

Red hot street machine.

MOTO GUZZI 850 LE MANS

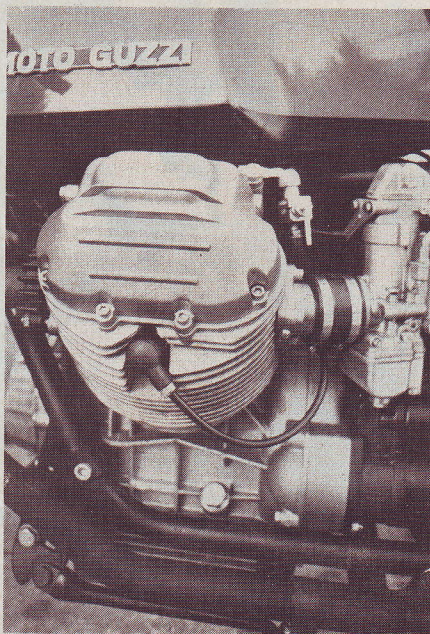
It's all in how you do it.

Everyone knows what happens in the automobile industry when they "refine" a certain model. Horsepower gives way to emissions; gas mileage takes precedence over handling, and suddenly it's the old adage of "remember last year's . . . how much better they were etc., etc., etc." The Motorcycle industry follows suit, to a degree. "Remember when they first came out . . . how much faster . . . etc., etc., etc. . . ." There is one manufacturer that hasn't been caught up in the tide and really put its best foot forward.

The Moto Guzzi 850 Le Mans is a bit different, to say the least, than most other bikes seen on the boulevard these days. And rightfully so.

The machine is the product of many years of quality European craftsmanship and skill. Its design is total; with all facets chosen and placed just so. The result is a thoroughbred streetster that's race track worthy as it stands.

Story and photos by Joel T. Breault



It's enough to make any rider remember it; and with only enthusiastic and complimentary thoughts in mind.

The Le Mans is a new addition to the Guzzi line. Originally, the game plan was to have two similar models to be sold in the United States. One was slated to be a mild version; a docile cafe racer. The other, a breathed on showroom sleeper. The demand for the latter proved that wild is more popular than mild, especially with the good old boys in the U.S. Only the best will be with us in 1977.

Because the new ones were "on the water" at the time of this writing, a 1976 model was provided by Nick Gambardella, a satisfied private owner. Very few changes are expected on the Le Mans for 1977, so we won't be far off.

The power for the beauty is supplied via a massive 90° V Twin four-stroke motor. Displacement measures a hefty

844cc's. Advertised horsepower is rated at 81 @ 7600 rpm. The valves are operated by rockers and push rods. The power isn't really noticeable until the cam comes on. At that point, it can't be missed. The motor is bullet-proof. And, with Moto Guzzi's fine track record to date, it's believable. This machine is made to last, for sure.

Power is transferred to the rear wheel by means of a drive shaft. This has been a Moto Guzzi tradition for years, and a welcome one. Combined with the five-speed transmission, the transition from stop to go is smooth and effortless. No "chain snatch" or grabbiness of clutch was encountered. Smooth, quiet and powerful.

Perhaps the most noticeable mechanical feature on the entire bike is the brake system. The Le Mans utilizes three discs that are drilled for cooling. To activate these, the rider is allowed two options. The system is best described as integral, a term usually associated with four wheelers. With the Moto Guzzi design, all the rider must do to back her down is apply pressure to the rear brake control lever. The foot control lever activates the rear disc and one of the front ones in unison. A preset ratio controls just how much stopping power goes to each unit. The rider can compensate for any additional power needed by merely using the front brake lever also. This will activate the other front disc. It takes a while to get used to this type of setup. It's mostly a matter of building rider confidence. The system works extremely well. We couldn't lock the brakes up without a considerable amount of trying. You can be certain that this type of brake system will become more popular with the other brands in the not too distant future.

The frame is beautiful and the backbone of the machine. The unit is a duplex cradle variety with double down tubes. The tubes are large in diameter and amply gusseted at all the stress points. The Guzzi features a set of removable lower tubes that run parallel to the engine. These are to be removed, instead of the entire motor in the event of a problem in the crankshaft area. All other engine work can be accomplished with the unit in the frame. We experienced no hints of flexing or unwanted oscillations at speed. Resemblance to a full race machine is evident in every bend.

