

No one could deny Moto Guzzi's Le Mans Mark II is a looker. Dave Calderwood took one to the Isle of Man during TT week to test the bike and his own endurance.

**SIX AM FRIDAY MORNING OF TT WEEK:** Leaden legs stumble down the stairs of Mrs Connolly's guest house and slouch across the slim seat of the Lemon. Flip up the choke lever on the left carb and, as always, the rumbling beat chunters into life immediately. Fortunately, the ferry terminal is less than 200 yards away across the deserted Douglas street 'cos I'm fast asleep again by the time I'm installed in the shuffling queue. Thank God it's Friday, even hardened degenerates couldn't last another day could they . . . ?

But still, after a couple of hours snooze on the boat plus being stung £2.75 for a greasy inadequate breakfast, the urge to snap back the throttle of the Lemon is too great. I must savour yet again that quickening thud-thud power pulsing through the 'bars and propelling man and machine forward at an ever-increasing rate. By the time we reached Stoke and turn off the depressing M6 onto the cross country A50, the juices are flowing again as though they hadn't ever been to Mona's Isle.

The Lemon earned its nickname from two incidents: first we'd received a Quote Of The Month entry cut from *Motor Cycle Weekly* with Le Mans spelt Lemons; then there was its inability to stay with Team Bike's pair of 900SS Ducatis. Not all the differential between the bikes was down to rider error even though one of the Dukes was ridden by Mac McDiarmid, who knows his way sufficiently well around the TT course to put in a roads open lap of 29 minutes. There was also the fact that I'd lost all the damping on the front forks of the Le Mans.

Now before all you potential Le Mans buyers rush into your dealers and cancel your order saying Guzzi forks are u/s, read a bit further. The fault lay entirely with the De Carbon sealed dampers within the forks. Guzzi forks are different from usual practice in having long thin

sealed dampers within the stanchions instead of free flowing oil. The 90cc of transmission fluid in each fork leg is there for lubrication only.

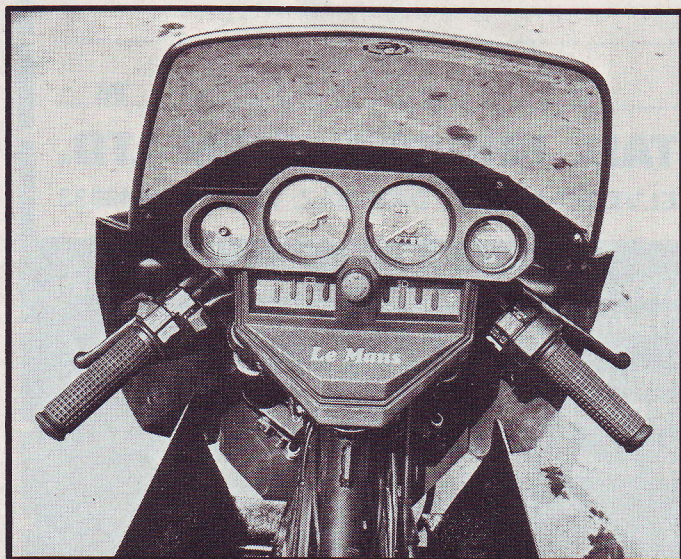
The Guzzi forks combine soft springing and firm damping with the intention of providing reasonable comfort with taut, controlled action — a very difficult bill to meet. On previous Guzzis I'd ridden there'd never been any problem so upon return from the Isle, the bike was returned to importers Coburn & Hughes for examination and repairs.

Upon stripdown, it was found that the dampers were faulty and new ones fitted. This stiffened the front end considerably though they still lacked the smooth, easy action of Marzocchis. At least they didn't plunge and rise dramatically as do many so-called sporting bikes. The firmer action highlighted the poor rear shox more though. Again, it's a lack of firm damping which allows excessive wheel travel under mere acceleration and deceleration.

