

Long-term Impressions Moto Guzzi Le Mans Mk II

ALMOST without exception, every Moto Guzzi owner you cared to ask would refute the invariable road-test criticisms levelled at these uncompromising motorcycles; and so it proved, when I was considering the purchase of a Le Mans 12 months ago.

On the question of finish, I was assured that they were coming through with much better chrome and paintwork these days, and to my mind the more important doubts over the quality of the gear change were explained away by the well-known long bedding-in process of engine and transmission, which also explains the disparity between the manufacturer's top speed figures and those achieved by the monthlies, I was told.

Well, if all this was to be believed, even if funds and better half were to permit, my relatively small mileage on two wheels would impose a tedious few months of initial ownership of a new machine. So a secondhand example it would have to be.

Having bought my last motorcycle through the classified advertisements of one of the weekly comics and sold it 18 months later for more than I gave for it, I had high hopes of the same source providing a suitable Le Mans.

Week after week went by, however, without anything remotely suitable coming up, and with no motorcycle to take advantage of the improving weather, I was beginning to despair of ever finding a Mandello Charger.

Only when practically all hope has been lost, does something turn up, and then only from the least expected quarter. A friend of a colleague at work was found to have a clean Mk. I, which he was kind enough to let me try with a view to buying. It proved to be remarkably like the impression I had formed of it in my mind beforehand. The power seemed endless, the brakes reassuring, the torque reaction hardly noticeable and the gearchange smooth if not rushed. Unexpected was the sudden clutch take-up, which would merely require a more delicate technique, the total lack of wind deflection afforded by the puny flyscreen, which would not apply to a Mk. II, and surprisingly a tendency to fall into a corner and have to be picked up again coming out.

All in all, though it served to convince me that I had to have a Mk. II, so the search continued and after a few more frustrating weeks a suitable example turned up in the shape of a nine month old 8,000 mile specimen, owned by one of the employees of a local dealer. Mechanically it seemed and has subsequently proved to be mechanically A1, although rather disappointingly it was blue, however the colour does grow on you and red is so common! So a deal was struck and the following week after a final test run, the money was paid over and my new toy ridden home.

"I decided I had to have a Mk. II . . ."

Practically the whole of the next two weeks were spent stripping, servicing and cleaning, the previous owner having been somewhat reluctant in this pursuit, in fact I reckon that had it been neglected for much longer, it would have been beyond recovery to pristine condition, as it was the fork stanchions were pitted and the engine castings dull. Despite these purely visual considerations the motorcycle has met my riding requirements to the full. It is a pleasure to ride quickly, not too easy, but just challenging enough to be extremely satisfying.

I am afraid that I am one of those people who are never completely satisfied, and feel obliged to constantly try to improve even the most nearly perfect machine with an endless succession of additions and modifications.

The first priority on the list was the front fork stanchions, which were pitted, causing seal leakage, however enquiry disclosed that replacements were both expensive and temporarily unavailable and quite likely to suffer the same fate as the originals. So I took the advice of a friend who suggested using araldite to fill the pits, to stop the leakage, which it did most effectively, and to tidy things up and hopefully stop a recurrence of the problem a pair of fork gaiters were bought from my local accessory shop, which exactly fitted both fork leg and stanchion without recourse to clips of any sort to hold them in place.

Small modifications followed, sheet rubber flaps at the front of the rear wheel and behind the number plate mounting, arrests dirt from

being flung all over the back of the gearbox and clutch operating mechanism and the back of the number plate, and small plastic plugs saved from something or other pushed into the ends of the winker stalk tubes, stops road dirt travelling unhindered into the winker lamps, causing intermittent failure and poor output when working.

Travelling home one evening after dark, I spotted the ignition warning lamp burning brightly when it should not have been. Fortunately I was not more than a few minutes ride from my workshop, and subsequent investigation disclosed a broken alternator brush wire. New Bosch brushes were obtained from my local auto-electrical specialists for 84p and the opportunity taken to solder on a terminal tag rather than soldering direct to the alternator plate as originally, future roadside repairs thus being made possible.

