

# MOTO GUZZI

23

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AS the rev-counter needle lolled into the red danger zone above 7250rpm and the speedometer needle swung off the clock at something over 140mph (225km/h) I gave a mental shrug and slotted the Le Mans' instruments alongside those of a goodly number Veglia equipped Italian machinery. Fast bike maybe, but not as fast as the instruments suggested, or so experience informed me. A pity; it took the edge off an otherwise extraordinary motorcycle.

Now I must confess that in order to include the bike in this issue the normal two week evaluation period was simply impossible, so rather than call this a proper test, think of it as a riding impression. Because of this, timing the machine for instrument accuracy, albeit with a stop watch, was simply not possible. Calculations taken from gearing, actual power development and rev-counter readings, however, do strongly indicate that in fact the Le Mans' clocks are not quite as inaccurate as was imagined initially, and that my previous experience was inadequate.

With regard to the top speed of the machine, and without timed proof, perhaps the wisest claim would be that the Le Mans is most definitely a 130mph (209 km/h) plus motorcycle, and that most probably the absolute top speed is around 135mph (217km/h). Whatever the speedometer indicated (I did not take too much notice) at maximum speed, the rev-counter needle was approaching — if not on — 8000rpm, at which point it would go no faster, the engine having literally run beyond its power band, something conclusively proved by similar experiments in third and fourth gears.

As the makers claim maximum bhp is produced at 7300rpm it would, therefore, seem reasonable to assume that the high speeds I experienced were as near

the theoretical top speed of 135mph as makes no difference.

Regarding instrument accuracy it would appear likely that the speedometer is approximately 15mph (24km/h) fast at over 100mph (160km/h) and that the rev-counter is probably 500rpm fast at high engine speeds if actual power development approximates to the paper claims and, with a long pushrod engine, 7300 revs should be about right.

To relate the total lack of stress normally associated with big motorcycles at these speeds is impossible. Owners of Ducati 900 S/Ss will understand what I mean, for only V and flat twins seem to enjoy the complete freedom from that nerve wracking intensity which can make speed unpleasant, apart from any lack of chassis quality. Multis are smoother in most cases, even quieter, but the rhythm of a V twin inarguably appeals to a deep seated, even primitive human need for repetitive heart-like sounds.

Quite possibly this is the reason for the soothing ride encountered on them, for it, especially in this instance, could not be due to silence or smoothness. With open carbs, as might be imagined, the induction crack, especially from the more forward and wider placed right instrument, was positively loud; louder than the surprisingly efficient exhaust silencers by a considerable degree. Before long someone, or another magazine, is going to compare it directly against the BMW R90/S, justifiably so in most rider's minds no doubt. It's the same layout right around. But, for all that, it is a very different type of motorcycle; pure sportster with few concessions to the long range, high speed touring so carefully developed and cherished by BMW over the years.

Like the 750 Sport S3, which it com-

plements, not replaces, the Le Mans is a raw knot of steel sinews, so blatantly careless of the usual slick camouflaging of ugly machinery of power that no man searching for a mere status symbol would dare buy, or even appreciate, its apparently barbaric intent.

It has about it the awesome grandeur of a Pacific class steam railway locomotive. Not on the same scale, of course, but proportionately.

A Gold Wing is ostentatiously luxurious, a BMW implacably correct, a 900 S/S exquisitely engineered for speed. But this one has the guts and glory that went out of European motorcycling when Vincents disappeared, and which only Harley-D seem to have preserved in a quaintly vintage manner, which is most certainly not the style of this one.

As soon as you see it you can't help but think somehow, compared to the majority of more glamorous machinery around, there has to be more than *that* involved, and, somehow, a hint of it shows through, so that after a while, without even riding, you begin to perceive the plain truth of it all, and that, more than anything else, is what I found so very appealing about the Le Mans. It is what it looks like and it looks like what it is. No air cleaners, but a couple of wire mesh guards at the end of the induction trumpets. Black painted exhaust systems. A single racing seat. Ugly and high placed, but very comfortable footrests.

Naturally it owes a lot to the standard touring T3 model, sharing with it the same frame, engine and transmission basics, as does the 750 S3, but to imagine that one is the other would be wrong indeed.

