

Classic
RIDE

Moto Guzzi V7 Sports & Mk 1 Le Mans



BRAINS & BRAWN

Guzzi's V7 Sports and Mk 1 Le Mans look similar and have much in common - until you ride them. Dai Griffiths found one behaved like the perfect gentleman. The other was a lager lout. Jim Greening took the pictures.

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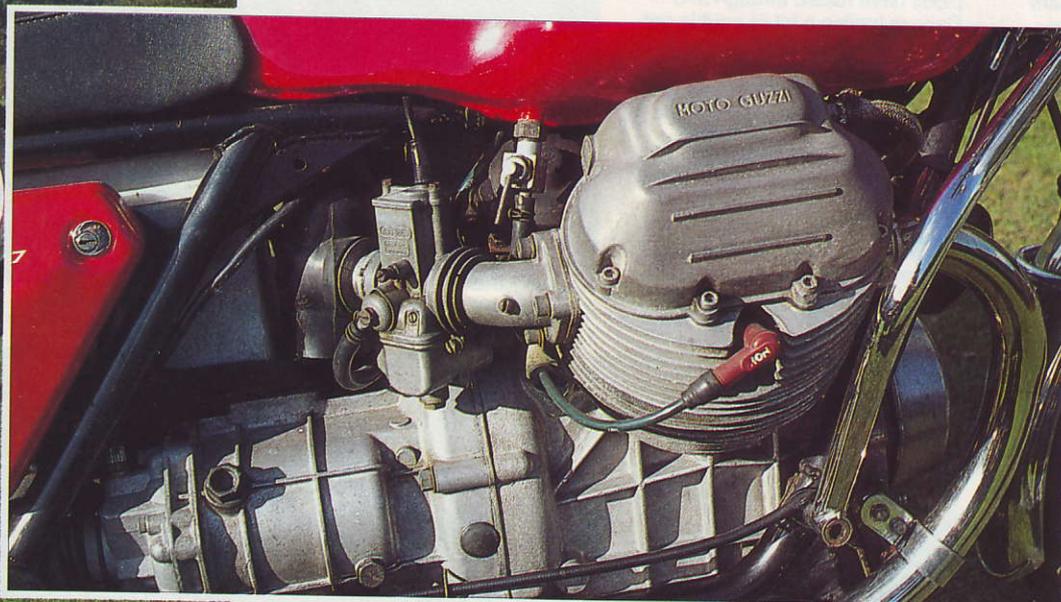
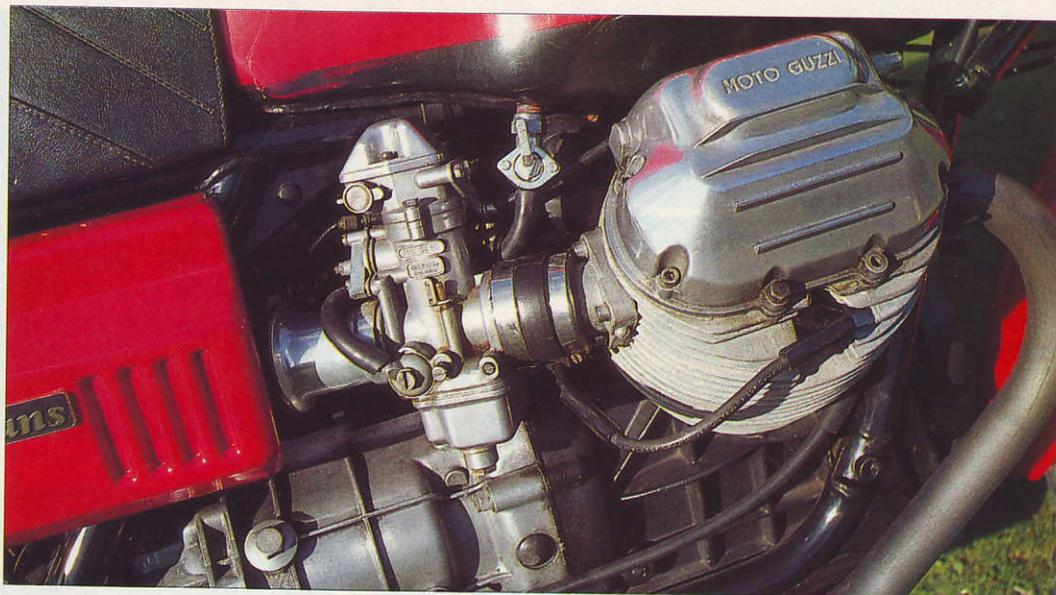


V7 Sport

SOFT as nails. It sounds a funny way to describe this bike, but it's accurate. You can whiffle around all day in top gear, but drop two cogs to third, wind the throttle open and it kicks in hard - not with the kick-in-the-kidneys explosion of a modern bike admittedly, but hard enough to have you wondering if the speedo is telling lies. It isn't, but it is marked in kph which doesn't help!