Successful repair

The repair was entirely successful, but closer-than-usual attention to the voltmeter readings whilst riding disclosed a peculiar tendency for the voltage to fall as the engine revs rose above 5,000 or so, yet the voltage would rise again immediately the throttle was rolled off even before the engine revs had fallen. I will admit here and now that despite much thought and experiment I have not got to the bottom of this behaviour, but my theory for what it is worth is as follows. I suspect that the alternator brushes are bouncing out of contact with the slip ring as a result of the alternator being rigidly mounted on the engine, together with the unequal firing impulses of the 90° Vee twin, rather than any reciprocating imbalance.

Anyway, whatever the reasons, my infrequent

use, particularly during the winter, and the barely adequate battery for this high compression twin made it imperative for the battery to be charged at maximum rate on every possible occasion whilst being ridden. To further aggravate the situation I must admit to being a daylight headlamp rider in the hope of being more conspicuous.

What I felt was needed was a daylight running lamp which was of comparable value as a beacon but which used fewer amps and would not spoil the lines of the machine. Clearly after the most thorough inspection it was found impossible to fit a separate light anywhere, so the headlamp must somehow be used, but how? The pilot lamp seemed to offer the best possibility, but the largest bulb that could be found with the correct MCC fitting was a puny five watts and was hardly a satisfactory substitute.

As often happens the world of four wheels had the answer in the shape of a 20w Philips quartz halogen bulb with an MCC fitting, designed for fitment in some high intensity rear fog lamps. The result was better than expected, being as bright as a dipped headlight but visible over a wider angle. The only problem which remained in this connection was what to do for a parking lamp, as 20w seemed a bit excessive. After hours of sketching out alternatives a single toggle switch mounted alongside the hazard flasher switch was fitted together with a single diode and a few inches of wire and a handful of connectors to give a choice of running lamp only or pilot lamp in series with rear and panel lamps, to give a reduced intensity and battery drain for parking.

This modification has substantially improved the battery situation, voltage when riding in daylight being consistently higher, particularly

in traffic, although some fall off is still apparent when I'm really moving. Even so after a couple of weeks of freezing cold and no use, starting still requires a special technique, learned as most things by accident. So if churning the engine over on full choke produces no sign of life, release the choke whilst still cranking at which it will almost certainly fire, then immediately restore the choke to prevent it from dying, it almost never fails.

Larger battery

Fellow sufferers may well advise fitment of a larger battery as an alternative, but as I value the original tool tray to which I have fitted a secure wooden lid and my can of tyre seal, both of which would have to go if a larger battery was fitted, I am reluctant to give up without a fight.

Towards the end of the life of the rear Pirelli Gordon, a distinct and rather unsettling weave started to show itself, usually in fast bends, but occasionally in a straight line particularly in gusty conditions. Juggling with tyre pressures and rear spring pre-loads had little effect, so a new 4.25 x 18 Roadrunner was fitted. At first the problem seemed solved but a trace of unsteadiness has re-appeared.

Having avidly read the article in *Motorcycle Sport* on two years' ownership of Guzzi V7 Sport, I could not help but notice the similarity of a fault described therein to my own problem. So in true perfectionist style I decided to have a go at stiffening up the front damping, which had struck me as soft on first acquaintance, using the method advocated with slight alteration.

As is well known, Moto Guzzi forks utilise a separate sealed damper unit at the top of the fork leg, which are somewhat renowned for their short and ineffective life. The method suggested

D&A Rayner (M/C) Ltd

1185, HIGH ROAD, CHADWELL HEATH, ESSEX, RM6 4AI

ITALIAN BIKE CENTRE

for everything that's good from Italy


MOTO GUZZI

LE MANS MKII 850



DUCATI LAMBERTINI

SEE THE FULL RANGE OF ITALIAN CLASSICS ALWAYS IN STOCK

VERY SPECIAL DEALS

Subject to negotiation

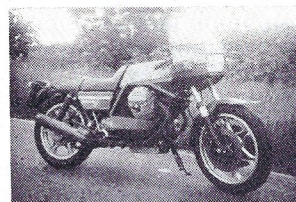
Part exchange with any article

PHONE NOW 01-590 7367

RIDERS
(YEOVIL) LIMITED

DUCATI
Benelli

MOTO GUZZI



LE MANS MK. II 850

We can offer you the best purchase price on any Moto Guzzi

Good deals guaranteed

Low deposit — low finance on all our bikes

(Write for written details of credit terms)

Tel: Yeovil 21681 (STD Code 0935)

**31 VINCENT STREET,
YEOVIL, SOMERSET.**

being flung all over the back of the gearbox and clutch operating mechanism and the back of the number plate, and small plastic plugs saved from something or other pushed into the ends of the winker stalk tubes, stops road dirt travelling unhindered into the winker lamps, causing intermittent failure and poor output when working.