The engine, while retaining the same basic format, is built to a higher standard, using high compression pistons of 10.2, instead of 9.5:1 ratio manufactured

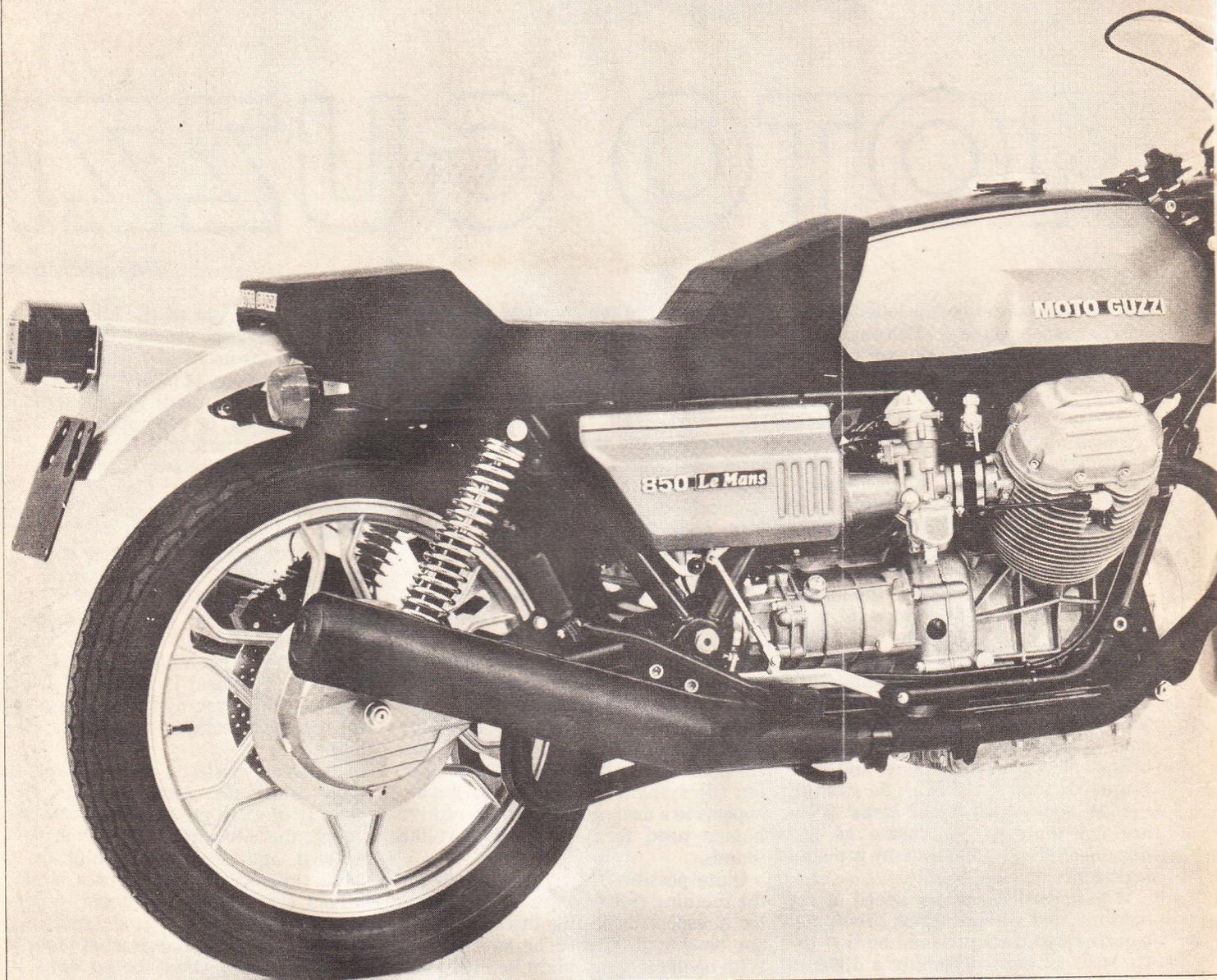




# MOTO GUZZI

## 850 LE MANS

CON FRENO INTEGRALE



to higher standards than normal, and the camshaft involves considerably fiercer valve timing. The carburetors are Dell'Orto racing instruments, PHF 36B, incorporating the usual accelerator pumps, but operated via a rod and lever system, rather like a car. The valves are also bigger than normal, and presumably of higher quality.

