



**Classic Motorcycling  
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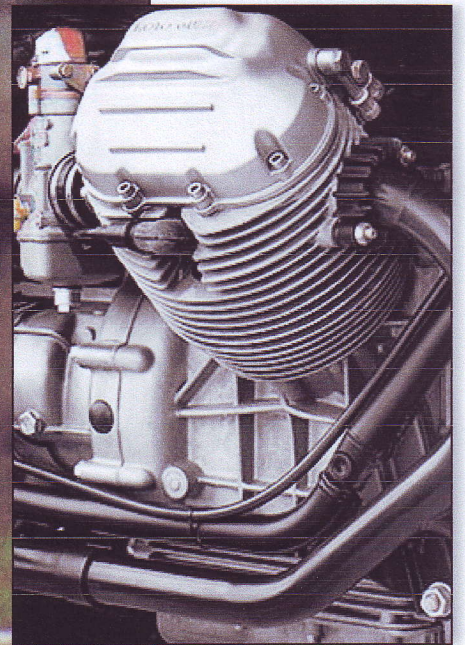
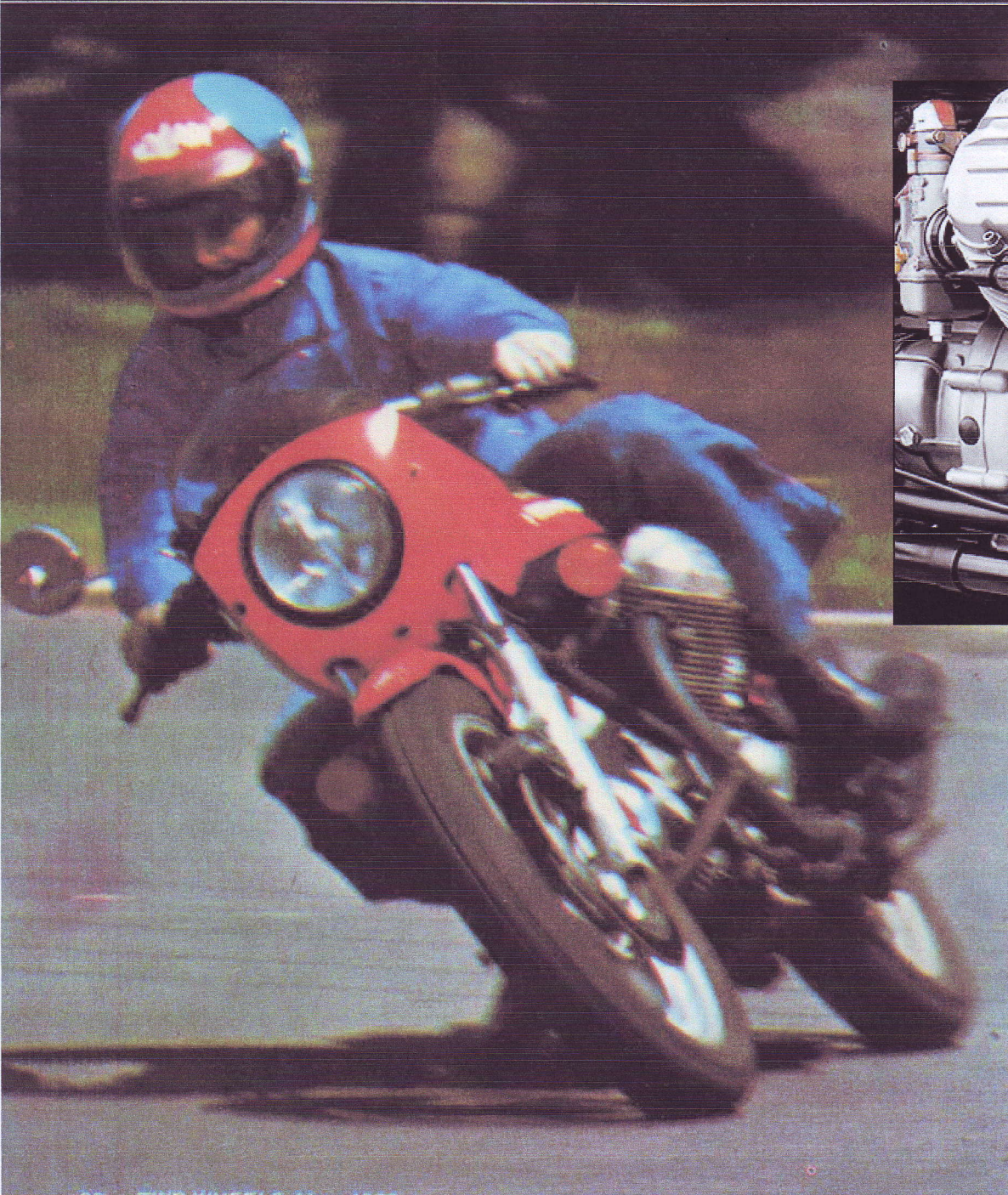
**Black Duck Rally  
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# The Horniest Sportster

