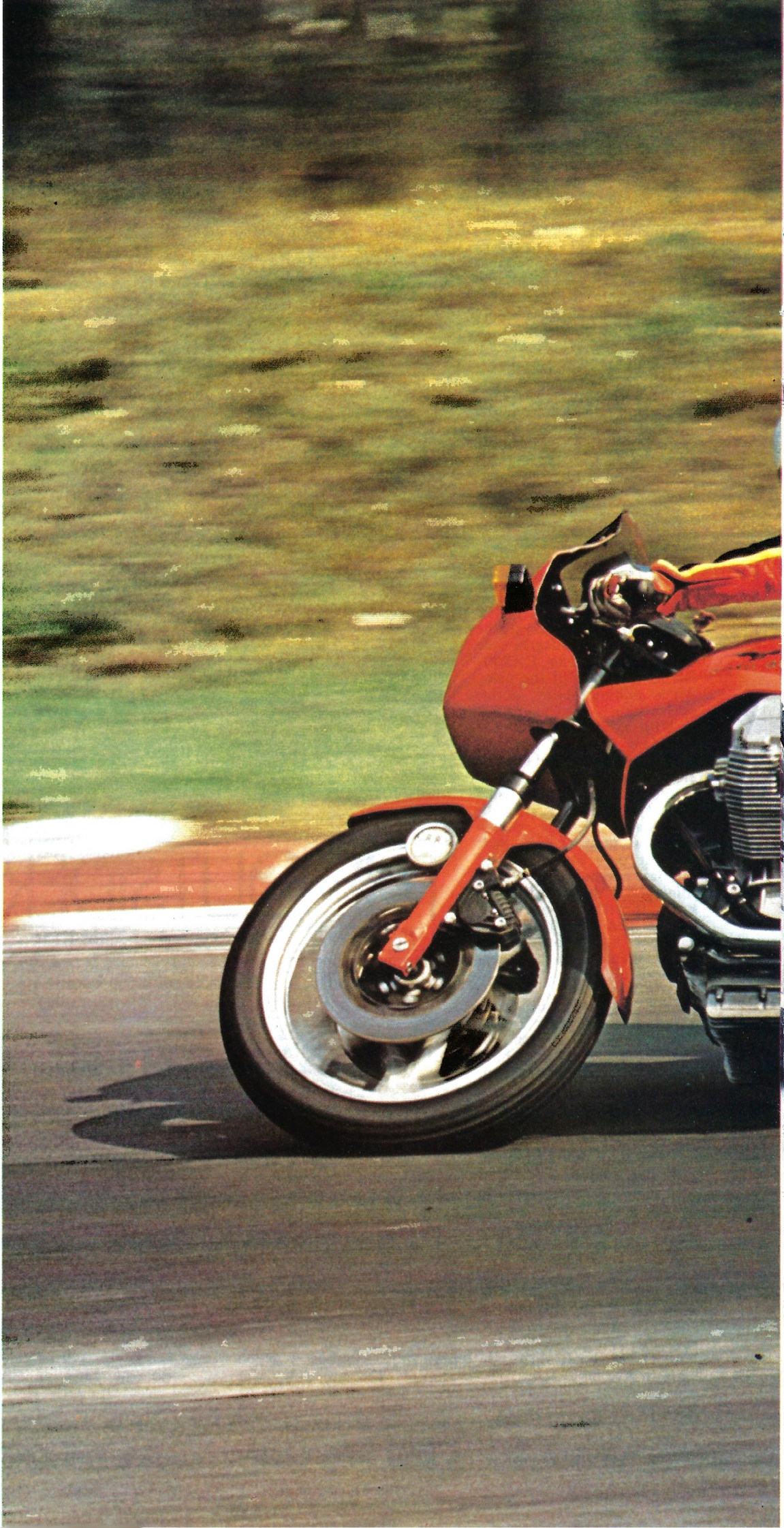


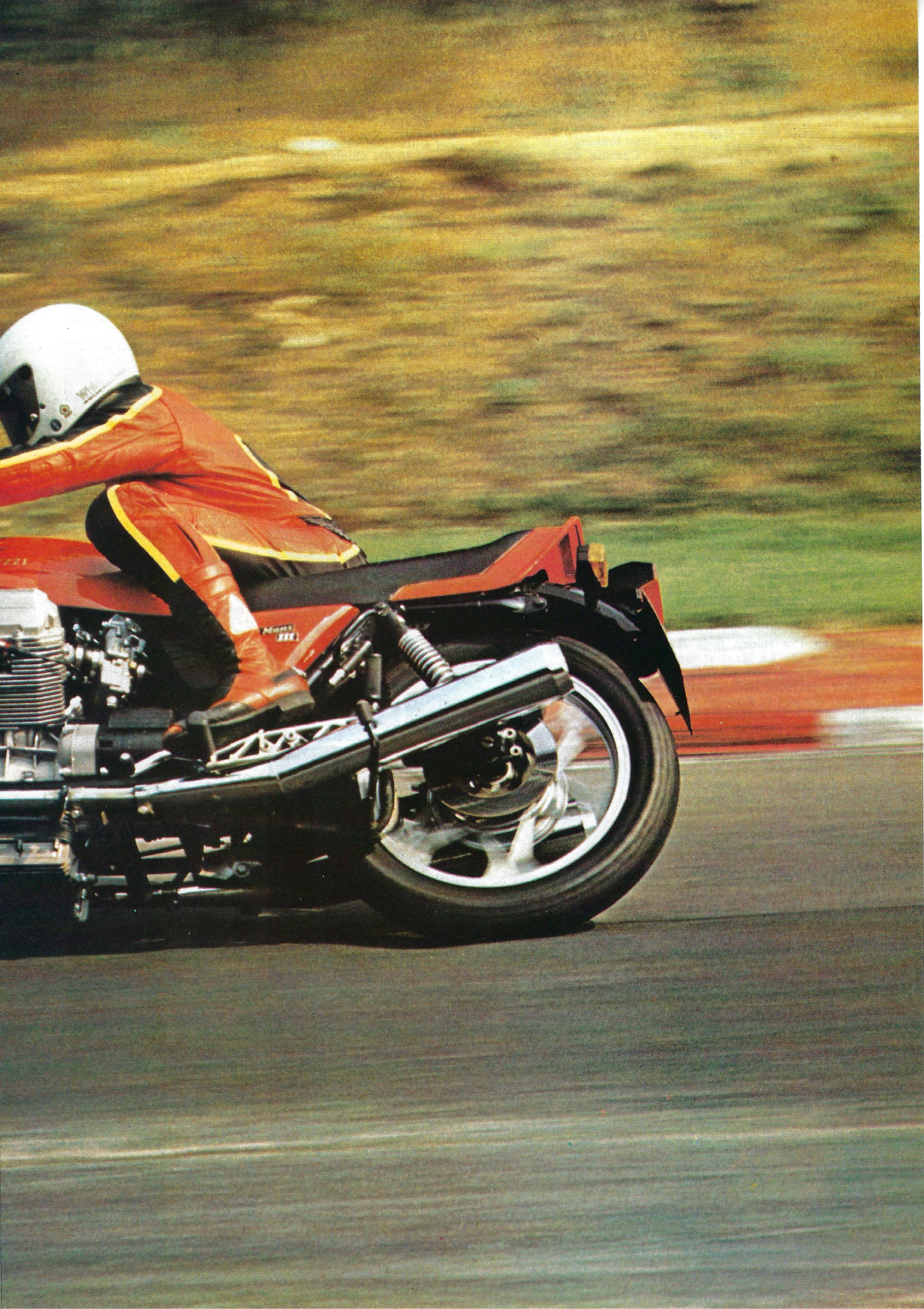
TWIN S

in top. The extra power over the Mark 2 comes from a redesigned head in which improved porting plays the major role. Accelerator pumps assist the smooth transmission of power, and mid-range acceleration is pretty respectable.