The engine doesn't sound hurried even when spinning hard. However, as the revs rise so does the typical Guzzi clatter. It lets you know things are happening.

Show it a corner and it peels in



The smaller VT motor (left) will out accelerate its 850 stalemate above.

far quicker than any of my later Guzzis and, having a smaller engine, there isn't so much torque reaction from the shaft.

Changing lines and changing road surfaces refused to upset the bright red Guzzi. The New Forest road I chose was perfect for testing the V7 Sport - the only problem was a pony that had decided to graze on the verge.

It's debatable as to who was watching the other most closely. I'm no great fan of horsemeat and this wasn't my bike, so a little more restraint than usual was called for.

I have to admit that I wish it was my name in the log book. I know you've heard that comment many, many times but the V7 Sport has been top of my most-wanted list since I first saw one.

Mind you, the day didn't start that brilliantly. I'd arranged to meet both Dario Tonutti, owner of the V7 and Trevor Wilson, owner of the Le Mans, at Dario's. Then it was on to the New Forest to meet up with the photographer.

I'd borrowed Dario's 850T (at his insistence!) so (he said) that we'd all turn up in fire engine red

and chrome. Actually, I think it was because my Myvanwy II is looking seriously scruffy and Dario didn't want to be seen with her! We wheeled the bikes out and set off. The V7 lasted half a mile.

"All the electrics died," said Dario as I pulled over. As the magazine's resident electrical expert, I couldn't fail to appreciate the irony of the situation.

All the fuses were intact and I was beginning to think we had an aborted test when I burnt my fingers on one. Two seconds later I was holding up a fuse that had melted on the underside and was failing to make contact. We undid the sidepanel on the 850T, whipped out a spare fuse and were back on the road in minutes.

The V7 is a low and sleek

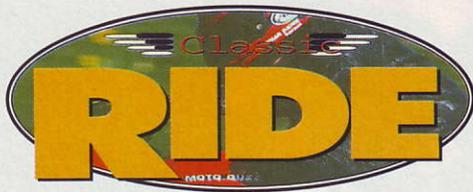
motorcycle. It even feels small for a Guzzi having a seat height of only 29.5 inches. The swan-neck clip-ons help on the comfort front too, being infinitely adjustable in height from full flat-on-the-tank boy racer style to dignified sit-up-and-beg touring. They also pivot from front to rear and can be adjusted in minutes with the turn of an Allen key. It is a great pity that, with the introduction of the S3, the swan-necks were dropped in favour of more conventional clip-ons.

The ignition switch is mounted on the frame forward of the fuel tank cutout. I gave the two 30mm VHB Dell'Ortos three quick twists to fill their throats from the accelerator pumps and turned the key.

A familiar metallic crash came from the gearbox as the starter motor engaged. Some things haven't changed. The engine caught very quickly and settled down into that lovely off-beat syncopation of a 90 degree V-twin. I'm just about to try to put it into gear with the brake pedal when Dario reminded me: "The gearbox is on the other side. And it's up-for-down."



All Guzzi's the same? No way!



Moto Guzzi V7 Sports & Mk 1 Le Mans

BRAINS & BRAWN

Great. When was the last time I rode a bike with that set up? Coincidence reared its laughing head and reminded me that it was in fact Dario's son Guido's Royal Enfield Bullet about eight years ago. I chuckled to myself and hooked the exceptionally long gear lever up into first.

The gear and brake levers on a V7 Sport are interchangeable for left and right foot change as the cross shafts stretch across the frame behind the gearbox. Both ends of the shafts are splined and the unused end of each is neatly covered with a rubber boot.

