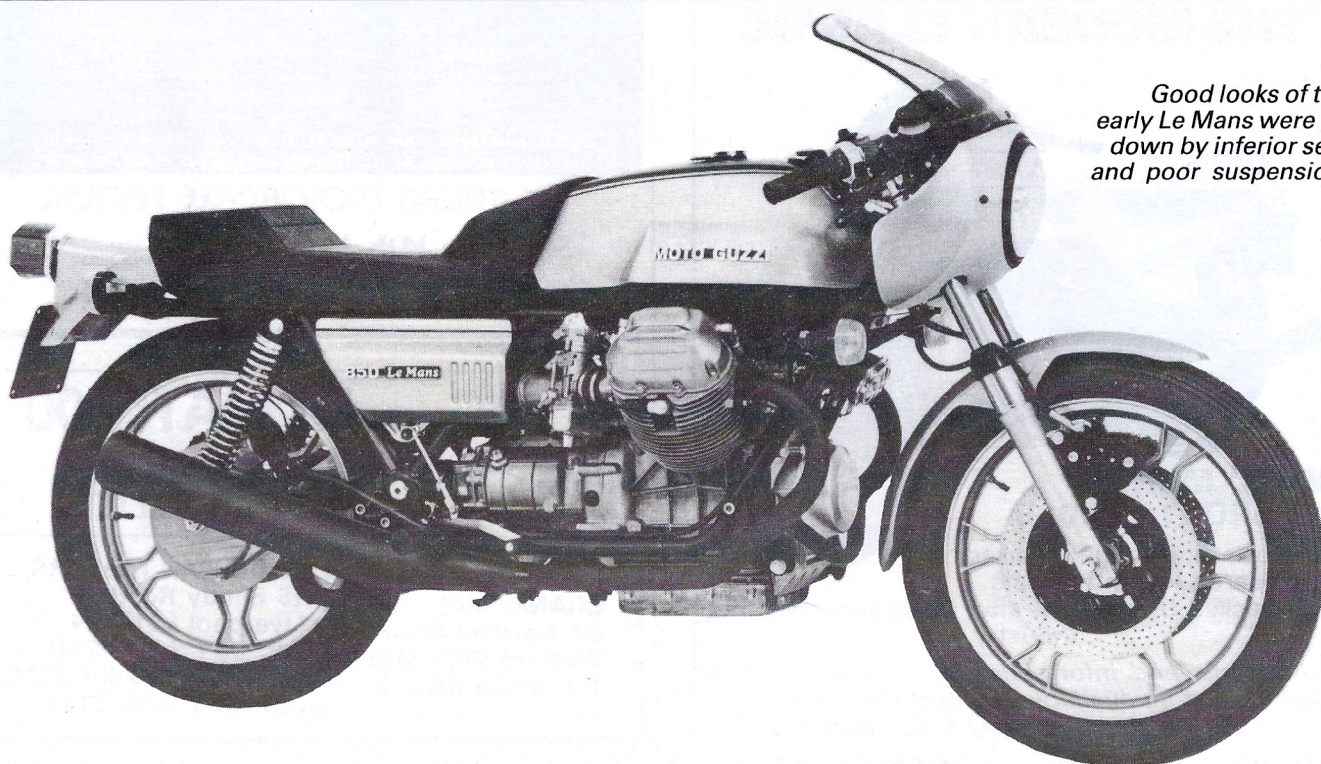


BUYING SECONDHAND Moto Guzzi

Good looks of the early Le Mans were let down by inferior seat and poor suspension



HISTORY

DISPLAYED at the Milan show in 1975, the first Moto Guzzi Le Mans machines arrived in Britain early the following year. Although very aggressively styled, the Le Mans shared its frame, engine and gearbox with the more restrained 850cc T3 tourer. The engine was an ohv transverse V-twin with a five-speed gearbox and shaft final drive, but the Le Mans version was fitted with a sports camshaft, and higher compression pistons, bigger valves and larger carburettors than the T3.