Wary of the handling, we changed a balding rear tyre at 2,100 miles: the improvement was dramatic. A quick check of the air-assisted fork pressure and also at the rear (made easier by the new linked system) and I was ready to put the Le Mans to the test. Up to this point, as you may have gathered, I was not overly impressed with the machine's useability. It was beautiful, of course. It sounded marvellous, but it was difficult to ride in town and, at 39mpg, was an expensive way of enjoying travelling. Still, occasional blasts along the riverside offered tantalising glimpses of its true potential, so I reserved judgement. In fact, of course, I knew that it was going to be good. I just didn't imagine how good.

It is quite possible to ride all day without moving into the power band. The engine seems at its sweetest at 4,500 revs, or roughly 80mph, where no allowance need be made for torque reaction when changing gear. If you want to pass a truck thundering along ahead, simply opening the throttle a fraction will take you past it, and the ton, instantly. Redlining it, each upward change at high revs is accompanied by a kick in the pants, even from 120 in fourth. Nose on the rev-counter, you appreciate that the wind-tunnel-tested mini fairing really works well. The spoilers above the cylinders do their job. The suspension comes into its own. At an indicated 135mph (actual speed near 128mph) on a



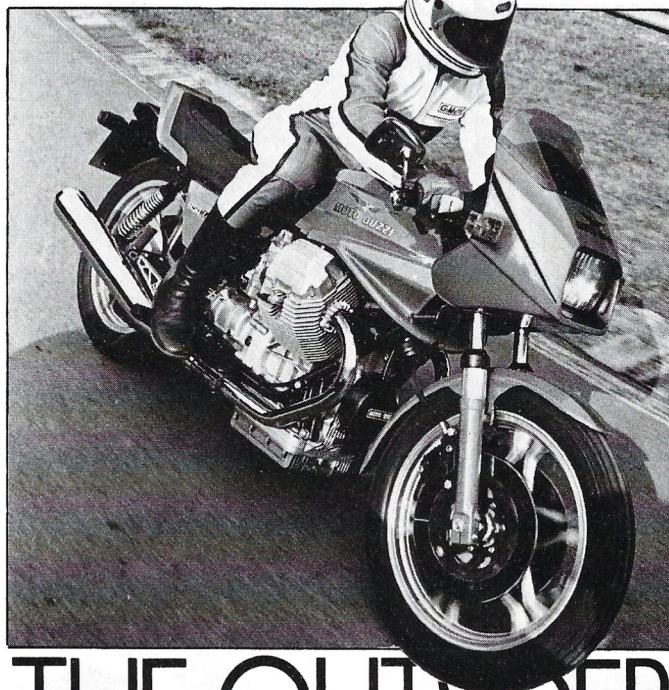


The symbol of the Moto Guzzi factory is an eagle in flight. It's said that the emblem was chosen to commemorate the death in action of a friend of the two founders, Carlo Guzzi and Giorgio Parodi. The three men were airmen in World War One and shared a passion for motorcycles. In any event, the first racing machine flew, winning first time out. Moto Guzzi went on to great success, staying ahead of the opposition with their race development programme which culminated in Carcano's astonishing vee-eight, which, in 1957, revved to 15,000rpm and produced 78bhp.

Twenty-five years on, the Le Mans 3 produces 78bhp from an engine as simple as a BMW. Shaft-driven, it's powered by a twin cylinder, push-rod four-stroke engine set across a cradle frame. Helical gears are used for the primary drive, and a five-speed box transmits the power through the two-plate clutch and a drive shaft to the rear wheel. Uniquely, the bulky 422cc cylinders lie athwart the frame in a 90-degree vee configuration. The CX500? Go to the back of the class. We're talking about motorcycles here.

With exceptional flair, the Le Mans designers have incorporated this broad-shouldered lump of an engine into a motorcycle whose visual impact is stunning. At rest, the Mark 3 stops people in their tracks. Kids rush up to it, only to hold back at the last moment, their eyes shining. Fathers twist the heavy throttle self-consciously. Old men with spirit pause, lean over it, step back assessing it, then go on their way, smiling.