Despite the fork problem, the Le Mans was still enjoyable to thrash around the Island. This was, after all, the first time I've ever made it to the TT with a decent bike — having endured the various leftovers from previous employers. What forced my hand in plumping for the Le Mans was just how together the whole bike looks. The old Mark One with that small flyscreen looked meaty enough exuding an air of raw brute appeal from its classic rakish lines. Back in '76 we rated the Le Mans as a pure kinetic artform and even three years later I'd have to concur. But with its new two-piece full fairing, the image is complete. There's enough of the dull alloy motor poking from beneath the bold, angular lines of the fairing to know that it's a big V-twin. And yet, many of the ugly nooks and crannies inevitable on such a collection of bits as a motorcycle are hidden by that luscious red glass fibre.

The handlebar part of the fairing is separate from the lower panels (straight Spada rip-offs) and the gap between the two is sealed by a rubber mat revolving with the action of the 'bars. This keeps out the weather and draughts efficiently and is a good example of the de-

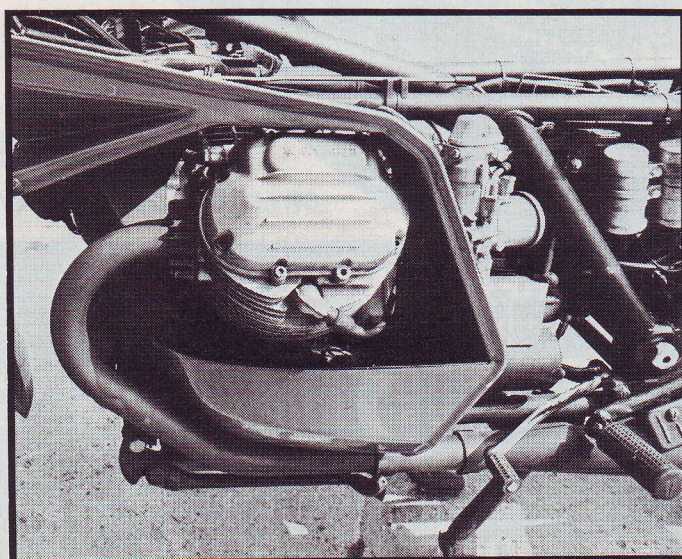
## Red Sunset Across The Mountain



Top Left: All tubes lead to the steering head. Every available space on the Le Mans is used for something.

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Left: New look fascia for '79 has accurate Veglia instruments, a voltmeter and a clock. Fascia is flexible rubber.



Above: Side panels are similar to the Spada with mini aerofoils. It's difficult to tuck your knees in behind the cylinders however.



signers turning a potential nasty compromise into advantage. Those drop 'bars tuck your head and shoulders behind the tinted screen just beneath the airflow rippling off the top of the screen, but not so much as to create wrist or neck ache over long distances. With a well-packed tank bag to rest upon, the riding position is near ideal.

It's good that Guzzi have gone for full coverage of hands because once you're up to a comfortable cruising speed there's no reason for rain or cold winds to affect sensitive fingers. Because of this and other relevant factors such as chassis and tyres, the Le Mans makes a superb wet weather bike since you're not suffering from the usual battering storm riders endure. This must be a primary safety consideration for intergalactic tourers; once you've moved into Warp Factor Five you're isolated from the tiring and concentration-sapping wind-buffetting that often curtails such journeys.

Unfortunately, in their quest for neatness and flashy looks, Guzzi dropped a bollock with the footrest position — I'm sure the bike is designed for a short-legged, long-footed, indented-knees monkey. Since I'm none of those things (I hope), the only way I could get comfortable behind the side panels was to have my knees poking out the sides. A fair cross section of other people also tried sitting upon the bike to assure me that there's no way a normal shape human being can get his knees tucked in — and hope to control the foot pedals with any degree of success. Either the pegs have got to be brought back a good three inches or the fairing trimmed.

Such considerations as actually riding the bike aside, the total effect of the flamboyant bright red bodywork and subtle black shadowing could melt the heart of even the most fervent of bike haters. Just the thing to woo the daughter of Maj Herbert Gussett (ret) when he's in a whatever-happened-to-the-Empire mood.

Regular TT goers will understand when I say that '78 was the year of the Le Mans; everywhere you looked there seemed to be one of the spectacular Mark Ones. This year it was





# Red Sunset Across The Mountain

the turn of the 900SS Ducati, presumably as a result of Hailwood's success last year. It was while attempting to circulate with these Ducatis that I really got to know about the Le Mans. Ordinary road riding can tell you about the relevance of a motorcycle in everyday life; take it to a course like the TT circuit and it's a whole different affair. Where the Guzzi feels secure and precise aimed through a smooth, constant radius ringroad turn around an insignificant urban sprawl, it would suddenly feel alive in your hands through a similar bend in the Isle of Man. I noticed odd effects which never manifested themselves to any great degree under the hardest mainland riding; things like the massive torque reaction under sharp acceleration or, worse, sharp deceleration.