At first I wondered if I had selected a gear as the box slid home so quietly. I gently let out the clutch of the 82.5mm x 70mm 748cc engine and yes, the bike began to roll. Then I discovered you cannot hurry the gearchange on a V7 - the travel of the lever goes on for ever. But there is a reward at the end of each deliberate, unhurried movement for the gearbox is the sweetest I have encountered on a Guzzi. Each change is smooth and silky, and unaccompanied by horrid metallic noises.

Get it wrong and it is a different story. You get first-neutral-second-neutral-third-neutral - all the way up, and all the way down.

A slight whiff of throttle and the Sport duff-duffed out into the road in a well-mannered gentlemanly way. Once or twice the gearbox caught me out as its ratios are much wider than the later T-series and derivatives.

The factory claimed a top speed of 130mph. I know what you are thinking, but in the early Seventies a bike magazine actually speed-trapped one at 128mph. Just for once the discrepancy between fact and fiction was not that enormous. There is a pay-off, however. This is a 'fuel-cooled' engine with a thirst verging on that of a two-stroke. Guzzi themselves say 32mpg is all you will get, even on a good day.

"Push it hard and it drops to 27-28mpg," said Dario. For a 750? You've got to remember that at that time the first oil crisis hadn't hit and the answer from all the factories to demands for more speed was to cram more fuel into the cylinders.

I chuntered along taking in the scenery for a while, getting used to the unfamiliar gearbox and

enjoying the soft but determined thuds coming from the silencers.

The bike is temporarily equipped with after-market silencers as the original shark-gill pipes have rusted through and Dario is having a bit of trouble getting replacements.

"Every now and then Silentium produce a batch of them," he said, "but it is every now and then and if you don't keep your ear to the ground you've had it. The last lot was made two years ago."

A real shame, as there is nothing to beat them visually.

Twisting the throttle hard changed the pleasant duff-duff to a hard edged roar and the bike took off with a willingness that sur-



The V7's swan-necked bars are multi adjustable.



The Le Mans has a 'take-no-prisoners' riding position.



prised me. Despite the smaller engine, it will out-accelerate the Mk1 Le Mans with no trouble, and the carburation on this bike was well-sorted. So was the suspension. So much so that I never even thought about it.

Dario and I are similar in height and weight. I could not have set the Sport up better if it had been my bike.

Apart from the silencers, the only other obvious non-original parts on this machine are the rocker box covers which are from a later model. Dario has the "soup bowl" originals, but they need serious cleaning up before they can go back on.

The only thing that stopped me enjoying this ride more was the front brake. The twin leading shoe rear brake was superb with continuous feedback and enough power to lock the wheel without thinking. Not so the enormous double twin leading shoe front brake.

We fiddled with the balanced cables for a while and checked the link arms but spinning the front wheel revealed the ominous chuff-chuff of an ovalised brake drum. It did work reasonably well but nowhere near as good as it should.

And yes, I did once try to change gear with the back brake lever. As I wanted to go down a gear anyway the unexpected slowdown didn't matter as much as it might have done!

Mk1 Le Mans

HEAVY, heavy, heavy. After the Sport everything about this bike was heavy and brutal, from the weightlifter's clutch to the shot-putter's throttle, from the uncompromising board-hard seat to the almost solid suspension.

Even the colour scheme of red and black shouts "don't mess". The whole stance of the bike is defiant. Pure Italian machismo at its best.

At least I was back on familiar ground with the linked brakes, left-side gearchange and triple-disc set-up. But this time it was a long drop to the clip-ons mounted below the top yokes.

There's no compromise with the riding position on the Le Mans - it forces you exactly where it wants you and if you don't fit, tough.

Starting procedure is the same as the V7 Sport requiring three quick twists of the throttle to feed the gaping throats of the 34mm Dell'Ortos. Starting one of these from cold is a two-handed job - left hand to thumb the starter button and right hand to twist the throttle.

If the choke levers are worn and in the habit of snapping back to the off position, then starting a Le Mans from cold can best be described as a wrist-breaking experience. This one was still warm from the run out and caught easily.



Riding the Le Mans well demands strength and commitment.

The snarl and bark from the Armour Products exhaust system made loud promises and I really was looking forward to the direct comparison between this bike and the V7.

Shock number one. The clutch was so heavy my immediate reaction was to look for kinks or traps in the cable. There weren't any. This is normal for a Le Mans. Pushing the gearbox into first also required more pressure than was necessary on the Sport.