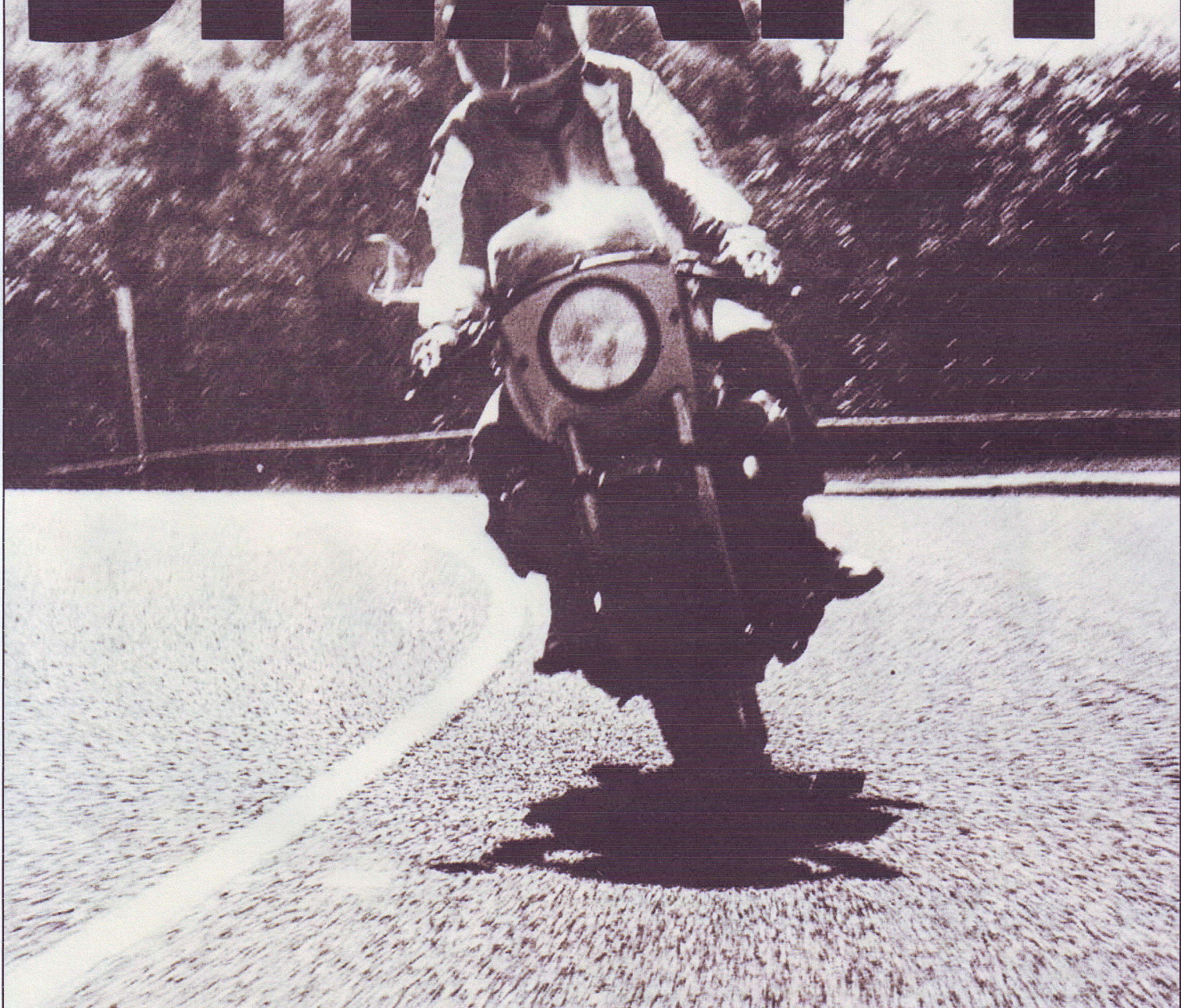
... And it could only be the Guzzi Le Mans!



Published  
Two Wheels  
May 1977

**Bike Legends**

# SHAFT



## MOTO GUZZI

### 850 LE MANS

### THE SUPERBIKE THAT SHAFTS

# The Horniest Sportster

MOTO GUZZI'S factory at Mandello in Italy features a museum . . . a place that displays more than half a century of motorcycling genius, and contains the story of the mighty Italian company that once held the world breathless with advanced design and excellence of quality engineering.