After a while, I realised that shutting off in a bend would pull the bike's attitude rightwards, while accelerating would pivot the bike about its central lengthwise axis to the left. Thus, if you were leaning through a tight lefthander and put the power on hard it would tend to make the bike lean further; shut off and you'd be aimed through the nearest stone wall. For a right-hander, it would be the opposite. This effect wasn't so much dangerous as interesting though I'd hesitate to claim it could be used to advantage; certainly once I'd accepted it as normal, things didn't slow up at all.

You may consider this analysis unnecessary and beyond what's expected of a road bike; don't forget the Le Mans has been marketed on the production racing successes in *Bike's* own Avon Roadrunner Championship. In case you've forgotten, Roy Armstrong took the top class in '77, riding his own Le Mans.

I should've realised it was going to be an incident-packed week after nearly being wiped out on three occasions within the first 12 hours of leaving Peterborough. The first was when touring into Liverpool late one evening and a dog beamed down for a piss just two feet away from my front wheel. This was in the outside lane of an urban dual carriageway — its owner had taken it for an evening stroll along the central reservation! The other two incidents

were the first of many near-misses on an overpopulated Island full of cretins attempting contorted manoeuvres on blind bends.

In each of these incidents, full panic power was applied to the Guzzi's now famous integral braking system and since I'm still here to tippex my opinions, I'm assured that the three discs are collectively fantastically powerful. However, they do lack that fine touch of 'feel' expected of a high performance machine but this may be that I'm not used to applying most of the braking power by foot. At slow speeds — not a common occurrence — applying both foot and hand brakes causes the fork legs to twist slightly, just enough to feel it. There's no brace between the fork legs and the simple inclusion of one as a mudguard stay would solve this.

This must be the only part of the bike that does flex for the rest of the chassis is constructed to extremes. The ultra-rigid frame is dedicated to the idea of straight tubing: two top tubes run from the steering head to the end of the seat with an extra top tube from one of several cross-braces. The engine is held in a full cradle with massive-triangulated support to the swing arm pivot.

Steering geometry is such that, like Ducati's 900SS, fast long-sweeping bends become a work of art. Once on the right line it runs round as if on rails. This stability, however, means that tight, twisty bends are hard work. It's not that the bike doesn't handle through swervy, just that you need to keep on top of the situation. You need to force the 'bars round and if you're going quick, it's necessary to manhandle the plot quite determinedly. Previous tests have criticised the lack of ground clearance but I never found this a problem; the only change is in the design of the centre stand which now has its access arm tucking up around the left silencer.

Though the Lemon didn't take too kindly to the 'point and squirt' technique necessary on some 100bhp-plus megabikes, it proved very effective in staying ahead of a GS750 Suzuki and an immaculate T160 Trident round the tortuous, narrow lanes on the south of the Island. The Guzzi set the pace by virtue of its ability to hold

