



Alan's Tralla S as displayed at the Two Stroke Show in Port Charlotte, Fla., in February 2022.

# BULTACO

## The Forgotten Early Racers

Story by Alan Singer

When Bultacos are mentioned, most think of motocross or trials machines, perhaps of enduros. Some may remember the Metralla sports bike. And a very few will recall the TSS road racers which, for a brief time, put the Spanish manufacturer firmly in the world championship conversation.

Among even the most ardent Bultaco enthusiasts, few know that TSS stands for Tralla Super Sport. The first Bultaco, famously born on Señor Bulto's farm in 1938 was the Tralla, a 125cc road model with (for the time) sporting performance.

The progression from this modest beginning to the emergence of the TSS four years later is the missing link in the company's history, a period barely touched upon in any Bultaco histories. The purpose of this article is to shed some light on the men and motorcycles that first established Bultaco's sporting credentials.



Johnny Grace finishing Bultaco's first race at the GP of Barcelona. Photo inscribed and signed by FX Bulto.

### Looking back

Though a long-time Bultaco enthusiast and minor collector, I too knew nothing of the pre-TSS road racers. In August of 2021 I was fortunate enough to happen upon the chance to purchase a very rare Tralla Sport (TS) from Igualada, Spain's Pons family collection. This spurred me to find out more about the TS model, its development and the men who rode them.

Less than six months after the introduction of the Tralla, Bultaco established a race shop in a garage on the farm. Johnny Grace, a Spanish speaking native of Gibraltar, followed Bulto out of Montesa to assist in founding the new company. A successful racer, he became the de facto racing director. Working with Grace was a young factory technician, Francisco Valera, known as "Bambi." Together they modified a standard Tralla, adding a new carburetor and other changes. This first version retained the stock lights. This became the first iteration of the TS. It is thought that fewer than a half dozen early TSs were built in 1959.

On June 19 of that year Grace finished second at the GP of Barcelona, Bultaco's first race, which was a very successful beginning for the new company and its nascent race

team. Later in the year at the 24 hours of Montjuic, Grace was third, behind Bulto's nephew Juan Soler Bulto. The pairs' 125cc bikes were only beaten by a 600cc BMW.

In 1960 Mauricio Aschi, a young factory rider for Montesa, joined the Bultaco team. He was joined by Juan "Tiger" Sobrepera, the owner of Bultaco's service center in Sabadell.

To support these riders, a new version of the TS was developed. Still retaining lighting, this edition had increased power from porting changes and a tuned exhaust. This work was rewarded by further successes in that year's races.

Grace again had a great race, finishing just .36 seconds behind Luigi Taveri's MV Agusta at the Spanish GP. Bambi and Tiger finished eighth overall and first 125 at that year's Montjuic 24 hour. They were proclaimed the 1960 Endurance Champions of Spain.

### Advancing design

For 1961, the race shop produced the final and most advanced version of the TS. Purely a racer, it featured a tuned exhaust, lighter fenders and a racing seat. It made no pretension of being a street motorcycle. This was a pure racing machine, born of some competitors complaints that the TS should not be considered a production bike. There were probably a half dozen examples constructed. The last couple were actually built after Tralla production had ceased. These were assembled using B2 (Bultaco 155) frames rather than the original B1.

Aschi led off 1961 with a win at Gran Canaria, followed by

COURTESY JOHN GRACE, JR. (TOP)



Mauricio Aschi wearing the victor's wreath at the 1961 Spanish GP at Circuit Jarama (left). Part of a tribute article written upon his death at age 80 in 2020 (above).



Two photos from Ramon Torras' historic 1962 run to Bultaco's first national championship. Torras was Bultaco's fastest, most successful racer of the early 1960s. The Tralla S in repose at home (below).



a great victory winning the Sport Nacional class in the Spanish GP at Circuit Jarama. Sobrepera took on an aspiring young racer apprentice at his shop. Later that year they shared a Tralla Sport to win the 125 class at the Warsage (Belgium) FIM endurance race. It was Tigers last race win and the first for Ramon Torras.

