation. It was a 50 cc four-stroke, all aluminum engine, with a single overhead cam.



*The next project by our Italian heroes: the prototype that became the Tehuelche.*

The engine was mounted on a minimalist chassis and started participating in local races as a way of advertising and attracting potential investors. After two years, the owner of a refrigerator manufacturing company was interested in this little motorcycle as a way of diversifying his business. It was his way of dealing with aggressive competition from numerous producers of refrigerators. In contrast, there were very few motorcycle factories, all of which produced bikes under license from Italy and Germany. This refrigerator company was called Tehuelche, an indigenous tribe from Patagonia, and thus the motorcycle by that name was born. In 1956, Raffaldi, along with Ollero, owner of the factory, agreed to convert the bike from a racing to a street utilitarian motorcycle that would allow two people to ride with sufficient and reliable power. This required an increase in displacement to 75 cc, easily resolved by enlarging the cylinder bore.

**YA ESTAN EN LAS RUTAS DEL PAIS**

las extraordinarias motocicletas  
**"TEHUELCHÉ"**  
 totalmente argentinas

CON 3 PATENTES NACIONALES REVALIDADAS EN EL EXTRANJERO

**características principales**

**MOTOR EXTRA**  
 TIPO CUADRADO 4 cilindros, diámetro 46, carrera 41.  
 POTENCIA 4.75 H.P.  
 VALVULAS A la cabeza, comandadas por engranajes.  
 ALIBO DE LEVANT. A la cabeza, comandado por engranajes.  
 LIBREACION. Automática a los 1800 y freno.  
 CAMBIOS. Con cambio manual.  
 BIELA. Armada con nailles y bujes conbaltitos.  
 CIGUELA. Desequilibrada.  
 TRANSMISION. Primario con engranajes.  
 ENGRANAJES. Armados en buche de acero.  
 CAMBIO. En buche de 3 velocidades con selector automático a la izquierda.  
 INCRUCION. No engrana con buche de indicación exterior.  
 LIBREACION. Con aceite en el cárter.  
 CILINDRO. De tubo de acero de alta resistencia.  
 PISTON. A expansión de gran diámetro con flexión variable.  
 SUSPENSION. Anterior telescópica, posterior con horquilla motolera y amortiguadores telescópicos hidráulicos.

**75 cc.**  
 Todos los puntos, rotores  
 con amortiguadores hidráulicos.

**VELOCIDAD.** 75 Km. P. H.  
**CONSUMO.** 30 lts. CON 1 LITRO DE NAFTA  
 GOMAS DE 18 x 2 1/2

**TERUELCHÉ** O'CONNOR 1321-01 1 y 2 132-2073  
 VILLA BASTIENNE Prov. de Bs. Aires

Con el firme propósito de brindar al usuario la máxima garantía de atención, las Agencias designadas para la venta de la motocicleta TEHUELCHÉ, han sido cuidadosamente seleccionadas entre las firmas de mayor capacidad y experiencia en el ramo. Todas ellas cuentan con organizaciones capaces de prestar un servicio técnico eficiente y la inmediata provisión de los repuestos necesarios en cualquier punto del país.

*Initial advertising for the new Tehuelche motorcycle.*

The process involved tooling, searching for suppliers, planning of assembly and eventual production. By February of 1957 a completed Tehuelche motorcycle was presented to the public, again at the Argentine Industrial and Metallurgical Exhibition, this time in Palermo, Buenos Aires. The brand-new bike was met with great enthusiasm for its design and look. But people also recognized it with pride as a fully Argentine bike, designed and created locally unlike the other popular motorcycles that were manufactured in the country, but all under license from other countries, including DKW, Gilera, Puma and Siambretta.

## THE MARKET COMPETITION

In 1957, among the four factories that were producing motorcycles under license, the most important ones were Puma from Germany and Gilera from Italy. The Puma was a licensed copy of the 2-stroke 98 cc Göricke that began manufacturing in Argentina in 1952 and continued until the beginning of 1960. Puma was the chosen name for this licensed motorcycle after the South American feline. More than 110,000 hit the market in less than 10 years. The Gilera, with the same name as its 4-stroke 150 cc original in Italy, was also readily available; in 1957 when the first Tehuelches were sold, there were already 10,000 Gileras on the road.