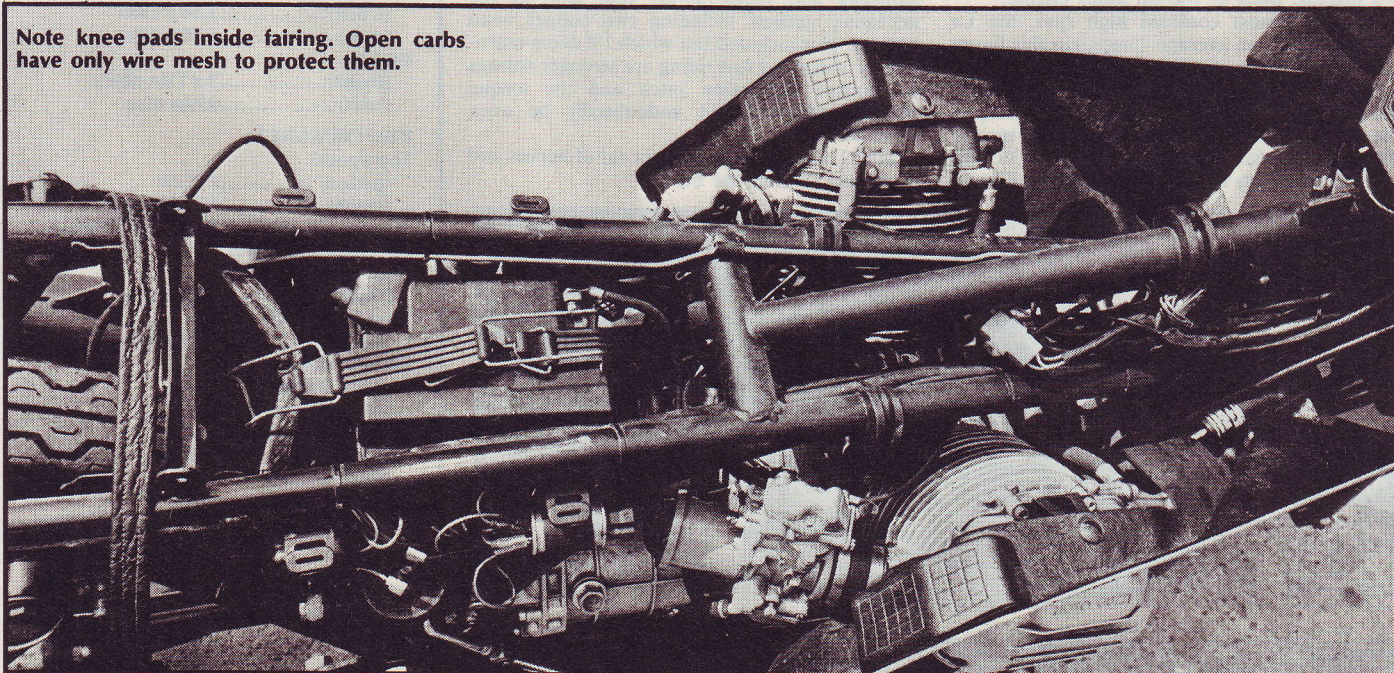
the brakes on well into a bend, and with its surprisingly quick acceleration out.

The Le Mans engine doesn't feel particularly quick when you first ride it. Unlike the softly tuned T3, there's little urge below 4,000rpm. Reach this point and the tach needle takes off and a careful eye has to be kept to avoid going full tilt over the 7,500rpm redline. There's some mighty big valves working overtime in those cylinders and they're controlled by conventional springs and pushrods. This power step poses a gearchange problem since it's impossible — not to mention noisy — to make a clean change from first to second or second to third, if the revs are above this point. This was most felt on the vital second-third change used so much (on the Lemon) pulling up the Mountain from Ramsey. I'd take the hairpin in first, obviously, and attempt to accelerate hard once I'd pulled up from maximum lean. Then it'd be up two gears on the approach to Waterworks when I'd have to decide whether to plod through in third and not have maximum acceleration out of the bend, or cog down and risk the awful ker - ker - ker - ker - ker - lunkbonk getting back into third. During this time, I'd lose speed so I'd be out of the power band anyway.

This, I maintain resolutely, is why I couldn't get past that 500 Velo until the straight before the Gooseneck — another flat in second turn. Back in saner climes (the mainland), the poor gearchange wasn't so noticeable because the riding wasn't so extreme. The Isle Of Man is a very special place in having no speed limits outside the towns which may encourage lunatic riding from some but there's also many examples of safe, competent, high speed skill. By the time I was back in Liverpool I'd also developed a technique of holding the pedal up hard until I could feel the dogs (of war?) engage.

While in the Island, I got into all sorts of conversations with owners of Mark Ones and picked up all sorts of ideas. One chap said that if you drilled a series of small holes around the silencer's one exit, you'd improve lowdown response and get better mpg. He'd actually knocked the whole of the end of the silencer out

Note knee pads inside fairing. Open carbs have only wire mesh to protect them.





on his bike and while this increases noise considerably, it does help the motor to breathe a little easier.