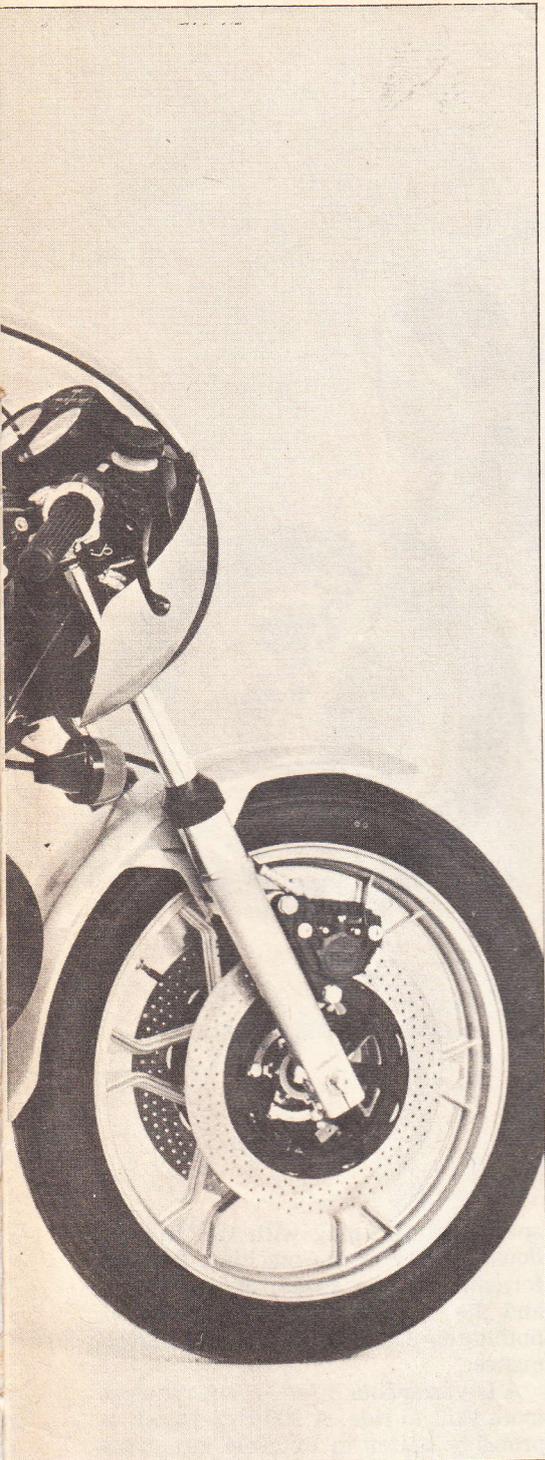
Apart from the frame, which is identical to the T3, in turn a duplication of the 1974/5 factory F750 and production racers, little in the chassis group is common to the other models, which is yet

another reason for the price increase over the T3.

The suspension system is Guzzi's own, and is neither Ceriani nor Marzocchi. The front fork is actually made by Guzzi, but they incorporate sealed damping systems manufactured by Carboni in Belgium, probably the finest in the world. One of the first things I noticed on the Le Mans was how much stiffer it was than the latest 750S3 (oddly enough I was reminded of the first S3, a couple of years ago which was stiffer than they are now). What Guzzi have done, so they

claim, is to have uprated their suspension by fitting racing quality components to the Le Mans. I must admit that they gave every impression of this, being resistant to movement in town and almost without fault at speed.

The fuel tank so closely resembles that from the 750S3 that it must be the same one, although the paint designs are so different that, without standing the two machines alongside each other, it is extremely difficult to tell. Unlike the S3, though, the seat is magnificently one man's, wrapping up and over the trailing



end of the fuel tank, making the sitting position when crouched low in anger just so, and the back stop is far enough forward to play a useful supporting role, thus eliminating a lot of the 750's discomfort at speed.