Moto Guzzi was able to outstride its competitors on the race track, relaying competitive prowess to domestic machines with great success. From the outset the name Guzzi made itself known in competition . . . on the shores

of Lake Como at Mandello del Lario in 1921 the first Guzzis came into being.

As far back as 1924, Moto Guzzi built a 500 with four overhead valves. Just six years later came a transverse four-cylinder 500 with supercharging. Developments came thick and fast . . . sometimes too fast, like in '55 when the V8 Guzzi was conjured up against threats by Gilera and Agusta. That bike was capable of 265.5 km/h (165 mph) — unreal for its day although its full potential was never explored.

In 1957 the inevitable happened . . . the tradition started by Carlo Guzzi and Giorgio Parodi in 1921 ended when the company pulled out of GP racing. And the disappointment of the decision was followed almost immediately by further troubles when the slump of the '60s struck.

But the Italian Government provided

*To hard core enthusiasts the Le Mans is overdone, but young ladies, old men and animals are always impressed. In pure pose appeal, the only bike we've had which attracted bigger crowds was the MV Agusta Sport America. But like the MV the Guzzi has a redeeming feature — it goes like stink, easily, smoothly and comfortably. You can't help forgive a machine its macho image if it really delivers the goods . . .*

**Bike Legends**

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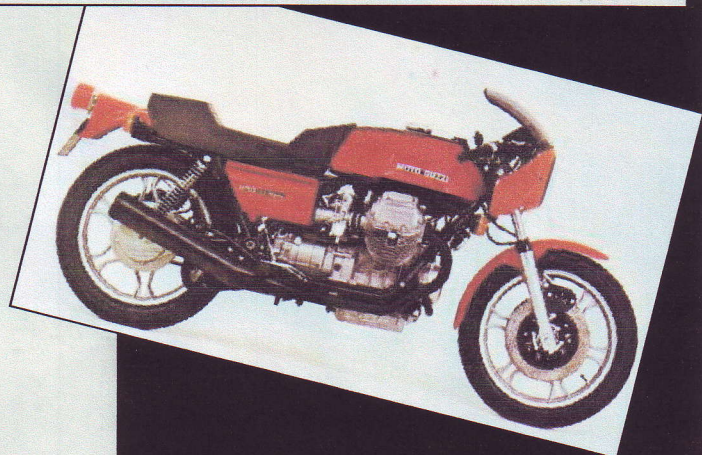
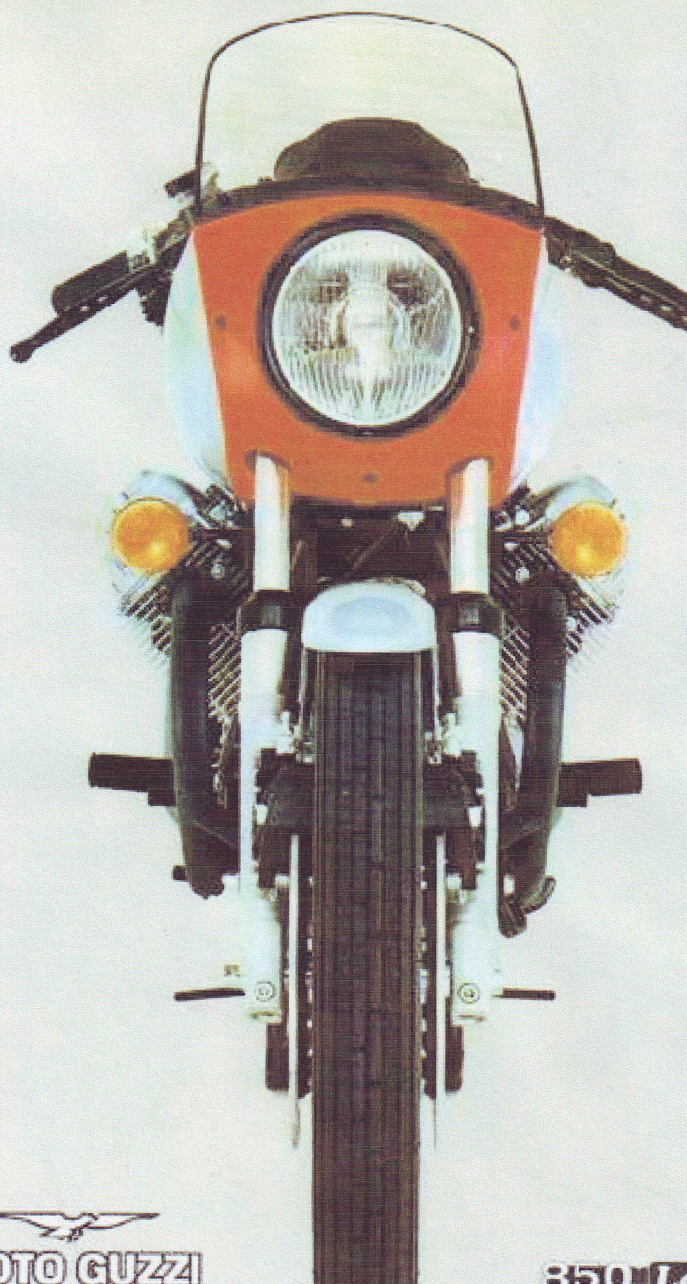
But the Italian Government provided

