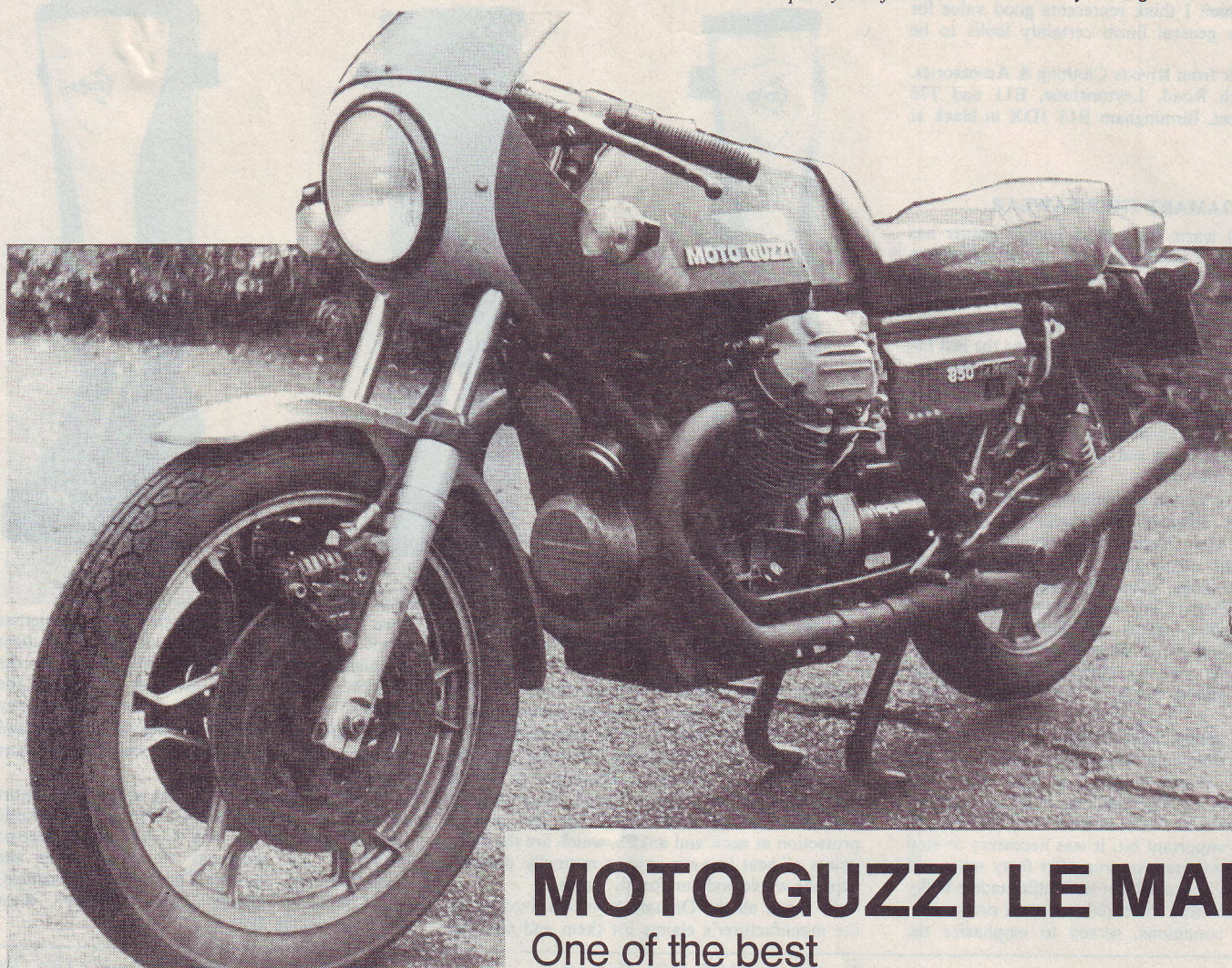


*Even when the Guzzi is resting on its centre stand, the frame appears to be abnormally low. Seat height confirms the impression – it is 30in, and a 5ft 7in rider was able to put down both feet. There is little chrome work. The accent is on high quality dull-finished aluminium-alloy castings*



## MOTO GUZZI LE MANS

### One of the best

"To anyone heartily tired of chains (and I am) or appalled by steep charges for servicing alternative multis, the lusty V-twin offers welcome relief."