*Sale de fábrica la*

# GILERA

## N° 10.000



GILERA ARGENTINA S. A. C. e I. en su planta industrial de la localidad de Tristán Suárez, acaba de producir la **GILERA N° 10.000**. Tan alta cifra es reveladora de una industria bien cimentada, dotada del adecuado apoyo técnico y en constante expansión.

ENCENDIDO **ATMA**  
NEUMATICOS **PIRELLI**

**REPUESTOS ASEGURADOS**  
GILERA ha ido produciendo, al mismo tiempo, los repuestos necesarios, de manera que cada motocicleta que sale de la fábrica tiene asegurada la ininterumpida continuidad de su marcha.

**LA GILERA 10.000 ES DONADA AL HOSPITAL DE NIÑOS**  
Como un simbólico homenaje de los "gileristas", GILERA ARGENTINA ha donado a la Cooperadora del Hospital de Niños la GILERA 10.000, para que su producción se destine a la adquisición de instrumental y equipos para la Sala de Cirugía Cardiovascular.

# GILERA ARGENTINA

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Artes Graficas MODERNA - Paraguay 823 - Bs. As.

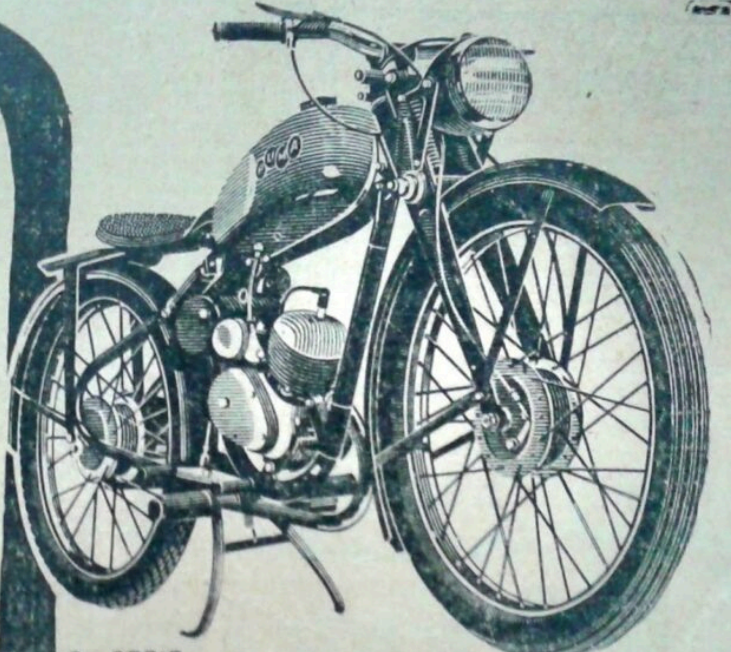
*Gilera was a huge name in Argentina in the 1960s, and a primary export target for the Italian brand.*

**LA SOLUCION IDEAL**

**MOTO**

# PUMA

**PARA VIAJAR, TRABAJAR Y PASEAR !**



2a. SERIE

*Puma was the name chosen for the 98 cc Göricke built under license in Argentina.*

The production of Tehuelches in the refrigerator factory lasted only two years. One reason for this short life was the competition from the bikes made under license that had support from abroad. The huge annual inflation of 200%, with no support either from the local government nor from foreign licensing factories, became a major challenge for Tehuelche. To add to the financial challenge, Ollero, the owner of the refrigerator factory, had racked up a significant debt to a private industrial bank.



*The blessing and curse of investor funding; a Board of Directors with its own agenda.*

UA government policy that prohibited the importation of motorcycles could have helped the Tehuelche production and sales. But a few devious businessmen figured out how to cheat the system that allowed spare parts to be imported and started to bring in entire motorcycles that were dismantled and declared as spare parts! This gave these importers a tremendous advantage over local industries that were in difficulty because of the lack of raw materials, strikes, inflation, etc. With much desired foreign bikes being available on the market, the Tehuelche once again was in deep trouble.