financial support, an impetus for new developments. In the early '60s the demand for a lightweight torquey engine to be used in a military scout car gave rise to the transverse V-twin, the forerunner of today's Guzzi powerplant, and it was 1966 when Guzzi's 700cm<sup>3</sup> 'V7' touring motorcycle appeared on the streets.

The combination of the V-twin plant and shaft drive plus the strength of Guzzi's reputation of reliability assured the success of the new venture and it was natural that the engine be enlarged to suit the demand. The 850T and California models were produced to satisfy the touring brigade while the S3 750 sportster maintained a little of Guzzi's lost racing image.

And just when we were thinking *real* sports motorcycles had left us, Guzzi lays on the Le Mans 850 and blows our minds.

The Le Mans is a sports motorcyclists' sports motorcycle — much more so than the sporty-looking S3. It's the ton standing still. Bikini fairing, low clip-ons, racing style seat . . . if you want it that way. If not, try a bigger tank and dual seat. Then take your choice of a standard close-ratio gearbox or even closer, straight-cut gears, several final drive ratios and . . . the piece de resistance to make this sportster stand out from the rest, a real, live race-kit. Cams, pipes, bigger carbs . . . lotsa good gear. Sure the race kit will make the machine almost unrideable in general traffic, but it's really nice to know that you can at least get the good bits if you want them.



MOTO GUZZI

850 Le Mans

Bike Legends

The machine that Peter Stevens Motorcycles offered us to run-in was fitted out with the smaller of the two tank sizes (on request, as a very standard out-of-the-shop bike, a 25 litre fibreglass tank can replace the 22.5 litre steel tank), had the racing style single seat, the wider ratio gearbox and, what was undoubtedly very high gearing — but not the highest available. No race kit on this one but our test bike would be, as is, a very competitive production race machine.

There's an exciting thing about the Le Mans' looks. The 90 degree transverse V-twin engine doesn't look at all as cobby as it appears on the 850T and 1000 Automatic tourers. The factory has created a horny, artistic weapon. Ducati's 900 and 750SS models look beautiful, the Le Mans Guzzi is gggrowlingly horny.

The power delivery matches the looks. The factory boasts 81 horses. That's debatable, but in truth it is extremely quick. And to match the speed, the handling is superb.

When Guzzi introduced the integral braking system on the 1000 auto, it

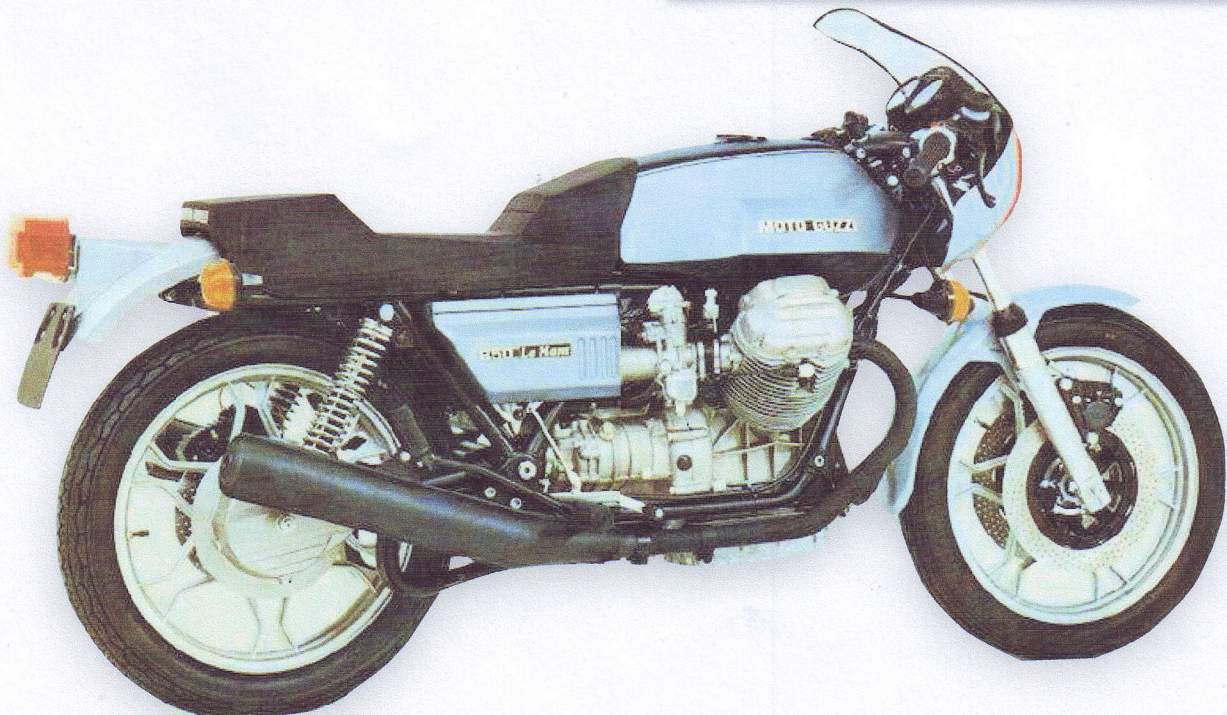
*Guzzi rider or not — they all like the bike. Neat black exhausts are super-quiet without performance restriction. Note well-forward rear units.*