Torras would go on to become one of Spain's greatest racers. In early 1962 he delivered one last victory for the TS, winning the RFME 125. Later that year, he adopted the newly developed TSS and went on to international success before his untimely death in 1965. Sadly, his mentor Juan Sobrepera died shortly after. Of the other pioneers, their futures were far better. Grace passed in 1998 having dedicated his life to the brand. Bambi too remained with Bultaco, serving for years as their off road competition director. After the factory closed in 1984, he spent some time doing restorations for the Pons', before retiring. Mauricio Aschi died in 2020, aged 80. He was eulogized with numerous tribute articles in the Spanish press.

With the ascendance of the TSS, the TSs were relegated to club racing and rather quickly disappeared from sight. Hundreds of TSS race bikes



FOTO GUAPAS ARCHIVE (TOP)

This page from a Spanish periodical (right) recounts the successes of Juan Sopropera "Tiger" and Ramon Torres (note the misspelling), and includes an advertisement for Tiger's shop. A portion of the Pons' collection (bottom left) and the TS being prepared for shipment to the U.S. (bottom left).

were built in a variety of sizes, some even water cooled. Riders such as world champion Ginger Molloy made them legendary and popular with collectors and vintage racers today.

Of the TS it is thought that about 16-18 were built over the three season span. The number remaining is not known. My late 1961 model is thought to be one of three left, the only one outside of Europe.

A small number of motorcycles, ridden by mostly forgotten pilots. But without them, there would not have been a TSS, and perhaps even the young Bultaco brand might not have survived. **MC**

*Alan Singer is an old fart who has been playing with Bultacos for half a century in his home-based MotoEuro Garage in Jacksonville, Florida. Some of his builds have won awards and been seen in enthusiast magazines. His pals remain unimpressed. He continues to seek information on the Tralla Sport.*

"TIGER" (Bultaco) 1.º absoluto en la Subida en Cuesta de Santa Cruz de Olorde  
Sensacional escalada de Ramón Torres sobre "Ducson"



vieron que soportar la lluvia durante toda la mañana.  
El vencedor absoluto fué el sabadellense «Tiger» con una Bultaco 175 c.c. de competición, en una subida muy segura y sin riesgos. En segundo lugar por orden de cronos se clasificó su Ducson de 65 c.c. el cual realizó una escalada extraordinaria, acoplándose perfectamente a su montura.  
En esta carrera debutaban los nuevos velocimotoceros Mymas los cuales realizaron una demostración de sus posibilidades, venciendo en la categoría turismo de serie hasta 75 c.c., por obra de Francisco Fernández.  
En la categoría hasta 125 c.c. turismo de serie se desdecadenó una violenta lucha, entre los defensores de las marcas Bultaco, Montesa y Lube-Renn venciendo el bultacoista Ramón Costa, que además consiguió el tercer mejor tiempo de la mañana. Entró en segundo lugar Rocamora (Montesa) cuarto mejor tiempo de la clasificación general, el cual realizó una brillante subida. Es de destacar en esta categoría la magnífica actuación del debutante «Toti» (Montesa) que hizo una escalada decidida y valiente, pese a su reducidas posibilidades, ya que subió con una bitubo, logrando mejor crono que los conocidos Esteve, Boada, «Nervos, Amat, etc.

Torres no se cayó con el Ducson.  
Resultado: un segundo menos que el vencedor absoluto. Esbozaburo

El día 28 del mes pasado se celebró la carrera en cuesta de Santa Cruz de Olorde, organizada por el Club Molins de Rey. La subida reunió una nutrida participación, pese a la ausencia de varias figuras, por coincidir dicha prueba con el Gran Premio Internacional de Madrid. El tiempo mereció brillantez a esta prueba, ya que tanto los participantes como los espectadores tu-

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ALBERT PONS (2)