One of the biggest importers of these "spare parts" was Motormovil, owned by Natalio Cortes who happened to also be the owner of the bank that carried Ollero's debt. In addition, he was the president of the newly formed Chamber of Motorcycle and Related Industries that protected their interests. The easiest way to settle the debt that Ollero could not pay back was by handing over the Tehuelche section of his factory to Cortes! Raffaldi and Fattorini became part of Motormovil.

**HECHA PARA TRIUNFAR!**

**TEHUELCHE**

la motocicleta que siempre triunfa cuando se exige: **75 cc**  
**4 TIEMPOS**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Grat"</li> <li>• "Praga"</li> <li>• Motor Extra</li> <li>• cuadro, Unión en el mundo</li> <li>• Agil</li> <li>• Desplazamiento: sobre montañas sobre volutas a bollitas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Andar</li> <li>• Descansada:</li> <li>• Suspensión anterior</li> <li>• Motor</li> <li>• posterior con</li> <li>• horquilla mecánica</li> <li>• y amortiguadores</li> <li>• hidráulicos.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Largo"</li> <li>• "Bivento"</li> <li>• Corre 50 kms.</li> <li>• con un litro</li> <li>• de nafta.</li> <li>• VELOCIDAD</li> <li>• 75 Kms. p/h.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potentes</li> <li>• "Móviles"</li> <li>• Válvulas y árbol de levas</li> <li>• a la</li> <li>• casta.</li> </ul>
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*Motormovil took control of Tehuelche as a way to settle debts.*

## TEHUELCHÉ IN MOTORMOVIL

At the beginning of 1960 Tehuelche was on its way to be manufactured in the Motormovil factory.

This same factory imported “spare parts” of Legnano, Bicicletas Legnano, DEMM and Garelli.

Tehuelche was the only bike that was completely created in Argentina, and that was the attraction point for Natalio Cortes, the owner of Motormovil. With the Tehuelche, he showed the government that he had a local product. By this time the government had become aware of the trickery with the importation of “spare parts” and was beginning to put an end to it by imposing various regulations. Cortes continued fighting this development with little success.



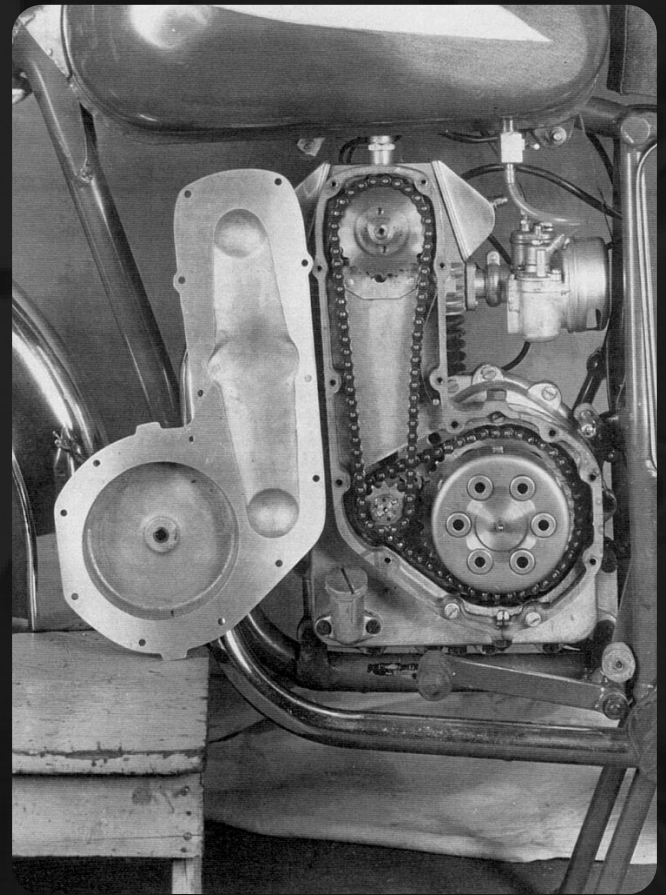
*The 1960 Tehuelche, restored by Vladimir Nekola.*

By 1961, Raffaldi and Fattorini, tired of dealing with the careless approach to production of the Tehuelche as well as failures to receive payments, left the factory. They settled back in the original workshop that they had in San Martín where they had repaired motorcycles, and Raffaldi had produced the first prototype that became the Tehuelche. Meanwhile, Motormovil continued making Tehuelches, paying royalties to the two Italian partners.