appeared in keeping with the limousine qualities of the machine, but I had doubts about the acceptability of the system on the Le Mans. Early-on I still had doubts. The rear disc brake and the left side front disc are operated by the foot lever and the right side disc up front by the handlebar lever. A U-turn on a road covered in gravel was taken with utmost care. Where in normal use the rear brake would offer a slight steadying factor it was worrying that the front brake was also operating. Would the front wheel skid?

We were quickly satisfied about the efficiency of the claimed 70 percent rear and 30 percent front braking potential of the foot lever. On a gravel road a really hard stomp was needed for wheel lock-up. Even then, it was the back wheel. Felt more confident after that little test!

The only styling area that didn't turn me on straight away with the Le Mans was the seat's, tank overlap arrangement. But it didn't take long before I developed a liking for the design. The knees tucking into the padding was comfy, makes you feel part of the machine.

Quite often testers of sports motorcycles find it difficult to assimilate to a riding position like that of the Le Mans. Assuredly, it's "no compromise", but being used to a



road-racing machine probably helps me fit in. It's a natural crouch to assume on such a racy vehicle anyway. The pegs are a compromise between rearsets and ordinaire — and a nice compromise for general riding.

The Guzzi is made even racier by its compactness. Height is around 8 cm below most bikes in its class . . . that's low. Even people with bums low to the ground who'd be tippy-toeing on most bikes can sit astride, feet flat on the ground.

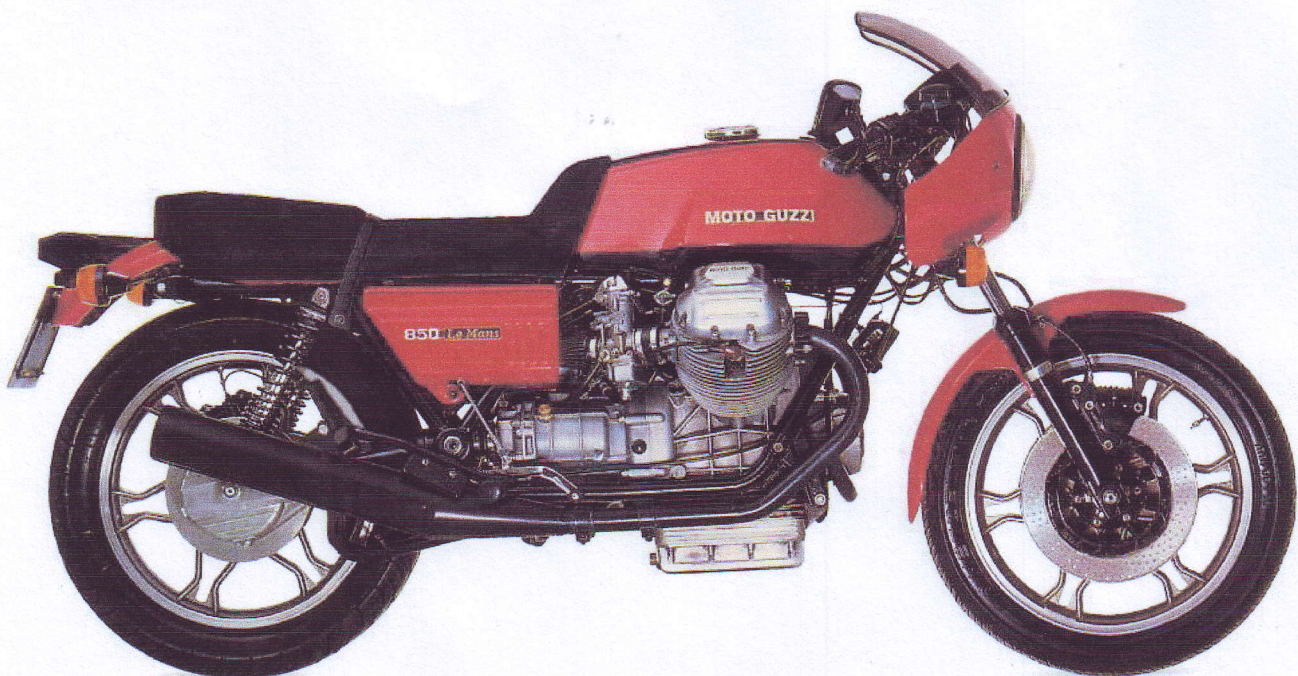
And it's true the whole machine does wonders for one's ego. The only other bike on which I felt so *superior* was the MV Agusta America. The MV is a super pose machine, in addition to being a bloody good motorbike. But it lacks the raw, growling appeal of the Guzzi. The only other real competitor to the Le Mans is Ducati's SS and the Duke looks slightly pleb alongside the Guzzi, too neat and lacking the brutal appeal.

