



The Le Mans is still the fastest twin you can buy. Now it's got air suspension and a black and gold colour scheme too

Test: Julian Ryder

I remember my first ride on a Le Mans vividly, and not just because I was riding pillion. Loose Bruce, the Touring Oz, had managed to persuade me that a blast around south west London was necessary to demonstrate that a summer spent touring Europe had just about run the bike in nicely.

Foolishly I agreed and arranged myself on the not over-generous pillion seat. Bruce fired up the disreputable looking beast and leaving a trail consisting of the dust of six countries we set off on a circumnavigation of Clapham Common. First, I noticed the slow, deliberate way in which the pilot was getting all braking and gearchanging over

Moto GUZZI *Le Mans Mk2*

Not so much a scratcher's bike, more an endurance racer

well before a corner. Then I noticed that the speed we were travelling at was way above my normal rate of progress for that piece of tarmac.

'Hmm, must be in top' I thought and relaxed my grip on the back of the seat. That was my big mistake. Bruce reached up for top gear while I wasn't looking and at a speed I don't want to think about. Only an intensive bum pucker kept me in shape and got my feet back on the rests.

Believe me, the Le Mans has enough torque to pull some very high gears. On the average Jap multi I find myself looking for more ratios well before the motor is anywhere near the red line. This odd trait can be put down to two factors; my formative years on British bikes and my dislike for torturing defenceless lumps of metal.

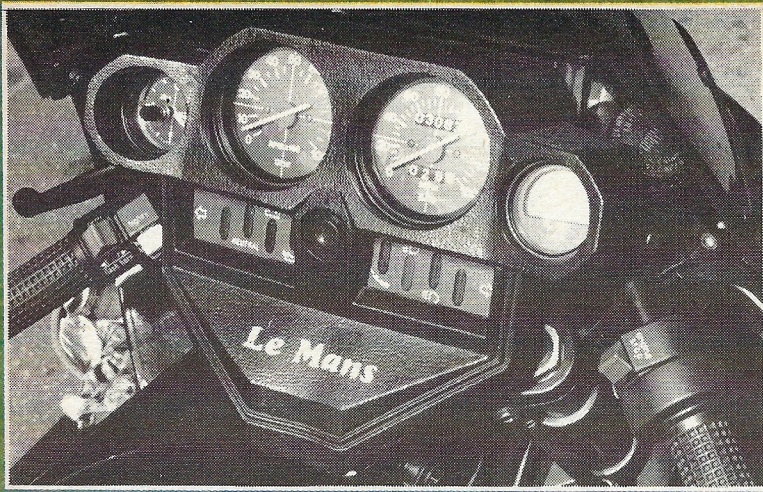
If you are as easily offended as me, buy a Le Mans immediately. On more than one occasion when convinced I was in top I

decided to check and found I had a ratio left. And that top gear is most definitely not an overdrive, it'll push you forward strongly from anywhere in the rev range.