*1964 Tehuelche/Legnano*

Basically, the model stayed the same over the years with some minor aesthetic changes. Sport and Super Sport models appeared in 1962, with the only difference between the two being the color scheme and the inclusion of a speedometer that the Sport model lacked. By 1963, a Tehuelche-Legnano model was introduced. Again, the differences were minor: a different color scheme and a different shaped gas tank. In 1964, and for the first time, the engine was modified: the overhead cam was controlled by a chain instead of the regular gears in the original model. Also, a multidisc clutch was introduced instead of the original single disc. This model lasted only six months because Motormovil closed and that was the end of the Tehuelche production.



With a new cam chain, multi-disc clutch, and new oil pump, the 1964 Tehuelche was up to date, barring its 3-speed gearbox.

The competition from inexpensive two-strokes like the Puma was simply too much for Tehuelche to survive.

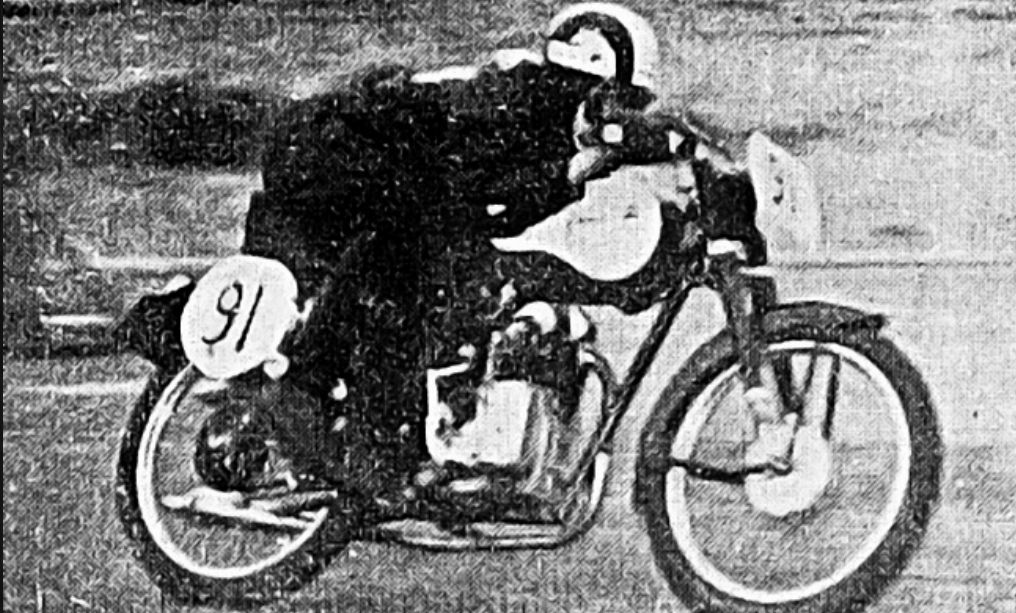
### The demise of Motormovil

When the government passed legislation in 1962 stopping the importation of “spare parts”, there were still containers full of these parts sitting in the Buenos Aires port. So, foreign bikes continued to appear on the market resulting in tough competition for the Tehuelche. Eventually, foreign bikes disappeared from the market and this could have provided an advantage for the factory that produced a totally local motorcycle, and there was no marketing reason to stop production. It could have been one of the few bikes available. However, production was not profitable enough for Motormovil. The bike became obsolete – the engine was outdated; customers wanted something more durable and easier to fix, like the two-stroke engines found in the Puma Cuarta Serie (with a 125 Sachs engine). The Tehuelche was no more.