True, a person lacking the conceptual ability to recognise brutal beauty may regard the Le Mans in a not so shining light. The bulky 26 mm Dell'Orto carbies protruding in an ungainly

*Racing crouch is a squeeze for a long-legged bloke — but so are they all. Fairing is strictly looks, but at the Guzzi's speed potential and wind deflection is an advantage.*



**Moto Guzzi 850 Le Mans 1976**





# The Horniest Sportster

manner may not be particularly appealing. But the carbies, sans filtering, fitted merely with a mesh wire to stop rocks being gulped, add to the ruggedness of the overall design.

But ruggedness does not refer to the manner in which the Guzzi is built — on the contrary! The production concept of a machine that has grabby looks but is still super functional, has worked brilliantly. And we'd expect those carbies to be filtered soon. Intake noise is tremendously loud, even compared with the exhaust system! With the full face helmet on you can still hear the big carbies sucking in horses.

Taking the superiority stance (sitting astride) the Le Mans and looking down at the instrument panel is a surprise. Immediately in your vision is a big, black line obscuring vision. That's the trimming on the bikini fairing . . . a nice touch, but a bit of a nuisance, depending of course on the rider's natural seating position.

Had a little trouble with the control switches — pretty different is probably the reason. I don't particularly like the way the light switch swivels round the handlebar and I can't see the reason for a "lock" position on it. All else is acceptable.