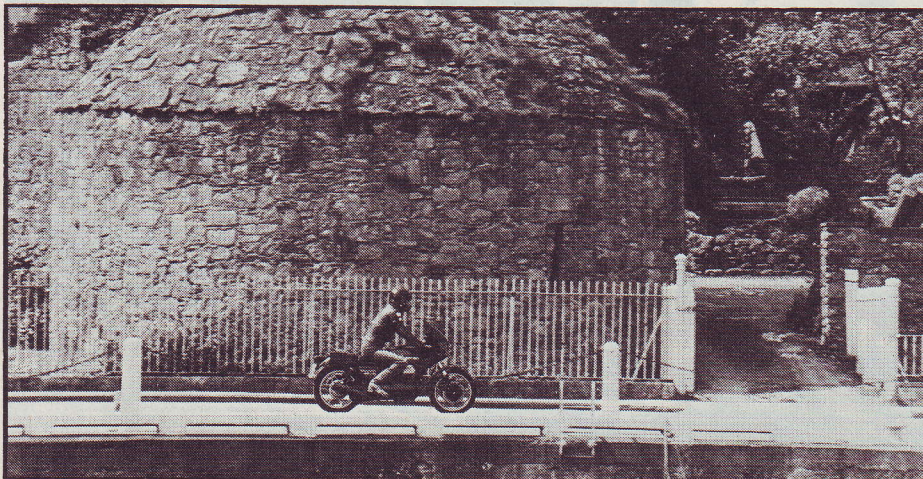
There's a slight contradiction by the factory here for they fit quiet exhausts to pass US laws but leave open carbs with just bellmouths and wire mesh. There's a good few decibels to be saved by fitting air filters (K&N would probably fit), not to mention bore wear and carbs. Those 36mm injector pump Dell 'Ortos don't come cheaply.

Without this exhaust mod, which doesn't need any carburation changes, it's vital to keep the motor revving hard to produce anywhere near the same level of performance that's available from Ducati's 900SS — which comes with straight-through silencers and monster carbs as standard. The Ducati pumps out gallons of torque from as low as 2,000rpm which makes its getaway from sharp, slow turns much quicker. Still, I did have the satisfaction of having one of the few of Team Bike's machines to survive the week. Both the Dukes developed ominous noises from the cranks (cranks on the latest left-foot gearchange models are much stronger), Howard Lees' Renegade Racer 350 Yamaha (June '79 issue) ate a piston as did another similar Yamaha, and a certain fully-faired 250 Ducati should never have been allowed near a public road in the first place.

This wasn't before we'd issued a challenge to Royce Creasey's Team Waste which subsequently never materialised. The challenge was based upon Mac's superiority around the TT course and the sure knowledge that the Le Mans made a reasonable trail riding implement. Sitting in the pub after watching Monday's Senior race from the Gooseneck, Mac suddenly recalled a track leading up to Windy Corner from Laxey. No more ado, we downed our pints and set off to find that the track became a narrow, rock-strewn, 1-in-6 hillclimb resembling a Scottish trials section. It was too late to turn around (tight steering lock, long wheelbase, etc) and anyway, wimps we're not. The amusing follow-on to this incident was watching several biking spectators disappear down this same trail obviously not realising what lay ahead. Dirt verdict on the Lemon: good through the nadgery but not so hot over the whoopdeedooos...

I digress. Back to the Le Mans engine.

Despite almost constant high rpm, the Le Mans returned an average 45mpg but this figure rose and fell dramatically according to use. One trip to Lincoln along my favourite winding road, the A15, produced a surprising 59mpg, despite the occasional 100mph blast and riding two-up. Yet after one fast lap of the TT course at 7am when it was fairly clear, this dropped to 37mpg.



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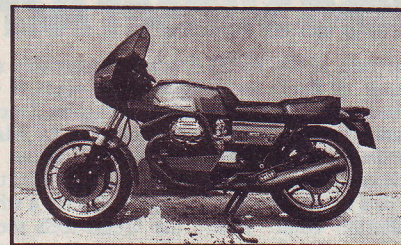
Mind you, the rear wheel was in the air for considerable periods including a sneaky little leap at Ballaugh. The five gallon tank goes onto reserve early leaving well over a gallon to go. These consumption figures are probably more accurate than previous years' tests because at last the Veglia instruments are reasonably correct. Zooming through our electronic speed trap at an indicated 120mph produced an actual figure of 116mph — and that's very accurate indeed. Other dials on the flexible rubber console are a pointless voltmeter on the right and a useful clock on the left. On such a complete motorcycle as the Le Mans, a clock isn't superfluous at all. In fact, it's a recognition by the designers of the Le Mans' true role: that of a fast tourer for serious riders.