Since riding the S3 last I have measured one against a Laverda SF3 and found, surprisingly, very little difference in the correlation of the various controls between the two bikes, despite the superior comfort of the Laverda. The trouble with the 750 was eventually traced to the unusually shallow distance



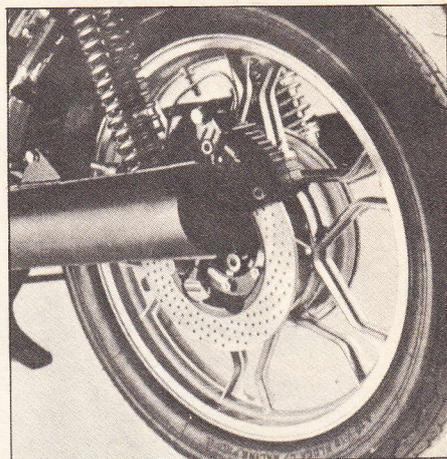
between the seat and the footrests. This hinted at over-forward footrests. Although correct to a degree, this assumption made no allowance for the peculiar stance enforced by the low seat.

Oddly enough, this was one of the very reasons which, particularly on the 750, require such high footrests, for with its low gravity centre arising partially from the low riding position, extreme banking angles are simple to achieve, thus forcing the footrests up to an already low seat.

Things are better on the Le Mans. Guzzi have raised the seat nearly an inch (25mm) to a fraction under 30 inches (762mm), and have dropped the footrests perhaps half an inch (12mm). In so doing the rider is placed so much more comfortably, but without the machine losing much at all of the incredible agility of its slightly smaller brother. In fact, thanks to the solid jammed-in feel allowed by the improved seating and leg arrangement, which no longer causes chipped kneecaps, especially on the left and rearward rocker box, it might even be faster in the hands of a five feet nine inch plus rider.

Although Guzzi, as optimistically as ever, advertise an all time record low dry weight of a mere 436lb (198kg) for the Le Mans, compared to 510 (230) and 538 (243) for the 750 and 850 respectively and, although I had no time to weigh the bike, if it doesn't match that of the 750 at least, then there is going to be a lot of hat eating going on in various bike mag' offices around the world.

Side panels and mudguards are plastic, and a good thing too; they save weight, money, and don't corrode. At this juncture, on such a bike, it would be so much more pleasant to leave it at that but, sadly, Italian paint, at least that on the handsome, matt black exhaust system, is not all that it could be. To claim it



corroded in the short period I had the machine would be barmy, but the thinly applied coating was so painfully only meant to impress in the showroom it was embarrassing. A few weeks in a mid or north European winter and the units are going to be pitted with rust.