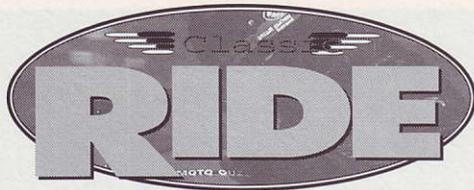
The second shock was the

strength of grip needed to turn the throttle. The vacuum set up in the venturi of those massive Dell'Ortos would be sufficient to hold the round slides open if very heavy return springs weren't fitted.

It was beginning to seem that the no compromise appearance was going to be matched by a no compromise ride. After the Sport, my immediate reaction was: "I don't think I like this."

Whereas the Sport rattled and whirred quietly at tickover, the bigger 83mm x 78mm 848cc Le

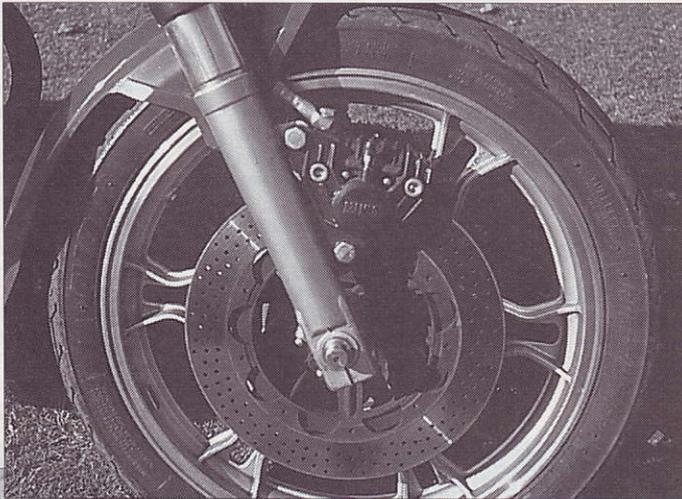




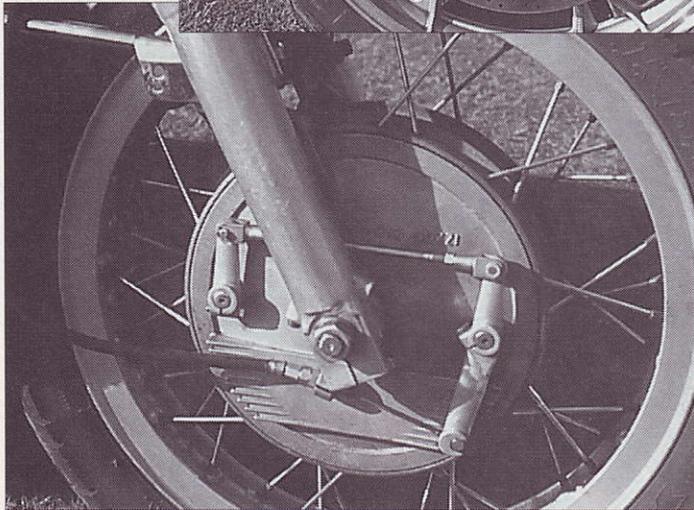
Moto Guzzi V7 Sports & Mk 1 Le Mans

BRAINS & BRAWN

The Le Mans front disc. Front and rear discs can be operated together with Guzzi's 'linked braking' system.



Below, the V7's drum front brake was poor - probably due to an oval drum.



Mans engine made its presence felt with each power stroke sending a distinct thud through the frame which kicked the whole bike from side to side.

At least the clutch didn't grab and we set off smoothly to do the first of a series of passes for the photographer.

The gearchange was a bit notchy compared to the Sport but it changed cleanly and in the lower rev range the power was predictable enough to try a few clutchless gearchanges, something I hadn't dared on the V7. No problem there.

Braking was easy and predictable too, the linked system operating on the rear and front nearside discs together to haul the bike down efficiently and without

fuss. The handlebar mounted master cylinder operates the front offside disc only and is more of a round-town-only or panic anchor than an oft-used brake in the style of Japanese bikes.

After running up and down the same stretch of road for a while I was beginning to feel the unrelenting pressure on my wrists and wondered how on earth Trevor rides this thing to Cleveland and

back without resort to splints or a chiropractor.

Once or twice the carburation fluffed and the bike missed a stroke.