The number of Tehuelches produced in the seven years of its lifetime is just an estimate because factory records do not exist. The lack of continuity in production in both factories makes the estimate even more imprecise. Based on interviews with surviving factory employees 50 years later, it is estimated that 1,200 to 1,300 Tehuelches were produced in the original refrigerator company, 3,000 to 4,000 units came from the Motormovil phase. In contrast, 11,000 motorcycles were imported as “spare parts” in 1960 alone. These numbers explain why so few Tehuelches exist today.

## THE RACING COMPETITION

As mentioned, the Tehuelche prototype was born as a racing motorcycle; so when the bike hit the market later as a utilitarian machine, many customers immediately tuned their bikes for racing. The first recorded participation of a Tehuelche in a race was in November 1957 at the Buenos Aires racetrack. This was an international race for the 125 cc class. No record can be found about the performance of the Tehuelche in this race.



*Tehuelches where they excelled: racing.*

Tehuelches participated in many other races around the country, mainly on dirt circuits. According to personal accounts Tehuelche outperformed the competition in other classes besides 75cc. Riders who were aiming to become racers quickly realized that the Tehuelche was the motorcycle to have. The next racing record appears for a race in June 1958 for the Premio de la Industria (Industry Award). The particularity of this race was that only strictly standard motorcycles were allowed. Tehuelche won first, second and fourth place. The winner's average of 74.826 km/h showed that this little machine could reach a remarkable maximum speed of more than 80 km/h.



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EN BUSCA  
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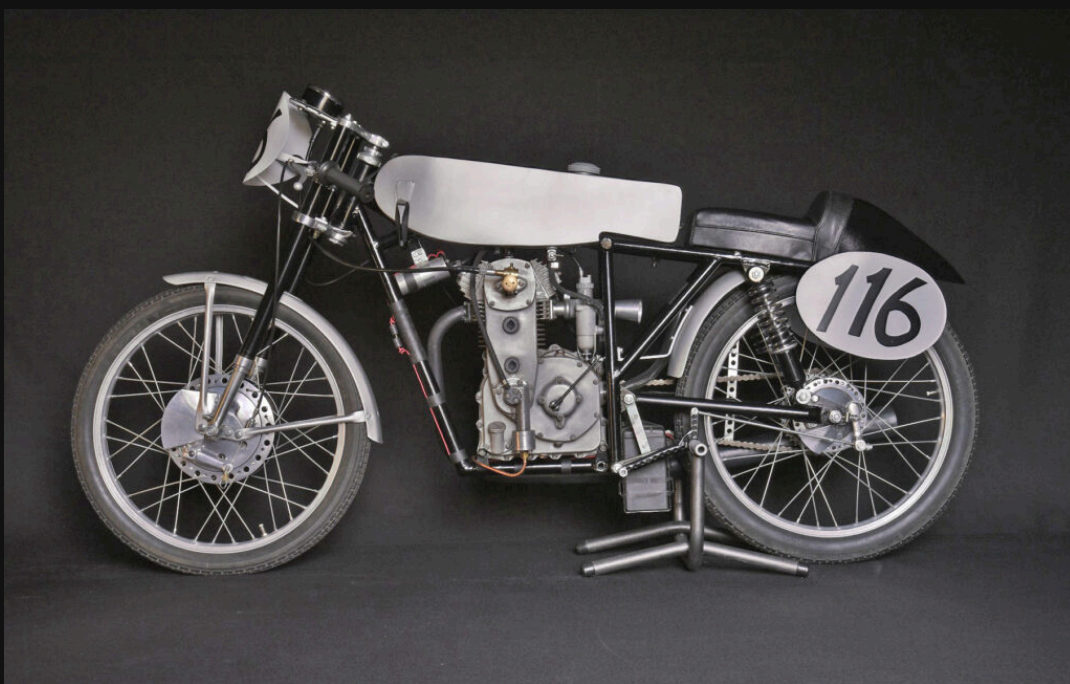
*Raffaldi/Fattorini modified Tehuelches for racing, with great success.*

The next milestone was in April 1959 in the First Open South American Motorcycle Championship in Rio Negro province including local and international participants from five countries, with more than a hundred motorcycles in different categories. Tehuelche won in the 75, 100 and 125 cc categories! These motorcycles were tuned by none other than Raffaldi and Fattorini. The Tehuelche factory took notice of that and decided to add a sticker on the gas tank commemorating such a feat.