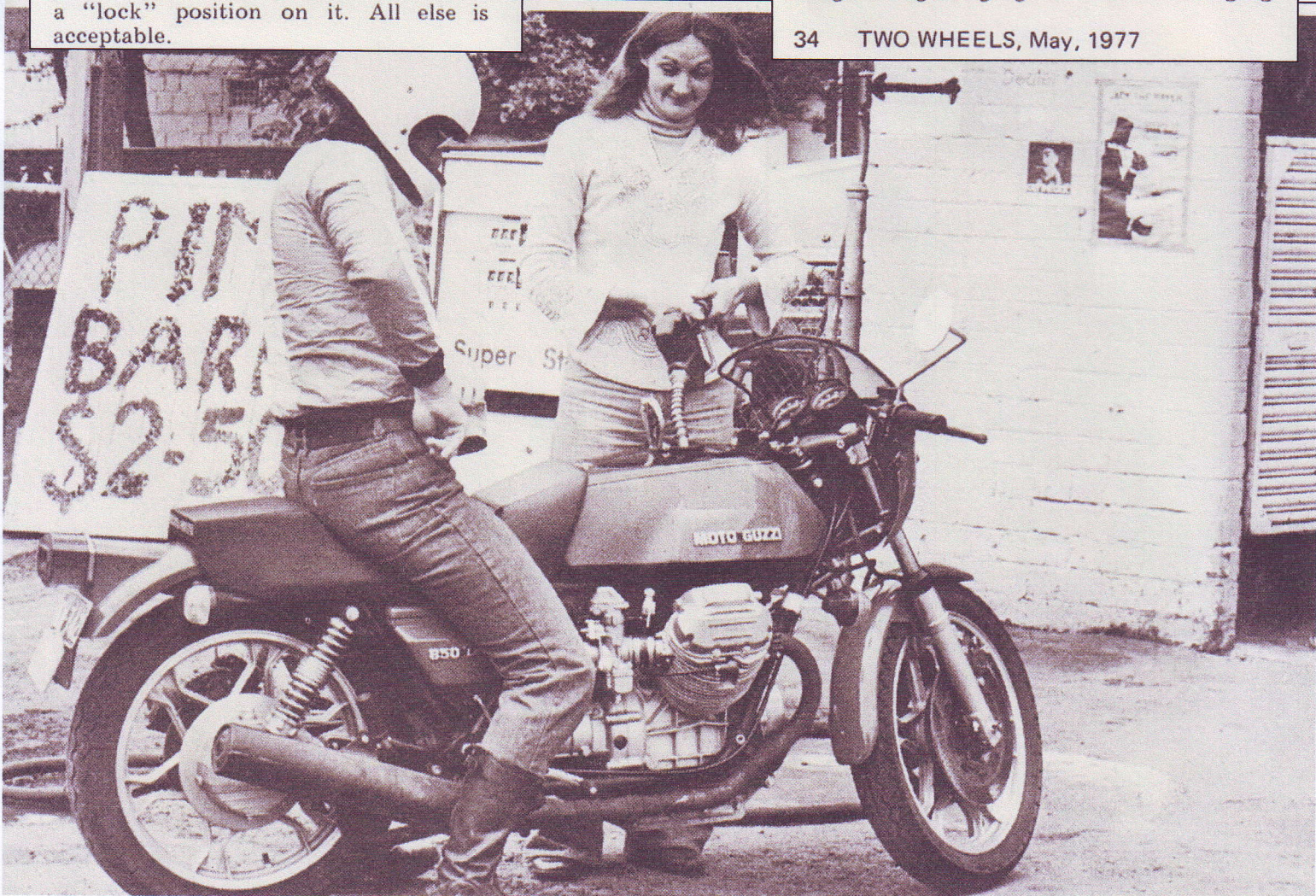
Even though our test bike had the single seat, passenger pegs are fitted. A pillion rider can actually sit up on the back section and the rider can be reasonably comfortable shoved up front, but not recommended for long trips. The height of the passenger pegs would make the pillion reasonably uncomfortable even if a dual seat was fitted.

But this isn't meant as a two-up tourer . . . it's a selfish get-on-and-go-for-a-blap unit. Forget about everyone else and everything else and get out there and turn up the wick.

One wouldn't dare wear anything but good bikin' gear on the Guzzi . . . but you've got to negotiate a deal of traffic before you get to blap territory.

A flip up, on-off choke lever demands use when starting the Guzzi from cold. Hit the starter button and the most outstanding sound is from the carbies. The exhausts are quiet, very quiet.

Flip off the choke and the V-twin settles down to a nice idle. Blip the throttle and the centrifugal force sways the machine. The high gearing on the test machine does make it reasonably unsuitable for city go-to-working. However, in tight traffic it misses the awkward situation on some other bikes that leaves you the choice of either rang-a-dang-danging in first or changing



into second where the power band is lost. It doesn't occur with the Guzzi. You can belomp along (but watch the clutch on takeoff) and keep it in first without excessive tacho numbers.

The heavier-than-usual clutch operation does annoy a bit when you are faced with continual stop/start riding. Clutch slip is needed to counter the high gearing and blast away from the tin-tops, but gear changes are not particularly slick, just average.

After several kilometres of trafficking you're looking for a freeway to ride beyond two gears. It's a relief to find a 100 km limit to get moving along a little. Third gear finds you at the limit at comfortable revs and a change to fourth is little above idling. Fifth is almost laboring. Wow!

Speed up a little . . . and I began immediately to doubt the accuracy of the speedo. There I was sitting right on 100 and cars were getting by with reckless abandon. Increase to 120 to stay with them. Allow them being 10 or so over the limit and the speedo appears optimistic. Ignore this minor revelation and start to enjoy the machine . . .

At last the wide open spaces!

Get going quick and you'll see why the Guzzi is such a mind-flipping machine. Attack the fast sweepers and you're doing the best any road bike is capable of. Lean into the bumpy stuff and the Le Mans stays right where you want it. Absolutely magnificent. Fly up to a tight bend, pressure the foot brake — along with a touch of brake lever — and you're knocking off speed in the quickest and safest manner that you could possibly imagine. If you get in strife, it's rider error.