RUGGED and chunky, the Moto Guzzi 850 Le Mans is an excellent motorcycle. It has stamina, more than enough energy for our strangled roads and it exudes common sense. The specification is logical, simple and tough and after a welter of bland transverse fours, the way the big Guzzi produces power is unusually attractive. The shaft-drive design must appeal to anyone who believes motorbikes are for riding, not tinkering with. It is a thoroughly practical machine.

If that sounds like an advertisement for the Italian factory, I make no apology: the Le Mans is most impressive. Though not perfect, it has no serious flaws and its quirks of nature give it the kind of character I like in a motorcycle. Sportier than other big shaft-driven bikes, the Guzzi in my opinion also eclipses chain-driven rivals and it now heads my personal list of desirable machines.

Developed from the slower V7 and Sports models, the 850 has been built for hard work and high speed. Fancy equipment to keep it sharp is unnecessary. The routine as we understand it, once running-in has been done, consists of changing the oil every 2,000 miles, checking battery fluid level once a month and periodically

adjusting valve clearances. Barring mechanical failure and, of course, punctures there would seem to be no reason to disturb the toolkit for a considerable mileage.

The test bike, finished in Italian racing red, had already done several thousand miles and the tyres fitted, which were not the originals, were a curious pairing – a front 325H x 18 RB2 Continental and a rear K91 410VB x 18 Dunlop – but they worked very well together. The only troubles experienced throughout the test were rather uncertain starting, due possibly to a slightly weak mixture and a tendency to cutting out in traffic. The Guzzi saw a lot of action in a short time and the all-round performance was captivating.

The engine is a 90-deg across-the-frame V-twin overhead-valve air-cooled four-stroke with bore and stroke dimensions of 83 x 78mm, a total swept volume of 844 cc and a compression ratio of 10.2:1. Claimed power output is 81 bhp at 7,300, though we note that the latest models have a 7,600 rpm redline. A wet-sump lubrication system, with a capacity of three litres, serves a substantial crankshaft having bolted-on conrods and heavy duty main bearings and a renewable filter cleans the oil before a gear type pump recirculates it.

In unit with the engine the transmission utilizes a two-plate clutch in the engine flywheel to transmit power through a five-speed gearbox to a final-

drive shaft and bevel gears; standard ratios, which were fitted to the test machine, are 11.6, 8.1, 6.1, 5.1 and 4.4:1 and gearbox oil capacity is three-quarters of a litre. A similar quantity lubricates the bevel gears.

Twin coils, used in conjunction with two contact-breakers, a huge Fiamm 12-volt 18 amp hour battery and a Marelli distributor supply sparks for the long-reach plugs; there is no kickstart, the rider having to rely on a Bosch electric starter motor. Two 36mm Dell'Ortos have accelerator pumps and intake stoneguards, and share a flick-on choke device mounted below the tank.

Even when the Guzzi is resting on its centre stand, the frame appears to be abnormally low. Seat height confirms the impression – it is 30in and a 5ft 7in colleague was able to put down both feet simultaneously. The frame comprises two downtubes which pass between the splayed exhaust pipes and along either side of the power unit to form a location for the pivot tube of the swinging-arm rear suspension. Twin top tubes buttress the steering head and support the sports seat. Secondary bracing tubes unite the main upper and lower frame rails and, to permit engine removal, the lower rails are detachable. Heavy gauge fabricated "ears" at the front of the engine support the main crankcase/sump which is deeply finned to aid cooling.