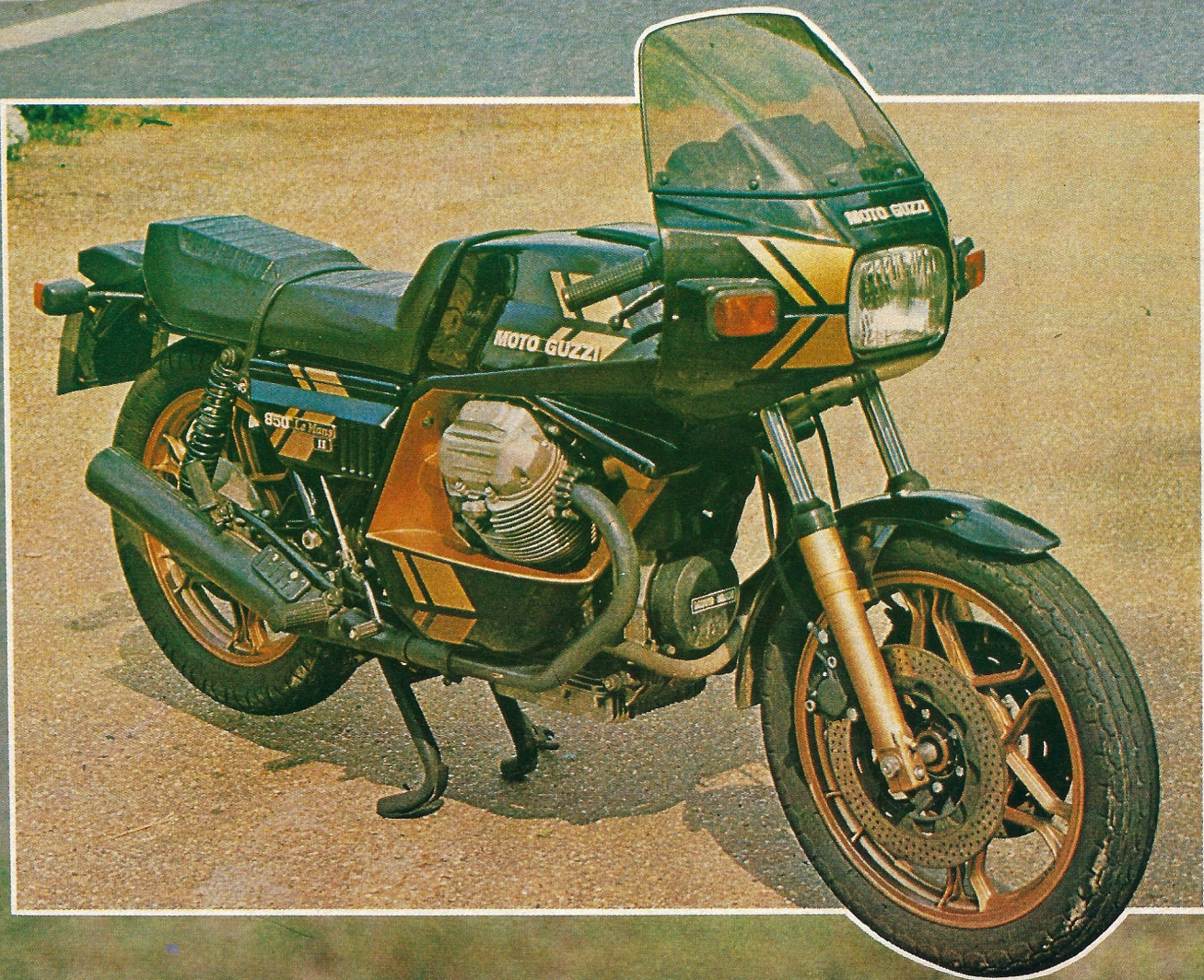
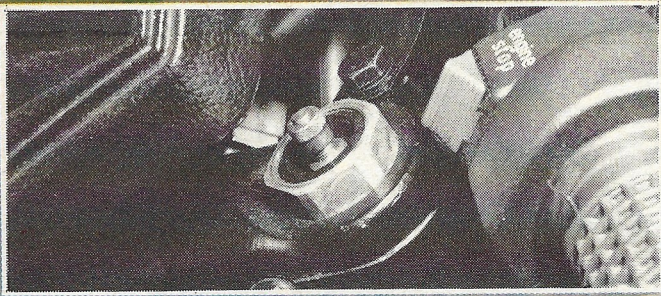
If the power delivery of the Moto Guzzi differs from the average oriental creation, the riding position sets them poles apart. A full race crouch with a low seating position and narrow handlebar make the Le Mans very much an open roads machine. You can ride most big Japs, even a CBX or a GPz, in heavy town traffic without any trouble. Trying the same thing on a Le Mans is to ask for back ache, cramped wrists and a stiff neck.

On main roads and motorways it's a superbly comfortable position. The small screen takes a surprising amount of the windforce and the fairing lowers plus the protruding cylinders keep the rider's legs warm and dry. Only one complaint. No mirrors. Looking over your shoulder involves lifting your throttle hand off the bars and twisting the whole of your torso. Just one bar-end mirror could cut out all the dangerous gymnastics.