"It's a pain in the ass, that," said Trevor. "Some mornings I can come out and it will tickover perfectly first time. Other days it just doesn't want to know. I'm told that fitting new carbs will cure the problem but not at the best part of £200 each! I do have the original exhaust system too, but it's a bit battered."

The Le Mans refused to change direction easily and everything I did required massive input. This brute liked straight lines and that was that. Until I grew accustomed to it, that is, and started using the throttle a little more freely.

As I got used to the weight and feel of the Le Mans the things that have endeared it to Guzzi riders the world over began to show through. It's a bike that thrives on being shown who's master. The more input you give it the better it responds.

I forgot the pain in my wrists and went hunting for the next set of bends. Around 5000rpm the engine sucks deeply and then grunts forward like a bull heading for a trespasser.

With the massive flywheel whirling round at the back of the crankshaft, the slow gearchanges don't much undermine the bike's forward progress. As the speed rose the wind pressure lifted more

of the weight off my wrists and the riding position became more tolerable. This was fun.

The Le Mans felt faster on acceleration than the Sport even though it wasn't. And though it had the better brakes it didn't corner so well.

There's a definite technique for setting a Guzzi up for a corner. You roll off the throttle until the bike drops just below cornering speed at the entrance to the bend and then roll the power back on again and drive the bike hard through it.

Following this practice, the Le Mans felt firmly planted on the road, but I was having to put far more effort into it than was required on the Sport. And I really wouldn't have liked to have found myself in a situation where it was necessary to change line partway through a bend.

The suspension couldn't have been more different either. On the Le Mans it was rock-hard. Potholes jarred badly, made worse by all the forward body weight, and I found myself picking lines that avoided holes in the road.

Yet, at the end of the day I was sorry to hand it back. It did respond well and was a lot of fun if you were willing to go ten rounds in a wrestling match.

The frame is basically the same as the production V7 Sport with a few minor mods such as a larger UJ support bearing. However, the Le Mans appears to carry a load more weight. In reality both bikes weigh in at 225kg (wet) and they share the same wheelbase at 1470mm. The difference in apparent bulk is merely an illusion, a by-product of the bigger capacity machine's lower clip-ons.

The Le Mans' fuel consumption is much, much better than the V7's, returning 50+ to the gallon even when worked hard.

Internally, apart from the difference in engine capacity, the Le Mans has its oilways cast into the sump whereas on the V7 they are part of the main crankcase casting.

The V7 runs timing gears but the Le Mans has a timing chain. The former are far more accurate but also far more expensive to produce. They will also fit all the later bikes. Both bikes carry spin-on cartridge-type oil filters inside the sump.

Lighting equipment is identical with a 14-volt, 20-amp Bosch alternator carried on the forward end of the crankshaft. However, in all honesty, I wouldn't give you tuppence for the CEV "matchbox" switches carried by the V7. The Le Mans originally had the plastic "handful of dolly mixture" type switches, but Trevor replaced them with much more robust Yamaha equipment.

"The originals fell apart," he said.

So, which of the two bikes do I prefer? I would have to say the V7 Sport because of its greater flexibility and better manners. The Sport is a gentleman. I am afraid the Le Mans is bit of a lager lout.

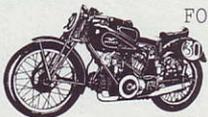


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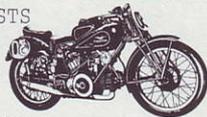
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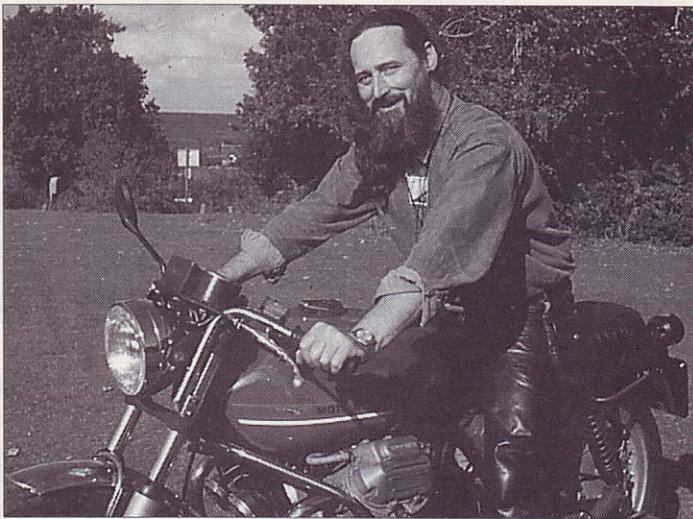


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V7 Owner Dario Tonutti is a former road racer.