Suspension is conventional with Marzocchi telescopic front forks and rear shock-absorbers which, surprisingly, are not adjustable for load; the hydraulically-damped rear units have exposed springs.

A 7in Aprilia headlamp has a 40/45 watt main bulb – surely the 280 watt Bosch alternator would stand a bigger bulb? – and the cushioned CEV rear light relies on a single stop/tail bulb, though 1979 machines will have two.

Guzzi's own design of 12-spoke cast alloy wheels balance the bike's 522 lb (that figure includes a full petrol tank, ie five gallons) and we liked them. The Brembo brakes comprise two 11½in drilled cast-iron discs at the front and a 10in drilled disc behind on the nearside – the offside swinging arm tube doubles as an oilbath for the fully-enclosed shaft. Wheelbase is reasonable at 57½in and maximum width, across the handed bars, 28in.

The 850's sports-racing image speaks for it – little chrome is (intentionally) apparent: two or three inches on the front forks and plates rear shock-absorber springs, tank cap and sundry rods and linkages. The accent is on high-quality dull-finished aluminium alloy castings. Matt black covers the stylish (and, we would say, encouraging!) upswept exhaust system which is cross coupled in front of the engine and again by the gearbox. A distinctive seat-cum-stomach support (not really a dualseat to English eyes), top fork yoke, handlebars and instruments are also finished in dull black.

Vital controls and instruments are grouped behind a shallow headlamp fairing and screen – not optically true, by the way – and there are warning lights for neutral, oil, generator, high beam and brake fluid level positioned in the rider's

#### ITALIAN SPECIALIST

In five years of specializing in Italian exotica, Mike Ward of Nottingham has built up a staff of knowledgeable enthusiasts. He rides a 500 solo Ariel in vintage road races, a post-war 350 AJS in Midland Classic Club trials and a 1967 ex-Roy Peplow 500 works Triumph twin in the Edinburgh. For trials, sons Mark, 16, and Simon, 15, have respectively a 250 Enfield and a 250 Greeves.

Workshop foreman Trevor Milner, 23, also rides in all weather. A keen rallyist, he has a 1961 350 lightweight Matchless, an Ariel Square Four and a GTS 860 Ducati, on which he did 13,400 miles including a trip to the Ducati factory during a fortnight's holiday this year.

He thinks nothing of fitting in a rapid Continental tour between Friday night and Monday morning in the summer months, and believes he set a record in attending eight motorcycle rallies in one weekend.

The Ward range of Ducatis, Laverdas, Guzzis and MVs attracts from near and far. Bill Emmerson, a previous winner of the gruelling Circuit de Pyrenees, dropped in recently for a T3. He lives in Newcastle...

line of vision hard by matching Veglia 0-160 mph speedometer and 0-8,000 rpm rev-counter dials.

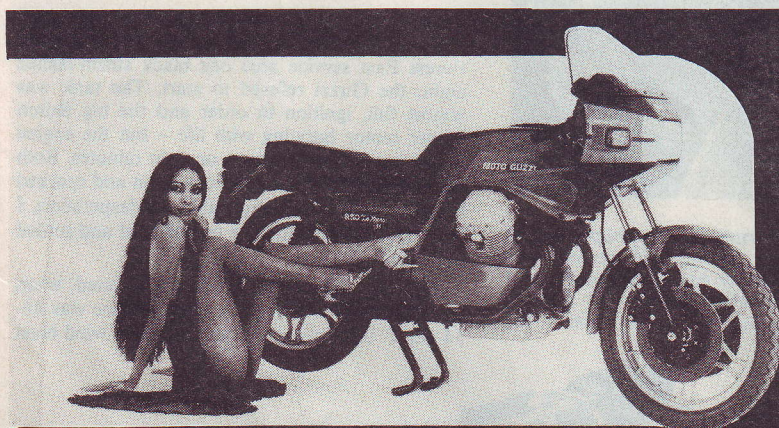
A telescopic steering damper has a particularly neat control: the damper may be switched in or out by a lever which passes through the steering stem. The control knob moves through only 45 deg and can be operated while the machine is being ridden.