The battery of idiot lights may be a sop to the seventies but American law insists on such things so's to remind a rider that he's on a two-wheeled motorised vehicle and not changing the TV station. Switchgear is by bright, easily found slide-knobs that reminded me of a Lego set. Once your thumb is used to the up-down dip-switch, there's no worries and the throw from the headlamp belies its puny 45/40w bulb. Maybe my night vision has improved after all these Watership Down carrot salads but I found the beam almost as good as the 60w H4 lamp on a recent Ducati test bike.

Not so good is the narrow, firm seat which develops two sore spots on your bum and is even worse for pillions. The idea of travelling hundreds of miles on that seat is horrifying. The seat 'lock' is also primitive to say the least. It's nothing but a retaining clip holding the seat strap to a peg either side. And lurking under the hinged seat is the extensive and valuable Guzzi toolkit.

This then is the role of the Le Mans Mark II with its final veneer of style added: the inter-continental tourer for someone who wants to travel at high speeds but just below the all-out balls-to-the-world cafe racers' pace. If you want that level, then there's the Production Racing version available for an extra £400 or you can convert your present bike by giving £450 green ones to Sports Motorcycles of Manchester. For this you'll receive the horrendously huge 40mm carbs with matching inlet manifolds, megaphone exhausts and pipes, hi-lift cam and all the necessary gaskets including two copper head gaskets. Not included but which I'd deem essential for sustained fast riding are stronger springs to control suspension pitch and the torque reaction which would undoubtedly be even greater.

Me? I'd settle for a stronger set of nerves and an Island without the bumps.



#### MOTO GUZZI LE MANS MK II

Engine ..... ohc V-twin  
Bore x stroke ..... 83 x 78mm  
Capacity ..... 844cc  
Compression  
ratio ..... 10.2:1  
Carburation ..... 2 x 36mm Dellorto  
Bhp @ rpm ..... 75 @ 7,300rpm  
Primary drive ..... gear  
Clutch ..... two-plate, dry  
Gearbox ..... 5-speed  
Electrical system .... 12v 280w  
alternator, 20ah  
battery, c/b and coil  
ignition  
Lighting ..... 45/40w headlamp

#### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase ..... 59in  
Seat height ..... 29in  
Overall width ..... 28in  
Ground  
clearance ..... 7in  
Weight ..... 476lb (with 1gal  
fuel)  
Fuel capacity ..... 5gal

#### EQUIPMENT

Trafficators ..... Yes  
Electric start ..... Yes  
Trip odometer ..... Yes  
Steering lock ..... Yes  
Helmet lock ..... No  
Headlight flasher ... No  
Others ..... Cast wheels, linked  
brakes, fairing,  
steering damper

#### CYCLE PARTS

Tyres  
(front) ..... 3.50 x 18in  
(rear) ..... 4.00 x 18in  
Brakes  
(front) ..... 2 x 12in discs  
(rear) ..... 9 1/2 in disc

#### PERFORMANCE

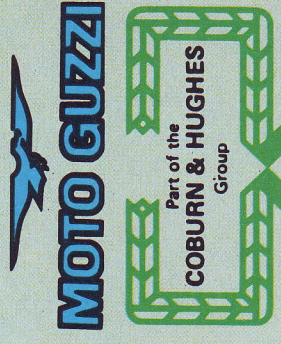
Top speed  
(prone) ..... 128.69  
(sitting up) ..... 118.99mph  
Standing 1/4 mile .... 13.68s/103.54mph  
Speedometer error  
(at indicated  
30mph) ..... 27.03mph  
(at indicated  
60mph) ..... 54.19mph  
Braking distance  
(from 30mph) ..... 27ft  
(from 60mph) ..... 116ft  
Fuel consumption  
(overall) ..... 53mpg  
(ridden hard) ..... 45mpg  
PRICE ..... £2299  
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