Enough fuel is carried on board for the average afternoon jaunt. Its capacity is 22.5 liters or 5 gallons U.S. Consumption varies with the heavy handedness of the operator. The average we got was a not so prudent 38. More miles could easily be had if the twin 38mm Del Orto pumper carbs aren't over-worked. Not an easy task.

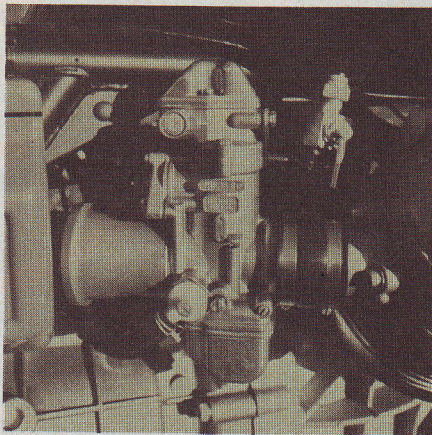
The seat and rear fender are of one

piece fiberglass construction. Comfort is good, for one. The seat is designed for one rider and a small passenger, if you ever want to take one. Not a machine to ride two up for long. The complete seat unit flips up to expose a small tool storage tray. Removing the tray reveals a Volkswagen sized battery. Italians seem to have a thing for ultra huge power sources. One thing for sure, plenty of power is always on tap for almost instantaneous electric starts, even on the coldest of mornings.

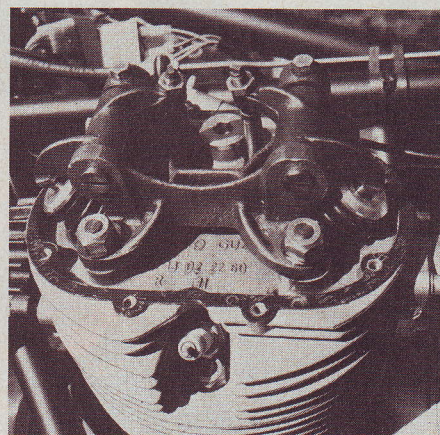
Other nice items on the Le Mans are the controls. Everything, including a headlight flasher, are within easy reach. Clip-ons are standard and easily adjustable. The tach and speedometer

are easy to read at a glance. Idiot lights are used to supply information on what's happening with the generator, oil, high beam, neutral, and the directionals. The lights are easy to see at night and so-so in the daylight. The levers are aluminum and anodized black. The throttle rounds out the "dash" area. The action is quick and light compared with other machines in its class. Only a slight tingle is perceived in the grips upon acceleration and while cruising.

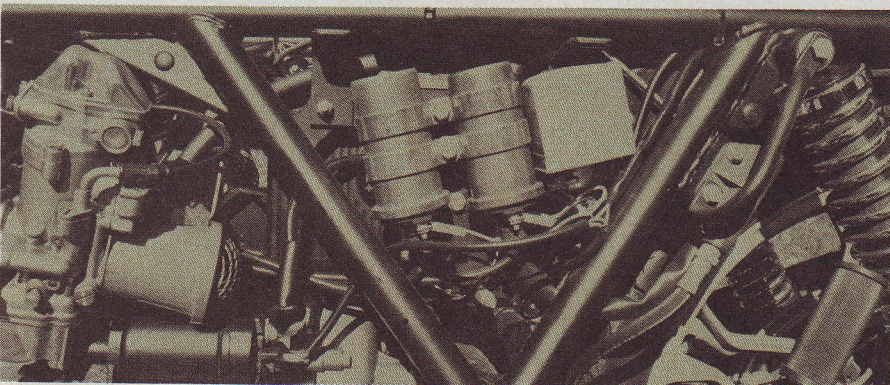
To aid in the handling department, Ceriani suspension components are used both fore and aft. They work extremely well and provide for a smooth ride and quick, solid maneuvering. For increased



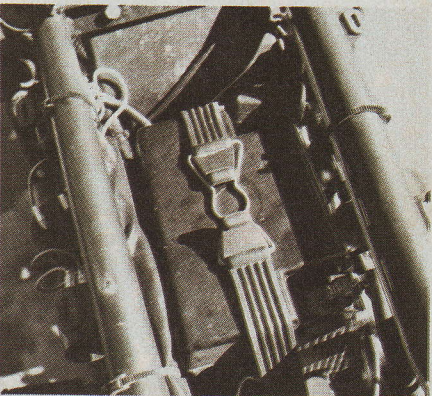
38mm Del Orto pumper carbs feed the gas into the two big cylinders.