Dario's V7 Sport is Tonti prototype

DARIO Tonutti is 56, a former Italian national level racer, who has had bikes since his school days when he acquired a Garelli Mosquito engine attached to a pushbike.

He has been a Moto Guzzi devotee for the last 20 years after stumbling into ownership almost by accident.

"It was just that the price I was offered on a brand new Rallye (the California's predecessor) was too good to refuse," he said. "Then I discovered how well they go round corners. The Rallye was followed by the first blue Le Mans Mk1 in the country."

He currently has an 850T as well as a V1000 Idro-Convert attached to a sidecar. The V7 Sport is historically important, but Dario didn't know that when he bought it.

"I courted the previous owner for four years before he would sell," he said. "It was on a Q-plate. While restoring it I kept finding odd things about the frame that didn't match the factory drawings.

"At first I wondered if someone had been messing with it. I found I

had something special as I chased all the paperwork necessary to apply for an age-related plate.

"When Lino Tonti designed the frame back in 1967 he and the design team built the first six prototypes completely by hand. The next 30 pre-production models were also built by the design team to iron out any production difficulties. The engine and frame numbers on this bike mark it out as number 30 from that batch."

But doesn't that make the colours wrong? Shouldn't it have a metallic lime-green tank and sidepanels with a scarlet frame?

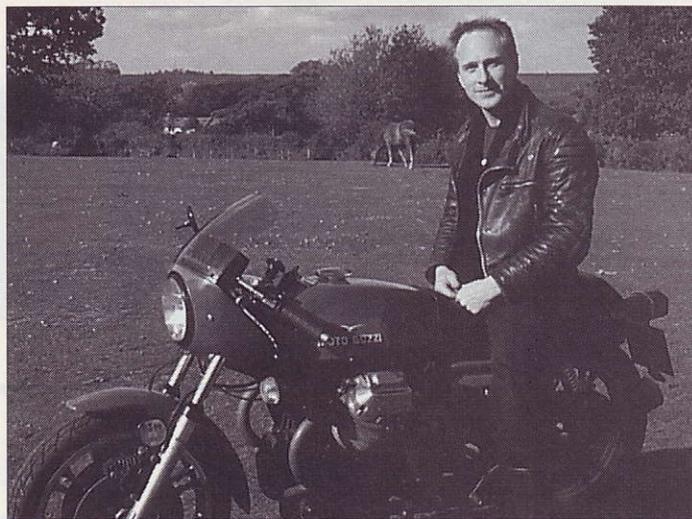
"Couldn't stand it," was the reply.

Mk1 facelift for crashed Le Mans

WORK on some of the scenery for Pink Floyd's Division Bell tour is among the jobs signwriter Trevor Wilson has tackled.

His first bike was a 250 Ariel Golden Arrow which he remembers with a big grin. Since then the 39-year-old has owned a wide variety of machines.

"I wanted a Le Mans Mk1 from the time I first saw one purely because the whole bike looked



Trevor's Mk1 Le Mans was built from a crashed MkII.

right," he said.

His ambition remained thwarted until he spotted the machine he now rides on its way to a breaker's yard.

He waved a handful of photographs under my nose.

"This mess was a Le Mans MkII that had been ridden into a tree at high speed," he said. "The rider survived - just - but the only parts salvageable were the engine, drive-train and seat. The frame looked like a banana and the front wheel was back under the sump."

"I paid far too much for it - £350. As the engine and frame are identical to the Mk1 I reckoned I'd build

it to that spec.

"I got a frame from a guy in Southampton and started from there. The only genuine Mk1 parts I am still looking for are a seat and silencers - there's no way am I going to use original switches!

"If you want to be pedantic then the bike isn't really a Le Mans Mk1 because the engine and frame numbers don't come from that series, but frankly, I don't care."

Trevor also owns a Yamaha XS650 and a Kawasaki Z650.

"Horses for courses," he said. "My wife complains about the seat on the Mk1, and the XS650 is far better for running two up, but if I'm on my own, I'll take the Guzzi."



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