Travelling home one evening after dark, I spotted the ignition warning lamp burning brightly when it should not have been. Fortunately I was not more than a few minutes ride from my workshop, and subsequent investigation disclosed a broken alternator brush wire. New Bosch brushes were obtained from my local auto-electrical specialists for 84p and the opportunity taken to solder on a terminal tag rather than soldering direct to the alternator plate as originally, future roadside repairs thus being made possible.

Successful repair

The repair was entirely successful, but closer-than-usual attention to the voltmeter readings whilst riding disclosed a peculiar tendency for the voltage to fall as the engine revs rose above 5,000 or so, yet the voltage would rise again immediately the throttle was rolled off even before the engine revs had fallen. I will admit here and now that despite much thought and experiment I have not got to the bottom of this behaviour, but my theory for what it is worth is as follows. I suspect that the alternator brushes are bouncing out of contact with the slip ring as a result of the alternator being rigidly mounted on the engine, together with the unequal firing impulses of the 90° Vee twin, rather than any reciprocating imbalance.

Anyway, whatever the reasons, my infrequent

use, particularly during the winter, and the barely adequate battery for this high compression twin made it imperative for the battery to be charged at maximum rate on every possible occasion whilst being ridden. To further aggravate the situation I must admit to being a daylight headlamp rider in the hope of being more conspicuous.

What I felt was needed was a daylight running lamp which was of comparable value as a beacon but which used fewer amps and would not spoil the lines of the machine. Clearly after the most thorough inspection it was found impossible to fit a separate light anywhere, so the headlamp must somehow be used, but how? The pilot lamp seemed to offer the best possibility, but the largest bulb that could be found with the correct MCC fitting was a puny five watts and was hardly a satisfactory substitute.

As often happens the world of four wheels had the answer in the shape of a 20w Philips quartz halogen bulb with an MCC fitting, designed for fitment in some high intensity rear fog lamps. The result was better than expected, being as bright as a dipped headlight but visible over a wider angle. The only problem which remained in this connection was what to do for a parking lamp, as 20w seemed a bit excessive. After hours of sketching out alternatives a single toggle switch mounted alongside the hazard flasher switch was fitted together with a single diode and a few inches of wire and a handful of connectors to give a choice of running lamp only or pilot lamp in series with rear and panel lamps, to give a reduced intensity and battery drain for parking.

This modification has substantially improved the battery situation, voltage when riding in daylight being consistently higher, particularly

in traffic, although some fall off is still apparent when I'm really moving. Even so after a couple of weeks of freezing cold and no use, starting still requires a special technique, learned as most things by accident. So if churning the engine over on full choke produces no sign of life, release the choke whilst still cranking at which it will almost certainly fire, then immediately restore the choke to prevent it from dying, it almost never fails.

Larger battery

Fellow sufferers may well advise fitment of a larger battery as an alternative, but as I value the original tool tray to which I have fitted a secure wooden lid and my can of tyre seal, both of which would have to go if a larger battery was fitted, I am reluctant to give up without a fight.

Towards the end of the life of the rear Pirelli Gordon, a distinct and rather unsettling weave started to show itself, usually in fast bends, but occasionally in a straight line particularly in gusty conditions. Juggling with tyre pressures and rear spring pre-loads had little effect, so a new 4.25 x 18 Roadrunner was fitted. At first the problem seemed solved but a trace of unsteadiness has re-appeared.

Having avidly read the article in *Motorcycle Sport* on two years' ownership of Guzzi V7 Sport, I could not help but notice the similarity of a fault described therein to my own problem. So in true perfectionist style I decided to have a go at stiffening up the front damping, which had struck me as soft on first acquaintance, using the method advocated with slight alteration.

As is well known, Moto Guzzi forks utilise a separate sealed damper unit at the top of the fork leg, which are somewhat renowned for their short and ineffective life. The method suggested