The only other addition to the discomfort suffered in town-bound stop-go traffic is provided by the throttle itself. Not only are



Schraeder valves on each fork leg are well concealed by the instrument binnacle. The legs are not balanced either



Moto GUZZI Le Mans Mk2

the return springs strong enough to give an orangutan wrist ache after half an hour, the throttle takes more than one handful to wind round to the fully open position.

Don't be put off. Any of you in search of a real long distance motorcycle are advised to take the time and effort to wrestle the Le Mans out of town and give it a go on the open roads. It may not be quite as fast or as quick over the standing quarters as the Jap heavyweights but it'll maintain higher average speeds and save you time in petrol stops. It sure isn't a street racer, despite its looks. No, the Le Mans is true to its name, it's an endurance racer capable of maintaining high speeds over long distances with the minimum of maintenance.

Even though the Le Mans is really a 'sports tourer', as the Americans would say, it can still be a lot of fun on twisty roads. But before you go rushing into blind bends on this little number, be warned. The MkII Moto Guzzi Le Mans is a deceptively fast motorcycle. Here is a short

description of how not to get a Le Mans around a fairly tight bend.

Step 1: Come flying up to bend. Step 2: Shut throttle in the hope that the bike will lose speed. Step 3: crank the bike over and go round the corner.

This is what actually happens: Step 1: rush up to corner — this is no problem.

Step 2: shut throttle — nothing happens.

Step 3: panic.

You see, that motor produces so much torque and there is so much inertia in the crank and piston assembly that the motor will quite happily turn a big tall gear even on the merest whiff of throttle. Enter a corner like that and the bike feels like it's not in contact with the road, there's no feedback from the steering and a lot of understeer.

Nope, like I remember Bruce doing on that entertaining little excursion: you must get the braking and gearchanging done before the bend and then power the bike round. And careful how you change down, there isn't a lot in the way of shock absorption in the shaft drive.

If all this sounds a bit like hard work in comparison to riding a Jap bike, don't worry. The pleasure of getting yourself into the relaxed riding style demanded by the Guzzi makes for a much less frenetic way of eating the miles.

There are some weird touches, the air assisted front forks aren't

PERFORMANCE

Maximum speed	129.08mph
Standing ¼ mile	13.78secs/98.26mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Overall	43mpg
Best	45mpg
Worst	37mpg
Average full tank range	210 miles

SPEEDOMETER ACCURACY

At indicated 30mph	30.74mph
At indicated 60mph	60.85mph

ENGINE

Type	90 degree ohv transverse V-twin
Bore x stroke	88 x 78mm
Capacity	844cc
Compression ratio	10.2:1
Carburation	Two 36mm Dell'orto
Claimed torque at rpm	56.4 ft-lb (7.8kgm) at 6600
Transmission	Gear primary drive, dry 2-plate clutch, 5-speed gearbox, shaft final drive
	AC generator, 20Ah battery, points cb and coil ignition, 55/45W headlamp