The new model features several modifications compared with the Mark 2. The nose screen is now smaller and squarer. The carbs have air filters. The exhaust system, its internals modified to satisfy ever-more stringent emission regulations in America, is now fully chromed. The same fire-engine red and black colour scheme as the Mark 2 now features matching red sliders on the front fork. The tank has been enlarged to 5.5 gallons and is reshaped to set off the new cylinder barrels and heads. The old, rounded fins have been squared off, giving the engine a brutal, squat look, and the lower half of the fairing has been dispensed with to give more room. The overall effect is to give the Mark 3 a sharper, harder-edged appeal than its predecessor, almost as though it had previously been slightly out of



THE OUTSIDER

Like an eagle, the Moto Guzzi Le Mans III is happiest when its wings are spread and it has the freedom to fly. Mark Revelle rode the bike in its natural habitat, the open road. Photography

by John Perkins.

MOTO GUZZI 850 LE MANS III

focus. For me, the only flaws in the styling are the ridiculous girder-section footrest supports and the instrument panel. This used to feature a boringly efficient layout, Honda style. The Mark 3 now has an eccentric arrangement featuring a small voltmeter on the left, a standard speedo on the right and, in between, a large, beautiful Veglia rev-counter that would grace a Bugatti. It is a classically beautiful design which prompts the question, why aren't they all like that? At night the pearled face is softly luminous, but its magical effect is despoiled by a glaring green idiot light

which tells you that your lights are on. Can the designers really be so crass? At least the headlamp is a first class quartz H4 affair, making night riding a safe pleasure. The main beam in particular (indicated by a glaring purple light) is excellent. The neutral light, however, lies. Anywhere from part-disengagement of first to part-engagement of second is neutral as far as the light is concerned. Trust it and you will be jerked onto the tank as the engine stalls. Of course, if the gear box didn't tend to half-engage, the neutral light would not be unjustly cursed.

But the problems of town

riding are such that the gear box glitch passes almost unnoticed. The problems stem from two obvious sources: the riding position and the engine's characteristics. An unashamedly racer's crouch is exaggerated by the narrow clip-on bars which abut the steering head, and angle down and back. The levers should be dog-legged, but are not. The seat is as long, narrow and hard as a length of railway track, and it's a long way to the controls, even for a six-footer like me. Of course, at high speed, the position is ideal, but traffic work induces a pain in the back. The engine doesn't help. Although it is tractable, there is still a lack of real bite below 3,500rpm, and the heavy low-speed steering (it almost wants to fall into slow corners) calls for no little manhandling on occasion. The illusion of instability is increased by the quirky adverse torque reaction.

Down where the acceleration ain't so brisk the engine rocks from side to side as you roll, and changing gear on a bend, often a necessary evil in town, calls for care and though. Blip the throttle at standstill and a warp passes through the bike like a harmonica player bending a note. The instability becomes real on slow, bumpy bends, where the firm suspension yields little. Carrying a passenger is not recommended. He or she slides constantly into the rider, there is nothing on which he can brace himself, and there is no grabrail for those moments when the frustrated pilot wants to let rip. Solo, and taken faster, the bumps are ironed out, but the Le Mans' usefulness as an occasional commuter is further restricted by the stands. The side-stand is an abomination. Mounted too far forward (you have to get off the bike first), it lets the bike lean an awful long way, and will only keep it standing when the surface is dead flat. Any kind of irregularity demands the use of the centre stand. There is a knack to using it and if you've got a Buddhist's power of concentration allied with the sinewy strength of an enraged orang-utan you could probably master it too. Just don't think it's easy. . . .

But using a Le Mans to commute is like keeping an eagle in an aviary. It is in its element beneath open skies, where the engine's torque and power can be fully exploited. Despite initial assertions to the contrary, valve sizes and timing remain unchanged. Tending towards the high side the gearing, at 7,800rpm, produces 135mph

TWINS

good A-road the Le Mans is as steady as a Lear jet and as straight as an arrow.

Moving onto lesser roads, the Le Mans requires a lot from its rider. Despite the conventional steering geometry and the short amount of trail, the machine almost has to be wrestled through the swerves — but it's a skill which can be acquired with practice, and the learning process is all fun: the Le Mans can be keeled over until your nerve gives out. Above 3,500rpm the flywheel comes into play, ironing out the adverse torque effect, bringing an uncanny smoothness to the engine. Around the B-roads, shifting your body weight improves the ease of steering, encouraging and enhancing the road racer effect.