Top speed was over 125mph, although the often wildly inaccurate speedometer sometimes indicated 15mph more. But few Le Mans owners cared about such minor details, for the bike performed well in sports and touring roles, and with its vestigial fairing, cast wheels and linked braking system there were few machines that could compete with the Guzzi's looks, performance or specification in the mid-seventies.

Two colour schemes were available, red or blue-grey, but in each case the tank-top was finished in black, and the fairing carried a dayglo orange panel on its front. Wheels were silver, and the exhaust system was painted black. A moulded rubber seat ran up onto the rear of the fuel tank, and offered uncomfortable accommodation for one-and-a-half people.

Little was changed on the Le Mans the following year: the bike was given

a new rear light and mudguard, a more comfortable and durable seat, and the orange panel disappeared from the fairing.

Late in the autumn of 1978, the Le Mans II was introduced. Mechanically similar to the first version, the Le Mans II had a three-piece fairing, which carried integral indicators and a clock. Other changes included a new exhaust system and switches, and the front brake calipers were now mounted behind the fork legs. The bike came in a choice of royal blue or red, and performance was much the same as the earlier model.

Two years later the Le Mans II was updated. The chrome cylinder bores were replaced by Nickasil material, the forks given uprated internals and air springing, and Paioli rear dampers were fitted. A new colour option of black with gold trim was offered for the British market only.

The black and gold machines were the last Le Mans IIs to be imported, and in 1981 the model was replaced by the Le Mans III. In its first five years on the British market, the Le Mans had won itself a formidable reputation as a competent and practical sports tourer, and had done well in production racing. But the gap between it and large capacity machines from Japan was narrowing all the time.

PROBLEMS

Mechanically, the Le Mans in all its forms is a strong, reliable motorcycle.

Early models suffered from poor finish and troublesome electrics, but most of these faults were cured during the Le Mans II's production.

Alternator stators can cause problems. Check that the charge light does not stay on at anything over tick-over. A faulty stator will cost about £80 to replace.

The other weak point is the drive-shaft's universal joint. Vibration as the bike pulls away is the first symptom of failure, and as wear builds up you will hear a clonking noise. If left uncorrected, this fault will break the gearbox casing. The joint costs between £60 and £80 to renew, and to prevent recurring failure it should be Loctited to the inner bearing race.

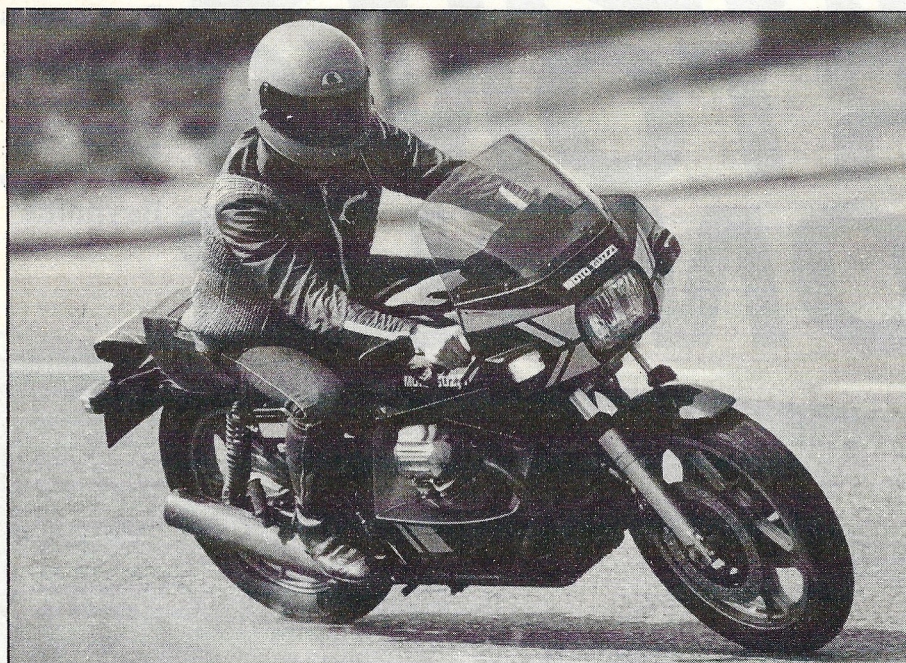
Like most Italian bikes, the Le Mans needs a sympathetic owner to get the best from it. Check the brake calipers for broken bleed nipples, and the external oil lines and cylinder base gaskets for leaks. Although the Le Mans came with carburettor bellmouths as standard, most caring owners will have replaced these with proprietary air filters to protect their cylinder bores.