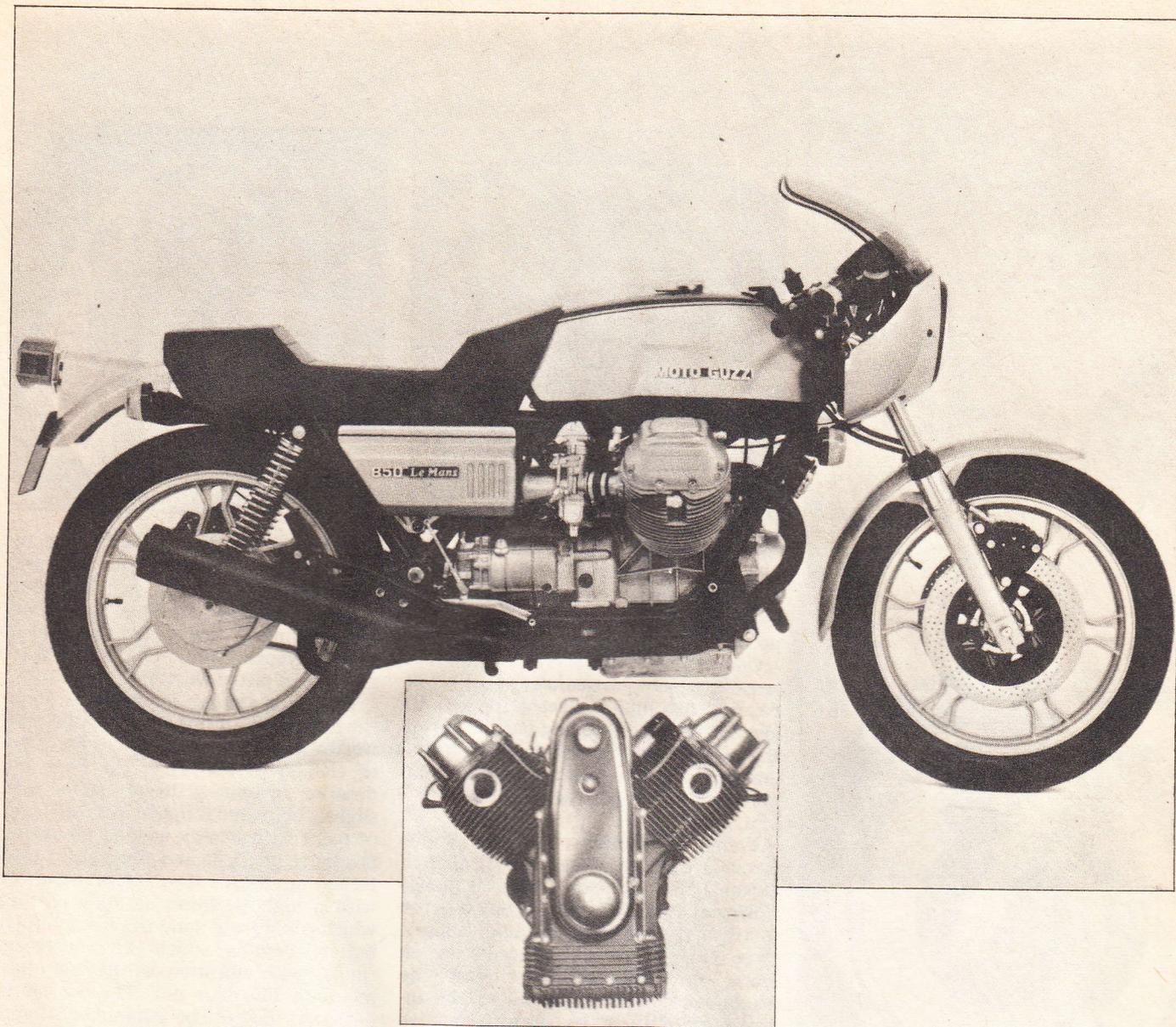
There's a similar appearance about the footrest mounting too. It really is not worthy of such a bike and is suggestive of cheapness that the rest does not deserve. Imagine a three quarter inch slightly bent pipe finished in a thin layer of paint with hastily welded mounting positions, footrests and silencer bracket tacked on. That's it — from a country with a high tradition of alloy casting which could have done the job so much better; besides which, the footrests tingled with vibration, as the cast alloy mounted 750 does not. The Le Mans designers ought to be ashamed of themselves for some of their ancillary money saving adoption.

The wheels, some of the prettiest to grace any motorcycle, and so much improved over some of the hideous combine harvester styled things we have seen recently, suited the character of the machine beautifully.

As the mechanics of the machine are identical to other Moto-Guzzi we have had recently, there is little point in going over them once again, but for a quick recap, the power unit is a car-type push-rod V twin, running on all plain bearings and transmitting its power through a twin plate diaphragm clutch, a five speed gearbox, and shaft drive.

Starting, from the huge battery and car type motor, was quick and easy, the only "choke" necessary in this hot weather recently being a couple of squirts on the twistgrip activated carburettor "juice-pumps". Tickover was always reliable at around 900 to 1100 revs, any less causing shuddering res-





istance from the heavy twin. Mechanical noise was commendably low, but the most surprising thing was the speed with which the entire unit shed heat, so much so that 15 minutes, even on a summer day with just a whisper of breeze, made either choke of juice squirts necessary.

In top gear, the only one it is possible to provide identifiable information on, useable engine power began no lower than 1800 revs, and that required a gentle right fist, bold use of the twistgrip initiating unpleasantly heavy combustion activity. This was at around 33mph (53km/h). City traffic use was convenient and simple, but needed use of around third gear which at 30mph (53km/h), took 2300 revs. Normally engine speeds so low were best left alone for the sweetest ride but, in third, no higher, the Le Mans condescended to allow itself to be gently chuntered around buses without a murmur of protest.

Under 3000 revs, though, the bike was just another bike, less of a bike, in fact, that its modest T3 brother (so if you like panniers and things then by-pass this monster) but once above it the power unit took on a new note, and breathed enthusiastically. From this point on acceleration in top gear rolled in, not with the crack of a two stroke whip, nor with the dynamo surge of a big multi, but monstrosly quivering with unleashed energy that endured right through to 130mph (209km/h).