Speed, and unerring stability at speed, are what the Le Mans is all about. The exceptional handling, more than a match for the engine's massive top-end power, is down to a solid frame, the Paioli forks and shocks and the superb Pirelli Phantom tyres. The unobtrusive steering damper does no harm. Nothing I've ridden feels as stable as the Le Mans at top speed, except perhaps Italy's other vee-twin, and, surprisingly, it's not as slow off the line as it feels. A straight line dice with a Yamaha RD350-LC left the Yam trailing after the Guzzi's high first gear had almost ceded the advantage. (It might have done, had not the Yam's rider popped a giant wheelie.)

That small victory came as a pleasant surprise, but that first gear is just one of a series of small problems which, if rectified, would put the Le Mans beyond criticism. The others include the stands, already mentioned, the seat strap, which serves no purpose now that a catch is fitted (though the catch ought to lock) and the lack of a grab-rail. The seat itself should be more comfortable, and with the tail unit should be redesigned so that opening it doesn't foul the rear tyre. The switchgear could be improved, both from an aesthetic and a practical point of view. As it stands, they are too easily confused. Finally, the introduction of CV carbs would obviate the need for the heavy throttle return springs, which make its action tiring.

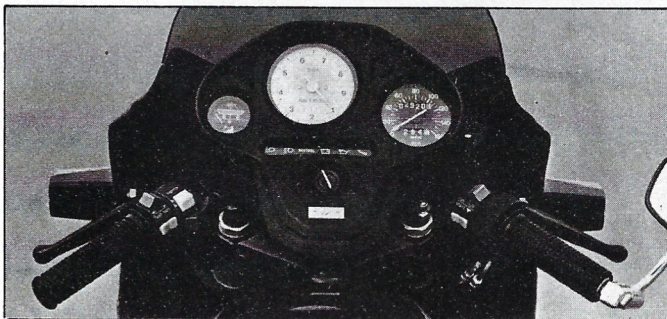
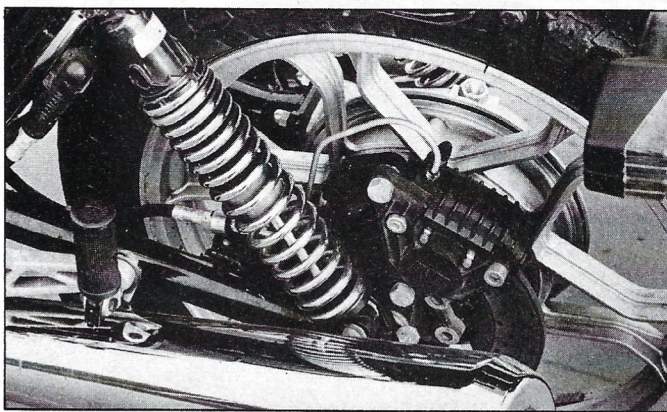
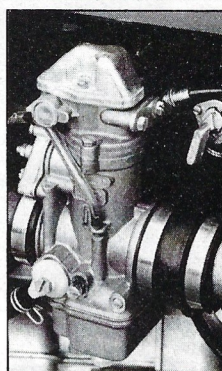
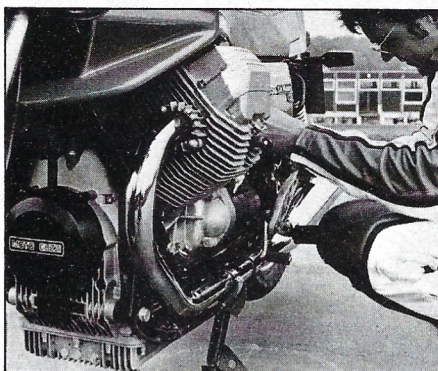
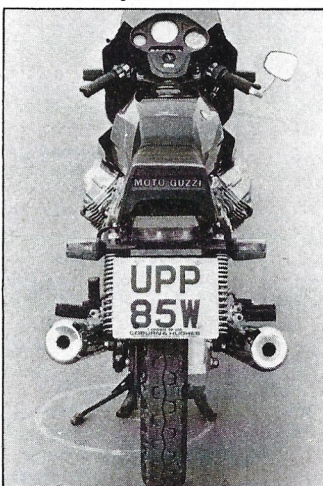
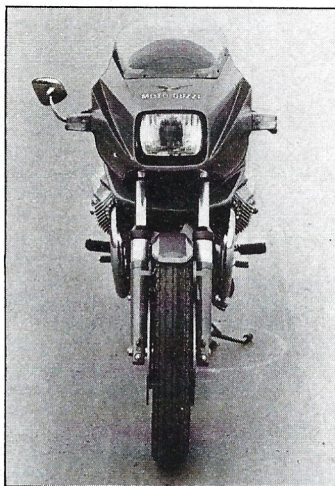
On the other hand, the Le Mans offers direct access to the heads for maintenance, uses an easily understood