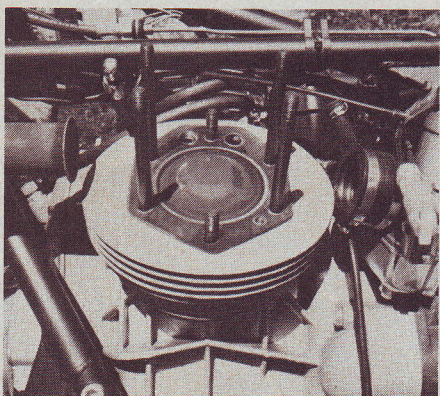
The Guzzi is a pushrod motor with a very straight forward two valve head.



Two very large ignition coils are hidden under the right side cover.



The Italians seem to have an a liking for very large batteries stuffed under the seats of their motorcycles.



Each of the heads can be easily removed for engine work. The pistons look like low compression models.

high speed stability, if needed, a multiple adjustable hydraulic steering damper is provided. The average rider won't need it. With the Le Mans' obvious top end capabilities, it's nice to know it's there.

The machine has other qualities about it that really add to its overall stature. Lightweight alloy cast wheels are mounted both front and rear. The castings are rather good and provide for a racy flavor. A small "almost a quarter" fairing accents the front of the machine. A fluorescent area about the headlight/fairing make the Le Mans rather noticeable to oncoming traffic and the guy you're about to pass. As far as function, its size is too small to get

down behind. Its inclusion in the package seem cosmetic in purpose.

A flashy Italian red and flat black paint scheme round out the entire program. Red seems to be the traditional color for any European hot number. As the final touch of refinement, graphics can always make a difference.

The entire setup, sans fluids, is 435 pounds or 198 kilos, if you prefer. The bulk is in the motor and is well placed high and forward in the frame for ground clearance. The result is a well balanced and proportioned street bike.

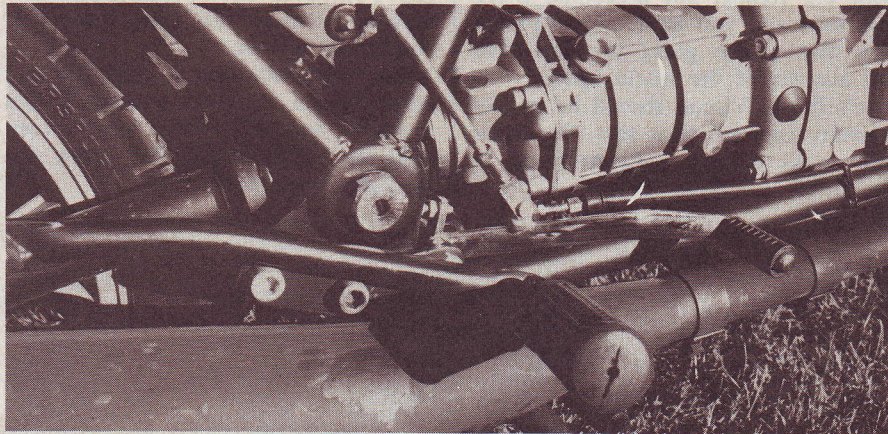
The Le Mans is a race machine and does nothing to disguise the fact; with one exception. The machine is absolutely quiet. Too quiet for a fire

breather. But, it will keep good will amongst the neighborhood and the local government. The absence of a high decibel reading makes the bike deceiving. At speeds clearly in violation of the double nickel laws, one must look at the speedometer to believe the actual velocity of travel. The bike is vibration free, even at red line. The only hint of speed comes from the wind. The bike just wants to go faster and faster, while staying smooth and solid. Totally satisfactory for cruising and perfect for those long, fast blasts through the winding countryside.