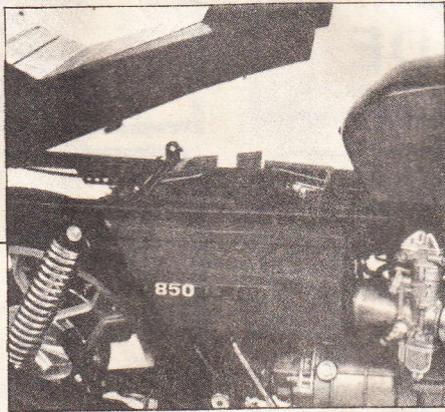
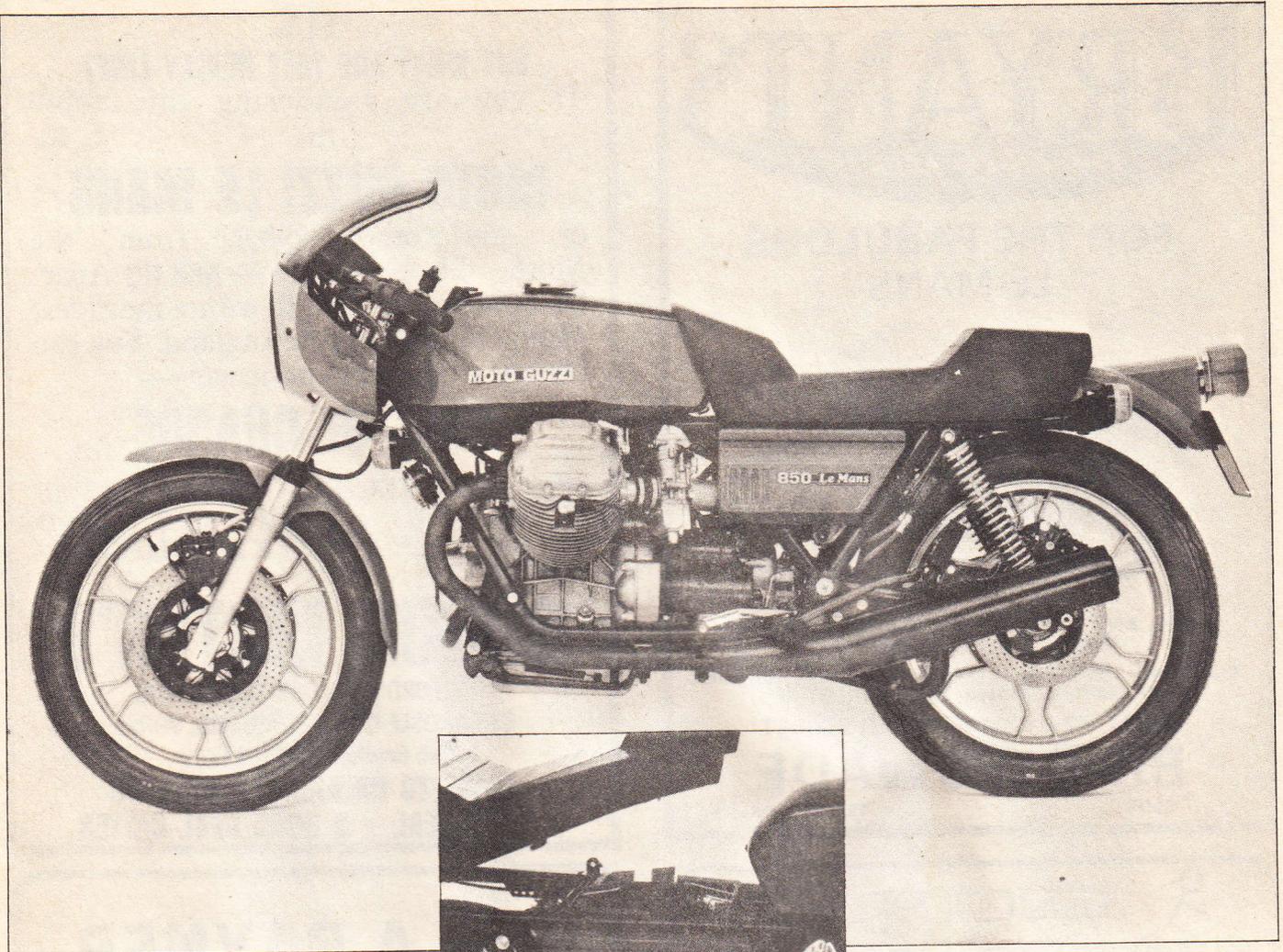
Exactly what part the fly-screen played in rider comfort is impossible to say with any accuracy, but I suspect that, along with an excellent riding position (that none-the-less required an inch taken off the footrest supports), it did help, for fast riding was neither tiring nor impressive by its speed. For this reason the manner in which the bike took fast curves could not be fully appreciated by the rider — unless he allowed himself to believe the

speedometer! Along with the tremendous stability of the machine, the performance of the suspension at speed, and the coupled brakes, there can be nothing to match it in all-round performance.