Handlebars switch layout is also neat and simple. Placed by the left thumb is a series of buttons and switches to control indicators (Left-Off-Right), lamp flasher and horn, and a rotating tumbler operates the lights. It has four positions: Off, Park, Low and High beam and a safety lock prevents overshooting Low when flicking from High. To obtain Park from Low, a release tab must first be pressed. Alongside the Tommaselli Daytona twist-grip is an engine Kill switch and electric-start button. All electrical contacts and wires are concealed within the bars to minimize the possibility of water penetrating them, and the ignition keyhole, which is next to the steering damper knob, has its own rubber shield.

The carburettor bellmouths are angled in away from the rider's knees and protected by the leading edges of removable glassfibre side panels which cover the battery compartment, electrical junction boxes and a hydraulic fluid reservoir for the coupled brakes; and they are another ingenious development.

The patented "Integral Brake System" works like this: a foot lever on the offside applies 75 per cent of the pressure to the right front disc and the remaining 25 per cent to the rear brake, and the usual handlebar lever separately controls the left front disc. It is intriguing – and it works. The only drawback we can see is that exclusive use of the foot lever must apply uneven stress to the front forks.

The Guzzi tickover is quieter than most, certainly softer than a BMW's but sometimes with the test bike one had to wait for it. Whether the engine was hot or cold appeared to make little difference. There is a knack to starting it quickly and several hundred miles passed before I mastered it. Once warmed up, the big twin settled



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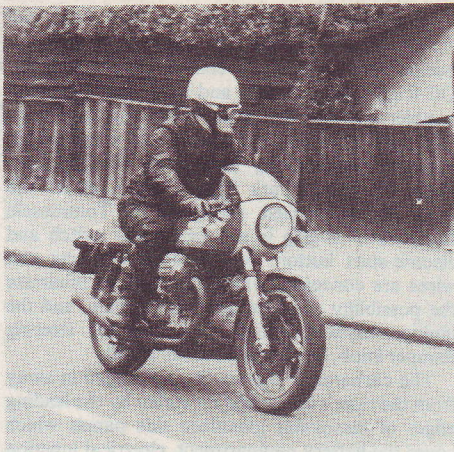
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with only a slightly deeper tone from the exhausts to indicate the effort.

"The Guzzi is one of the few modern road-burners for shorties. Its slim girth over the foot rests and a seat 2in lower than most would not embarrass a woman. But the weight might..."

Acceleration is satisfactory but there's a qualification. Elapsed standing-start times suffer because the motor needs to be doing about 3,000 rpm before it will respond to a snapped-open throttle. At 4,000 rpm it was just finding its stride and from then on a steady flow of power – no carburation flat spots – propelled the bike towards the horizon like a sprinter (excuse the vague imagery, repairs to our timing equipment are proving long-winded).

Good low-speed balance offsets to some extent a heavy clutch which in traffic can become tiring.

Moving the steering damper In or Out makes little difference to the steering in 30-40 mph built-up areas: when the big tank is full, one is conscious of the Guzzi's 522 lb all-up weight all the time in cities. Increasing front tyre pressure a couple of pounds lessens the sensation but the bike is wasted in those conditions.