ELECTRICAL SYSTEM

CYCLE PARTS

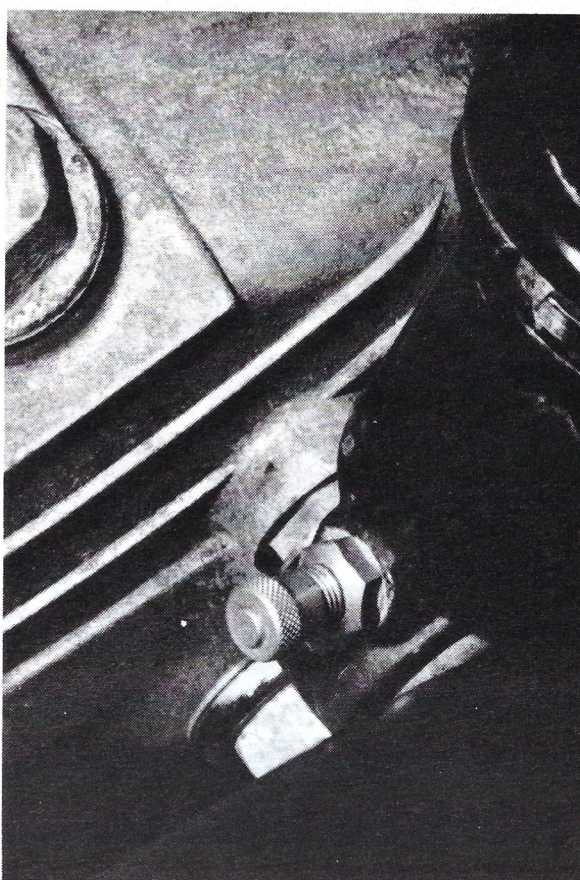
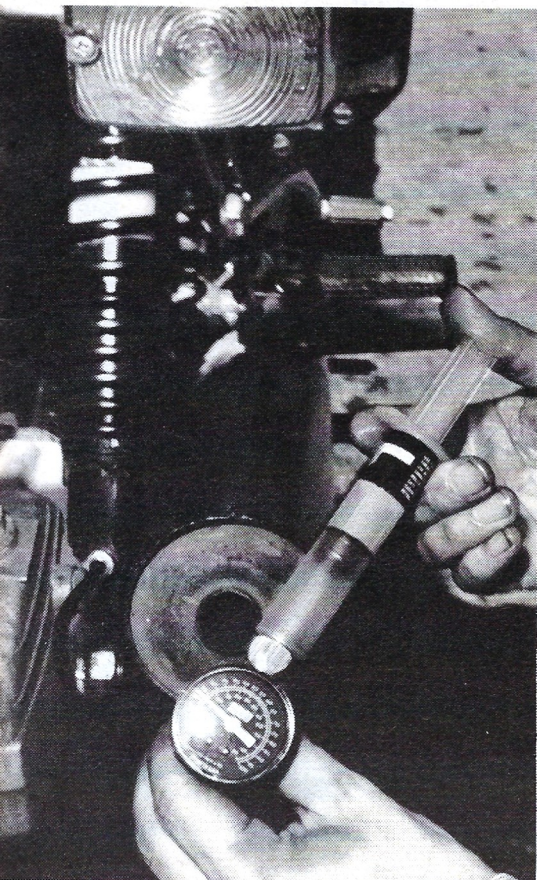
Frame	Duplex cradle
Suspension	Telescopic front fork with air assisted springing, pivoted rear fork with dampers adjustable for spring pre-load and with air-assisted springing
Wheels	Cast alloy
Tyres	3.50H x 18in Pirelli Phantom front 4.00V x 18in Pirelli Phantom rear
Brakes	Twin 11.75in (300mm) discs front 9.5in (240mm) disc rear

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	58.5in (1485mm)
Seat height	29.5in (750mm)
Overall width	22in (560mm)
Ground clearance	7in (180mm)
Weight (with 1 gal fuel)	475lb (214kg)
Fuel capacity	4.9gal (22.5 litres)

PRICE

Warranty	12 months/unlimited mileage
Supplied by	Moto Guzzi Concessionaires, 53-61 Park Street, Luton, Beds.



connected and the valves are impossible to get at. Also, I find the lumpy plastic switches a pain to use with heavily gloved digets. Then there's the paint-job. The black and gold is a special for the UK market scheme that in my opinion doesn't quite come off. What does come off is the paint on the wheels, it was coming off in large lumps from our bike.

Maybe I'm biased but really if any machine is Italian and fast it should be painted red.

At present the black and gold MkII costs £2999, a mere £200 less than the recently announced MkIII. Maybe we'll see some heavily discounted MkIIs around soon that'll let some of us skint mortals move up to a Le Mans.

So, if you're looking for a machine that's not only out of the ordinary but something really special, take yourself off to your local Moto Guzzi dealer for a treat.

Valves on rear suspension legs are easier to get at but again there is no balance tube and an S & W Mini Pump and gauge kit is necessary if air pressures are to be adjusted with any accuracy