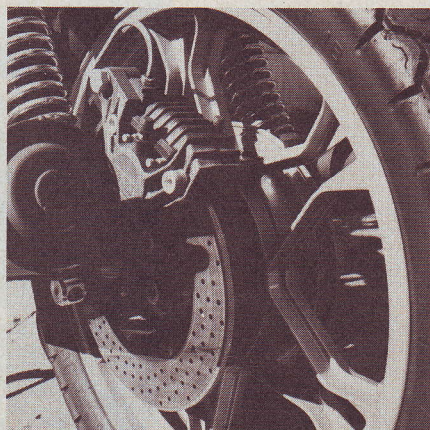
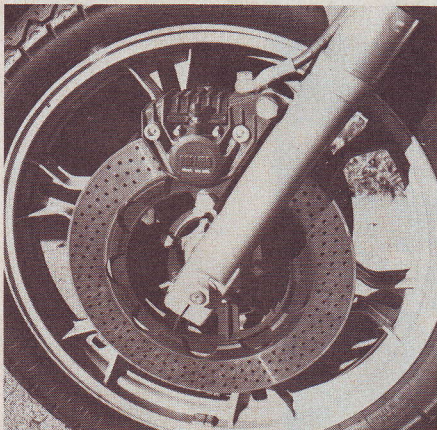
Although it's been just one season in production, the Le Mans has already carved a niche for itself in United States roadracing. Few, if any, motorcycles on today's market can be entered into competition somewhat showroom stock and be expected to excel. The Le Mans has done just that. As part of its introduction in the U.S. a sponsored ride was planned for AMA Superbike competition. The capable powers of Mike Baldwin were enlisted for the task at hand. With only one sponsored machine for the entire season, the Le Mans wasn't exactly odds on. That is, until after Daytona. Baldwin raised many an eyebrow as he grappled with the best in the U.S. A penalized start kept the Guzzi out of the winner's circle. At Loudon, Baldwin clearly showed that the Daytona performance was no fluke. The H.P., handling and the superior brakes proved the Le Mans potential with a decisive victory over a most powerful opposition. Problems in the ignition system kept the Guzzi out of the running at Laguna Seca. But this was after a fourth position was secured in qualifying. The bike was not entered at Riverside. Baldwin has also done quite well with the Le Mans on the local club racing level, scoring very high in season points.

A motorcycle with this type of style and reputation is not for the average person. Price alone could be the deciding factor. The Le Mans has a sticker price of just over the \$4000. While the cost is not cheap, neither is the product. These numbers aren't really out of touch with what you get for the money and what the competition offers for the same. Also, if you were to add what the Guzzi offers stock to another bike. Add the price of mag wheels, triple discs, racing frame, high speed tires, the cafe styling and the initial price of your base scooter and what do you come up with? The answer will just about equal the going rate of the 850 Moto Guzzi Le Mans.

And so, if you're in the market for a showroom thoroughbred with cafe styling and a growing racing heritage, go with the Guzzi. From what we've seen so far, it is one of the better ways to go, for sure. ■

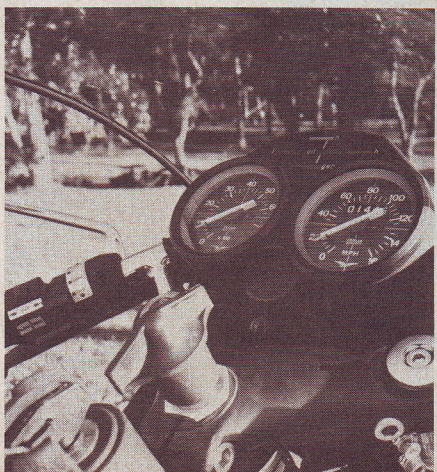


Just about all of the surfaces are either painted or black anodized to give them that racey look.



Mag wheels and drilled disc rotors make the front end so trick that it's almost scary.

Brembo supplies the brakes on the Moto Guzzi. As you can see the rotors have been drilled full of holes to aid cooling.



Dial faces are easy to read and you also have a score of idiot lights to tell you what's going on.