A Laverda Jota if faster, but requires more skill to ride. A 900 S/S Ducati is probably better in extreme situations around corners, but it has chain drive. A BMW 90/S is too damned *nice*. A Kawasaki Z900 is too, but is less stable and has chain drive. So on and so forth. To my mind there is nothing with all the advantages of the Le Mans.

*But*, you buy one, and you should understand just what it is you have. A big sportster with a heart of gold but deficient in the niceties we have come to expect as normal these days. The quality lies inside, in the racing suspension, special pistons, alloy wheels, racing carbs, etc.

It will take the neighbours' eyes right off your pal's Gold Wing — guaranteed.



#### ENGINE

**Type:** 90° transverse, air cooled, alloy V twin four stroke. Chrome plated cylinder bores. All plain bearing engine with two mains. Split shell big ends. Steel con-rods. One-piece crankcase.

**Valve operation:** Pushrod from longitudinal camshaft running between cylinder bases. Clearance adjustment by screw and locking nuts on rocker tips.

**Capacity:** 844cc.

**Bore and stroke:** 83 x 78mm.

**Compression:** 10.2:1.

**Carburation:** 2 x 36mm Dell'Orto PHF36B racing instruments. No air cleaner.

**Electrics:** 12v x 280w alternator on front of crankshaft. 12v x 20 a/h batter. Charging controlled by electro-magnetic relay. Coil and contact breaker ignition with mechanical auto-advance.

**Lubrication:** 5.25 pints (3 litres)

wet sump via high pressure gear pump and cartridge type filter.

**Claimed power:** 80 bhp at 7300 rpm. Torque N/A.

#### TRANSMISSION

**Primary drive:** None.

**Clutch:** Dry twin diaphragm type.  
**Gears:** 11.64; 8.08; 6.09; 5.05; top 4.36:1. Selection by left side one down and three up foot lever.

#### FRAME

All welded steel tube full loop duplex cradle, with fully triangulated, welded rear sub frame, and removable engine cradle tubes for major repair.

#### SUSPENSION

**Front:** Two way damped tele-fork with Carboni damping system. Exposed staunchions.

**Rear:** Pivoted fork with two way damped, load adjustable units, and exposed damper rods.

#### WHEELS

**Front:** 3.50 Pirelli Super Sport ribbed tyre on WM3 x 18 cast aluminium wheel, two 11.8 (300mm) cast iron hydraulic disc

brakes. One coupled to rear brake, one independent.

**Rear:** 4.00 Pirelli Super Sport block tyre on WM3 x 18 cast aluminium wheel. One 9.5 in (242mm) cast iron hydraulic disc brake coupled to left front disc only.

#### INSTRUMENTATION

Matched illuminated Veglia rev' counter and speedometer. Mileometer. Warning lights include, neutral, charging circuit, low and main beam, oil, and turn signal.

#### EQUIPMENT

4.8 gall (22.5 litre) steel fuel tank including 1 gall (4.5 litres) reserve. Electric starting only. Coupled brakes. One mirror as tested. Tool kit under hinged seat. Turn signals. Centre and prop stands. 6.5 in (165mm) 45 x 40 w headlamp. Pillion rests. Racing seat. Rubber mounted carburettors.