contact-breaker system, and has the inestimable advantage of shaft-drive. The clutch is firm, strong and comparatively light. The linked brakes are extremely effective, providing smooth, progressive clean braking.

Carping details aside, the Le Mans has got it where it matters. Designed to travel fast and alone, it requires guts and skill to master. If you have the desire and think you

have the skill, it can be yours for a mere £3,199. (£2,500 if you fancy a buying trip to Mandello). It's not a bad price. The engine may be old-fashioned, but so is the dedication to excellence in the pursuit of motorcycling's purest thrills which the whole machine embodies. The eagle may not have appeared on Bill Lomas' vee-eight, but its presence on the Le Mans Mark 3 is justified. There are

very few machines the Guzzi wouldn't eat for breakfast.



Front-on the slim looks of the Le Mans III make it seem smaller. Rider can tuck in for comfort over the ton. Simple engine enables easy servicing Dellorto carbs benefit from air filters now Rear disc is connected to the front right disc and operated by the foot pedal with a compensator to prevent locking Instruments including the beautiful Veglia revmeter give the rider the feeling he's in a fighter cockpit.

MODEL: MOTO GUZZI LE MANS III

Price inc. VAT: £3,199

Warranty: 12 months/unlimited

ENGINE

Type: Ohv transverse 90-deg vee-twin
Capacity: 844cc (83 x 78mm)
Lubrication: Wet sump
Comp. ratio: 9.8:1
Carburetion: Two 36mm Dellorto
Ignition: Coil and cbs
Max. power: 78bhp (DIN) @ 7,800rpm
Max. Torque: 54.9lb-ft @ 6,200rpm

TRANSMISSION

Primary drive: Helical gears
Clutch: Dry two-plate on crank.
Gearbox: Five speed
Final drive: Shaft and bevels
Overall ratios: 11.64, 8.08, 6.095, 5.06 & 4.37:1

ELECTRICS

Power source: Alternator
Battery: 12V 20Ah
Headlamp: 60/55W quartz H4

CHASSIS

Frame: Duplex tubular cradle
Suspension, front: Paioli telescopic fork c/w connected air valves.
rear: Swing arm with five-pos. spring preload adj & connected air valves
Brakes: Dual 11.8in Brembo discs (f) 9.5in rear disc connected to right front.
Tyres: Pirelli Phantom 100/90V18 (f) 110/90V18 (r)

CAPACITIES

Fuel tank: 5.5gal
Oil: 6.5pts

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase: 59.3in
Seat height: 30.3in
H-bar width: 23.0in
Grnd clnce: 5.5in
Rake/trail: 62deg/3.54in
Dry weight: 453lb

EQUIPMENT

Fairing, turn signals, electric starter, rev meter, speedo, trip meter, coupled brakes, prop stand, toolkit, steering damper, volt meter.

PERFORMANCE

Top speed: 130mph
Speeds in gears: 51mph, 73mph, at max. power
revs.: 117mph & 135mph
0-60mph: 5 secs
St ¼-mile: 12.9 secs
Av. Fuel consumption: 44mpg
Tank range: 240 miles
Importer/Manufacturer: Moto Guzzi Concessionaires Ltd, 51-63 Park Street, Luton, Beds.