*Tehuelche #116, winner of two national championships and two runner-ups.*

After this well publicized achievement, another pair of tuners, the Segatto brothers, made their mark with the Tehuelche #116 that in over eight years won many races, two national championships and two runners-up. By this time the displacement of the racing Tehuelches had reached 100 cc; the 75 cc category having been discontinued.



*The racing special Tehuelche, fully kitted with a 100cc barrel and cylinder head by Juan Raffaldi.*

This new displacement became available thanks to a racing kit created by Juan Raffaldi that was offered to Tehuelche owners who were interested in racing. This kit consisted of 100 cc piston and cylinder, an oversized cylinder head, a much-needed external oil pump and a multidisc clutch. The rest of the engine remained the same. Raffaldi thought about adding a fourth gear but didn't, due to the excessive cost as well as the fact that in order to be homologated as a racing engine a minimum of 50 units had to have been produced. And that was way over the two partners' modest capabilities.



*The Tehuelche in its happy racing days.*

By 1967, at the end of the Tehuelche's racing career, the bikes reached a maximum speed of 132 km/h and 11,200 rpms, a significant improvement from the original 75 km/h and 6,500 rpms. But this level of performance was not enough to compete against the more efficient two-stroke engines that had started winning races in Argentina as well as around the world. The four-stroke engine was quickly becoming obsolete for racing. This marked the end of the Tehuelche which remained dormant until I started researching the story of this motorcycle, and after 20 years finally produced a book that covers the history, racing performance, and characteristics of the bike, plus interviews with people who worked at the factory, racers and bike owners.



*The Tehuelche transfer touting its achievements in the South American championship in 75cc, 100cc, and 125cc categories.*

## THE TEHUELCHE GOES TO MOTOGIRO D'ITALIA 2024 AND 2025!

In 2024, 75 years after its first predecessor appeared, a motorcycle called Tehuelche stood out in one of the most important motorcycle events in Europe, the Motogiro d'Italia. This event consists of six stages covering 1600 kms. Two friends and I took our three Tehuelches, representing our CMACC (Club Motos Antiguas y Clasicas Cordoba) to participate in this grueling event. The Tehuelches didn't win any prizes or arrive first in any of the stages, but they did finish. In fact, they finished the race in admirable working state, something that cannot be said of many of the other bikes that participated, all of which were bigger, and many more modern than the Tehuelche. At 75cc it was the smallest displacement engine among the 180 participating bikes. Because the Tehuelche was from 1957, it entered the event in the most prestigious category, Rievocazione Storica (Historic Reenactment).



*It fit in a bicycle box! Shipping internationally is always a game...*



*The three riders Motogiro 2024*



*Vladimir at the top of the Apeninos*



*Norberto at the lead with Gustavo and Vladimir following*

In 2025 our team decided to return to Motogiro with our Tehuelches, with one variation: Vladimir's daughter, Ludmila, would be one of the riders and Vladimir the team mechanic. For the second time, the organizers of Motogiro were very supportive and welcoming. By this point in time participants and organizers clearly knew that these motorcycles were made in Argentina. The fact that the designers were Italian emigrants made the connection even stronger



*Vladimir Nekola's daughter Ludmilla rode a Tehuelche in the Motogiro d'Italia 2025.*

#### **THE TEHUELCHÉ DREAM COME TRUE**

Reviving the Tehuelche by writing a book about it, restoring the bikes that appear in that book and showing what it can achieve to an international crowd in its creators' birthplace was a dream come true. What else could one ask? Only one thing: that a Tehuelche is exhibited in a public museum outside of Argentina. Highlights of Motogiro 2025 were visits to various museums on the way, including Museo Officine Benelli and the Museo Nazionale del Motociclo. As it happens, arrangements are being finalized to have a Tehuelche added to the collection at the Museo Nazionale del Motociclo in Rimini, Italy! The dream is coming true!



*Vladimir Nekola is a motorcycle historian and collector living in Cordoba Argentina, and a specialist in the Tehuelche brand.*