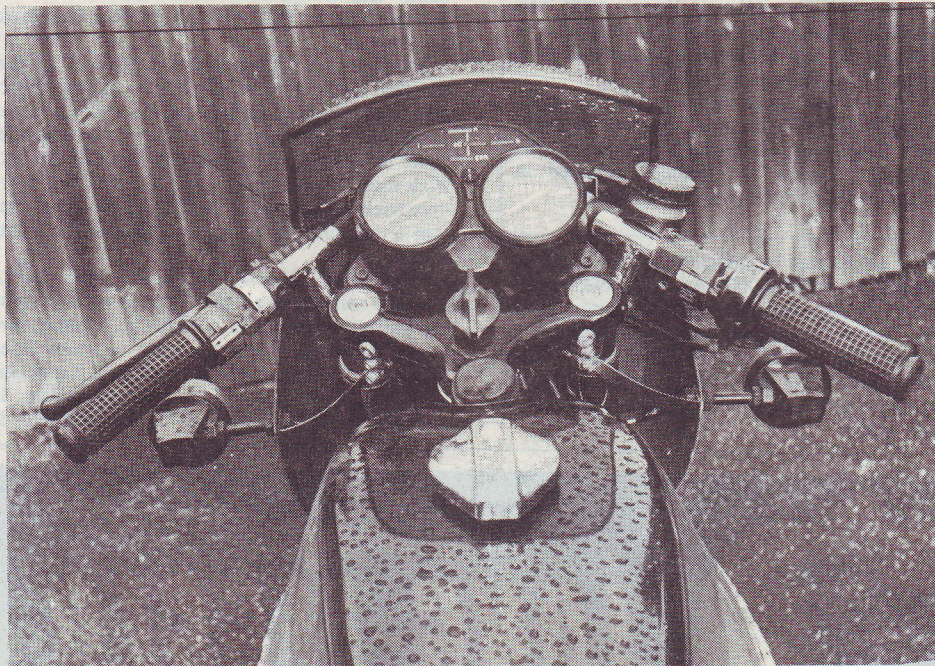
On plunging country roads and fast going like the A5 from Nuneaton to Towcester, the Guzzi comes into its own. It holds line exceptionally well, wet or dry. The limit of adhesion is elusive. Disconcerting at first, the left-right left-right pull of the V-twin at traffic roundabouts can be ignored – in fact, "fighting" at low revs never upsets the bike's equilibrium. It pays to synchronize revs and road speed, however, when changing down; get things wrong and the inflexible driveshaft will jerk the back tyre. In rain, and while heeling through an unexpectedly tight bend, the lesson can be dramatic. . . .

The nose fairing keeps the row of warning lights and twin dials legible in the filthiest weather but is otherwise little more than ornamental. It is too small to have any noticeable effect on frontal area; but without it the outline would be less attractive and we think it is worth retaining for that reason alone. A dolphin fairing seems superfluous as the big leaning cylinders effectively keep what mud and spray gets past the short front mudguard off the rider's legs.

Gear ratios suit the power characteristics. With a high-performance big twin like this, a fairly low bottom gear is required to get it rolling. The standard ratio, 11.6:1, is just right but second could stand being a shade lower. The other three ratios, being very close, enable one to hold the engine within its optimum powerband, between 5,000 and 7,300 rpm without difficulty. Even second pulverizes the 70 limit.

Only one really worrying incident occurred. After a five-minute stop at the M1 Leicester Forest East service area one black storm-lashed night, the Guzzi refused to start. The tank was almost full, ignition in order and the big Bosch starter motor bursting with life – but the engine would not oblige for seven or eight minutes. Both plugs were dry and in good condition and sparked brightly; it was all inexplicable. In desperation, I tried the choke again. The engine fired and settled to a steady tickover.

The low 'bars were most appreciated when travelling fast. Although the temperature was 46-54 deg F throughout the test, at speed wind blast