I had the speedo showing 210 km/h in a relatively short stretch and the Guzzi was still pulling. The factory quotes 210 as the maximum so the reading is obviously optimistic. Even

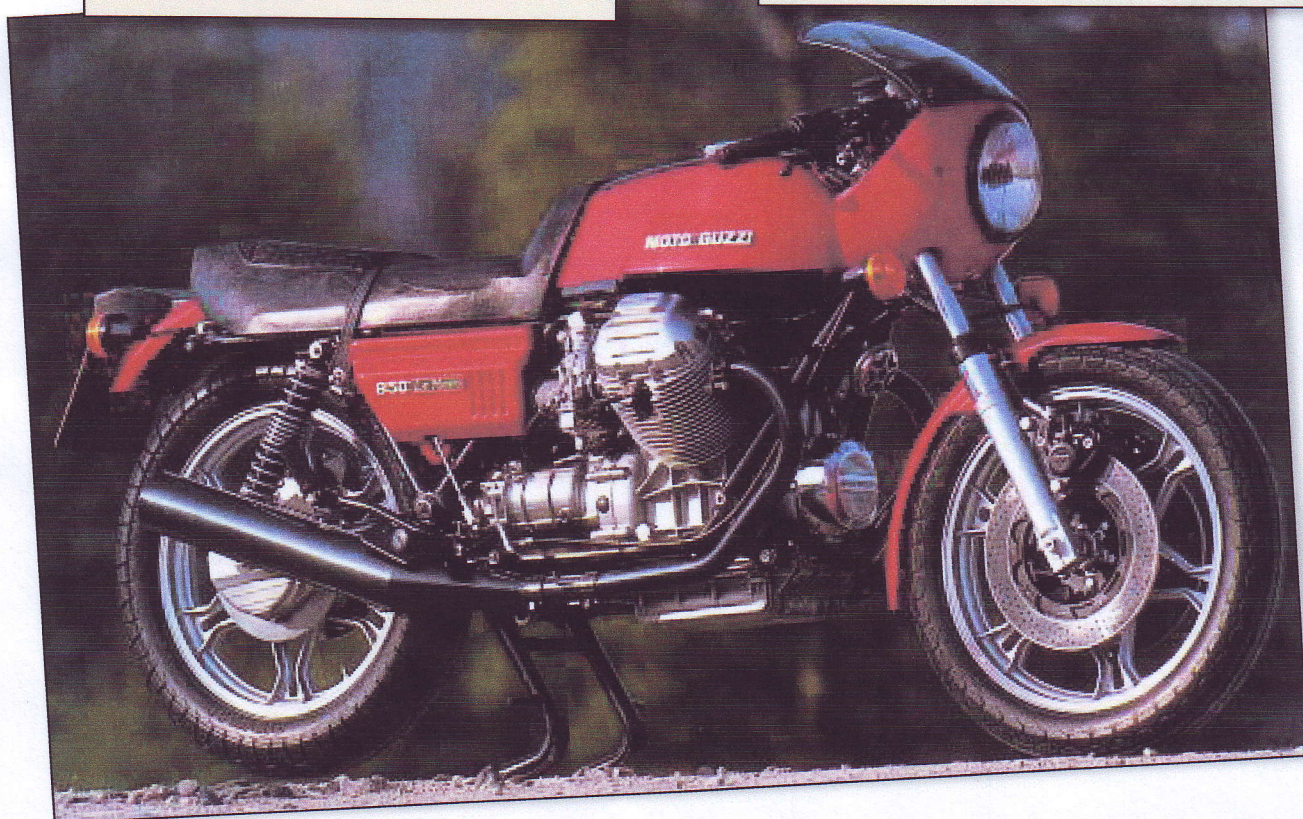
*Combination of high gearing giving low rpm cruising speed and four-stroke economy keeps the Guzzi out of the fuel-sucker brigade — unless you ride flat-chat everywhere and that's easy to do. Young ladies, old men and animals are always impressed.*

still, the Guzzi certainly ate 180 km/h genuine as if on a Sunday cruise. And that on a relatively bumpy road! The Guzzi was rock-steady. No weaving or bobbing, just pure, full-control blasting.

A satisfying thing about the Guzzi is that it *feels* unbreakable! The V-twins have a one-piece crank and plain bearings, pressure fed by a gear driven oil pump. The bore and stroke for the ohv unit is 83x78mm with the compression ratio upped from the touring 850's 9.2 to 10.2:1. The Le Mans' powerplant is a fine combination of strength and performance, an achievement, I suppose expected from Guzzi, but one most other builders outside Europe just cannot match.

The bike is available in two color schemes, red and black or a bluish silver and black, with black exhausts and a day-glo type section on the fairing surrounding the headlight. It all looks quite startling. The lighting is adequate but a safer bet with a QI light fitted. Tail and stop lights are quite good, the rear lamp being fitted into the moulded rear plastic mudguard very neatly.

All things in perspective, the Guzzi is a fantastic performance, reliability and safety package, built for the man who likes his bike to do everything well without compromise. The price will ensure that every Tom, Dick and Harry doesn't have one. Try around \$4000 for size! \*





**Bike Legends**

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