#### DIMENSIONS

**Weight:** (claimed dry) 436 lbs (198 kgs). Estimated true weight, approximately 510 lbs with fuel.

**Wheelbase:** 58in (1470 mm).

**Ground clearance:** 6.5 in (165 mm).

**Seat height:** 30 in (762 mm).

#### PERFORMANCE DATA

**Fuel consumption:** High speed, approximately 40 mpg (14 km/l). Averaged around town and country, 55 mpg (19 km/l).

**Fuel quality:** 100 octane (4 star).

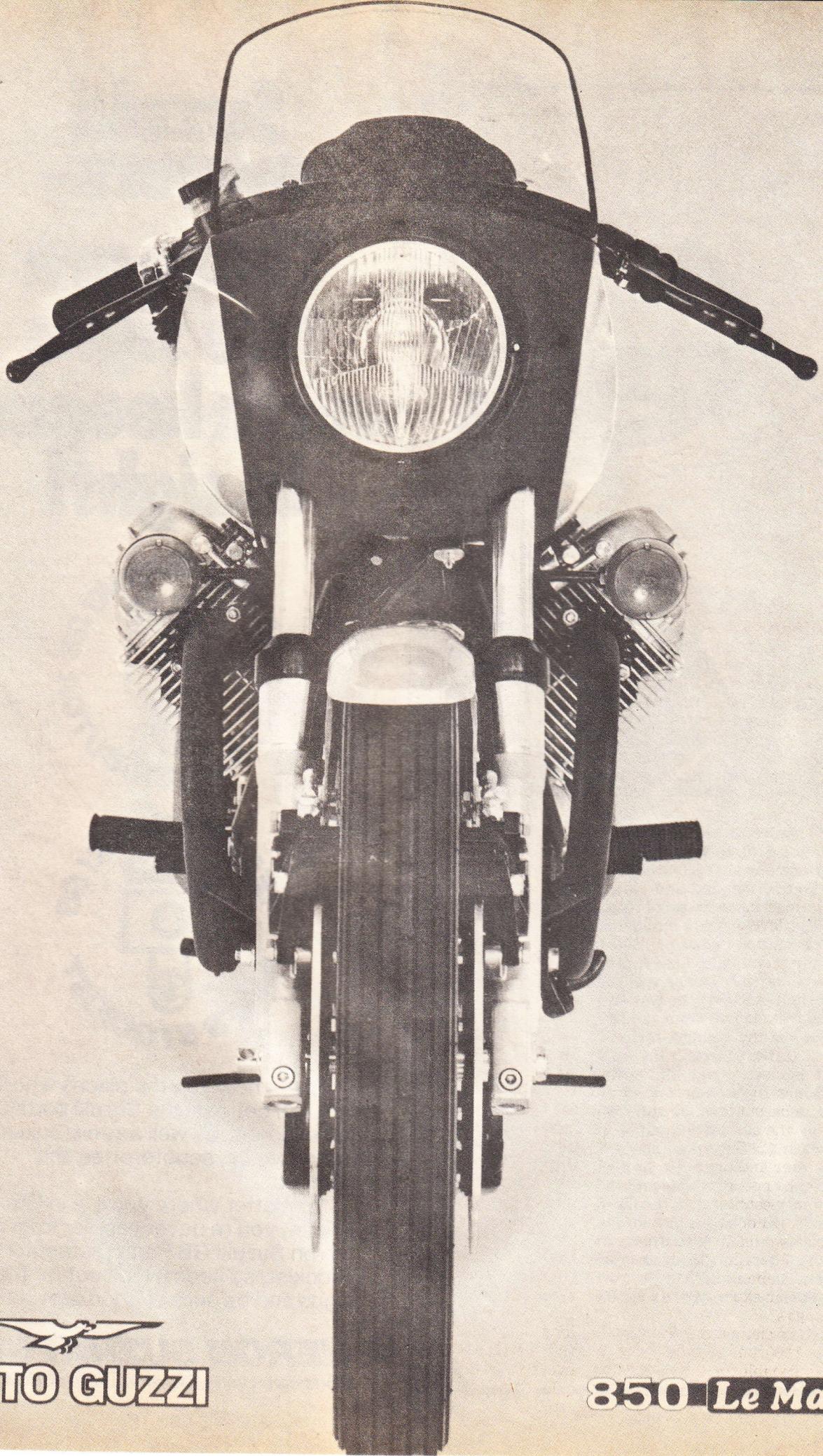
**Speed:** Highest one way estimated, 130 mph (209 km/h) plus. This also best practical top speed).

**Gear speeds:** (at 7300 rpm, manufacturer's recommended power optimum) 49; 72; 95; 115; 135 mph (79; 116; 153; 185; 217 km/h).

**Speedometer accuracy:** Not timed but estimated to be 15 mph (24 km/h) fast at 100 mph (161 km/h).

**Price:** £2,000 inc VAT.





  
**MOTO GUZZI**

**850 Le Mans**