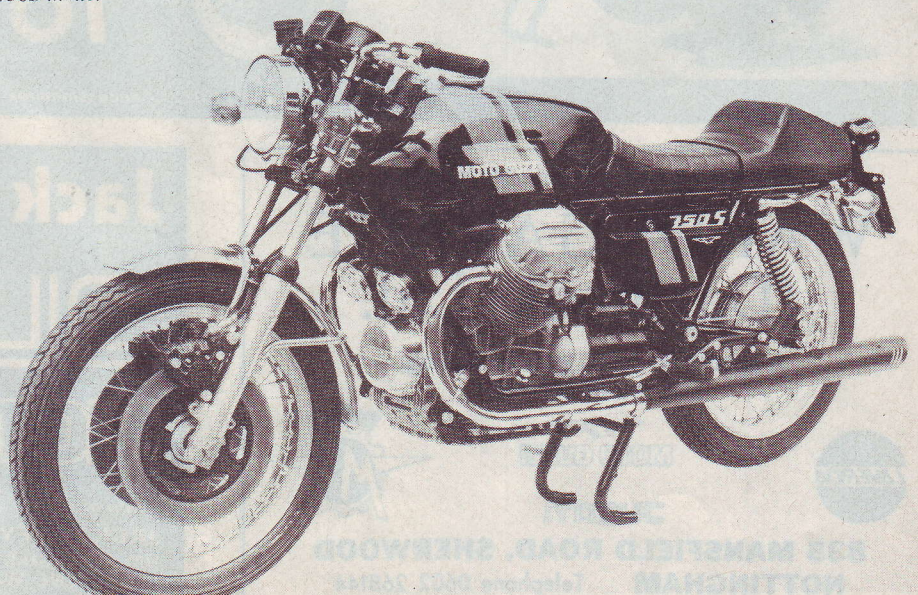
to a regular tu-tunk tu-tunk idle at about 900revs (the test machine had a noisy tappet on one side).

Not readily variable, the riding position is somewhat awkward and prompts the usual complaint that the foot rests are not ideally placed for a semi-crouched stance over the drooping 'bars. Freeing the clutch repeatedly does not prevent a clonk! as first gear is engaged; and, also like a BMW, the Guzzi moves to the right if the throttles are blipped at standstill. It can take several minutes to warm up. Even then a shade too much 'grip will make it gasp at low revs.

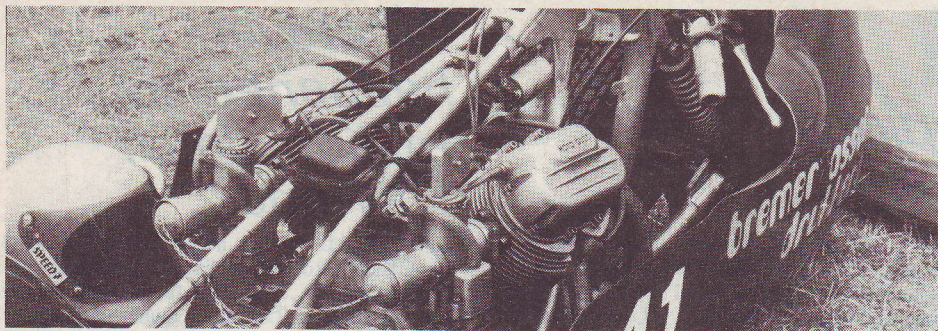
How can an 850 twin be so smooth? The lusty firing strokes rock the Guzzi when moving off ... and that is the only time you can tell the engine is working. It does not vibrate at all. I had expected the layout – someone called it agricultural – to produce some vibration; but no. The next surprise was the level of mechanical quietness at 70 mph on the motorways: a gentle rustle from the tappets mingled with a subdued beat from the pipes.

Long-legged gearing makes the Le Mans particularly suited to long-distance work, assuming one travels light as the seat is strictly speaking a solo affair and the turned up silencers rule out the fitting of panniers of a decent size. At Britain's maximum legal speed limit, the Guzzi in top gear was turning over at a casual 3,750 rpm and strode up long, winding hills on the same ratio

*Vital controls and instruments are grouped behind a shallow headlamp fairing and screen. The telescopic steering damper has a particularly neat control by a lever passing through the steering stem. Below: Forerunner of the Le Mans – the 750S model*







The 850 vee-twin can be tuned for greater things ... this is Dutchman Piet Bremers' Guzzi-powered outfit

did not numb hands in thin racing gloves; that abbreviated headlamp cone may be a better deflector than it appears to be. Main beam carried ahead well – it lit up the road for about 200 yards – and Dipped did not, apparently, antagonize slower vehicles as the Guzzi caught and passed them, though the intense shaft of light was biased to the left.

When the coupled brakes were used hard, the bike stopped in a straight line and without drama despite earlier fears that the application of unequal force to the front forks might be "interesting". The patented system acquitted itself with honour. The left front disc was the icing on the cake. There is a qualification. After the bike had stood overnight, the coupled brakes were found to be somewhat spongy for a few miles. No reason was apparent.

As things turned out, there was no opportunity to check top speed. The factory claim the Le Mans will do 133 mph. Having ridden the older, and less sporty V7 which recorded 125 mph, we think the claim is reasonable. The fact that, away from the track, you can't legally use such speed is we think unreasonable. Britain now has more

motorways than ever before, and the 70 limit is a ridiculous block on high-performance machines.

Count on 40 to 50 mpg in general use. On long and lonely motorways, however, the Le Mans needs that big tank if high average point-to-point speeds are to be achieved. Even if one keeps to the legal limit, enthusiastic and frequent use of the considerable acceleration in the lower gears can drink petrol at a great rate – say, 32-34 mpg. Oil consumption was virtually nil; here the one black mark was a persistent weep from the sump dipstick. A rivet holding the dipstick to the hexagon had worked loose. Otherwise the engine/gearbox/final drive casing was absolutely oiltight.

Proving that the Guzzi is outstandingly smooth, all bulbs kept their filaments during several hundred test miles; and the bike's responsive and nicely-styled suspension helped here, for severe craters were swallowed in a businesslike manner, though the lack of adjustment on the rear legs was occasionally a nuisance.

Moulded components (front guard, fairing, side panels and rear mudguard) looked to be of good

quality but the top of the rear numberplate/tail-light support had cracked after approximately 8,500 miles, and rust had eaten into a strut beneath the seat. The seat fabric covering had split in several places and the rubber-set side panels were awkward to replace. There was also a knack to using the main stand. A prop-stand was stoutly made and held the bike at a sensible angle.

Reserve setting on the twin taps provided enough petrol (4-star is essential) for about 20 miles, and the lift-up seat was hinged by the rear indicators on Silentbloc-type bushings. But a stay to keep it raised would be useful. Even when full to the brim, the steel fuel tank did not leak from the Monza snap-shut filler. The unsecured rear brake hose had begun to chafe against the swinging arm and a loose wire to the rear light was dangerously close to the tyre. A steering lock had its own key. A worthwhile addition would be a rear-view mirror....

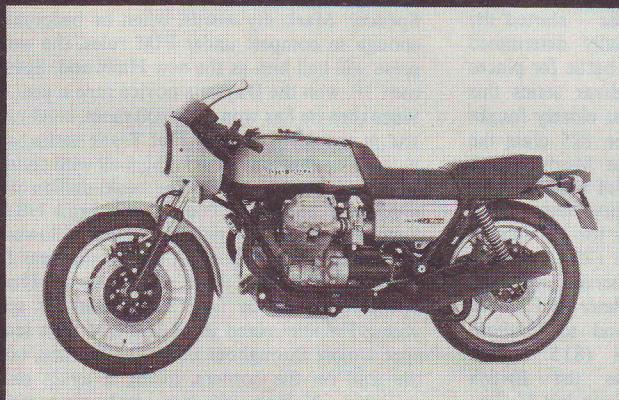
To anyone heartily tired of chains (and I am) or appalled by steep charges for servicing alternative multis, the lusty V-twin offers welcome relief. The Guzzi is one of the few modern roadburners for shorties. Its slim girth over the foot rests and a seat two inches lower than most would not embarrass a woman. But the weight might.

Expensive for a single-seater, the Guzzi would we conclude lose a lot if a normal dualseat replaced the present distinctive one; it's a bit of futuristic styling we like. For utmost longevity, the engine needs a proper air filtration system for the carburettors. Otherwise the Guzzi is perfectly acceptable as it stands.

There is only one other problem. How can I raise £2,199? V.W.

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