PRICES

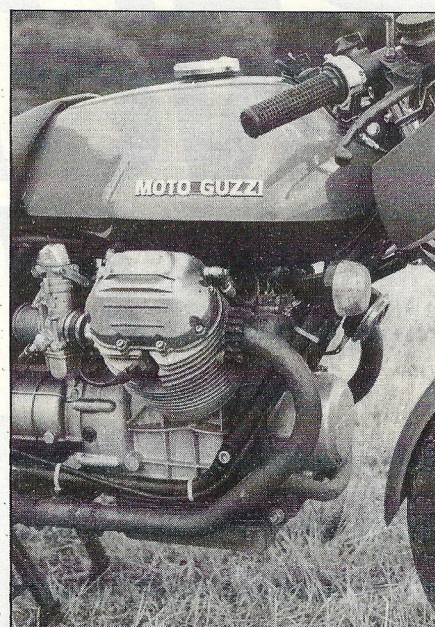
The early Moto Guzzi Le Mans is one of the few modern bikes that is appreciating in value. New prices ranged from £2,000 in 1976 to £2,999 for the black and gold Le Mans II in 1980.

Le Mans I and II

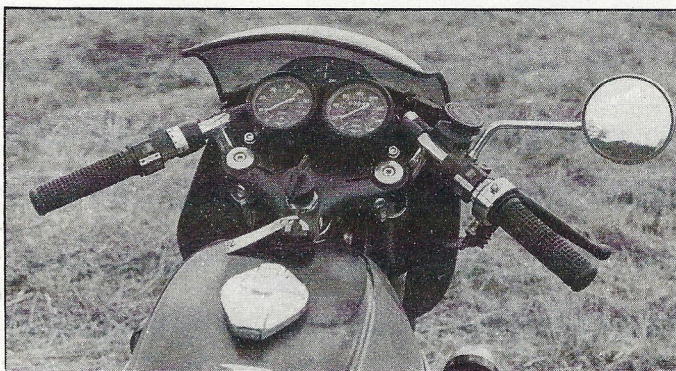
by Richard Simpson



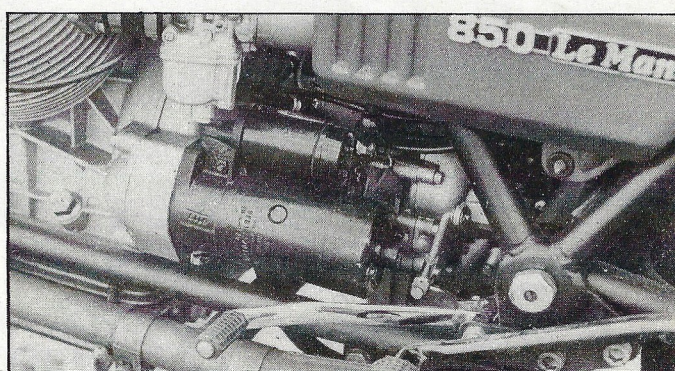
The last Le Mans IIs, finished in black and gold, were sold in late 1980



Big 36mm carburetors with accelerator pumps gave the Le Mans 125 mph-plus speed



Poor quality instruments and switches were fitted from 1976 to 1978

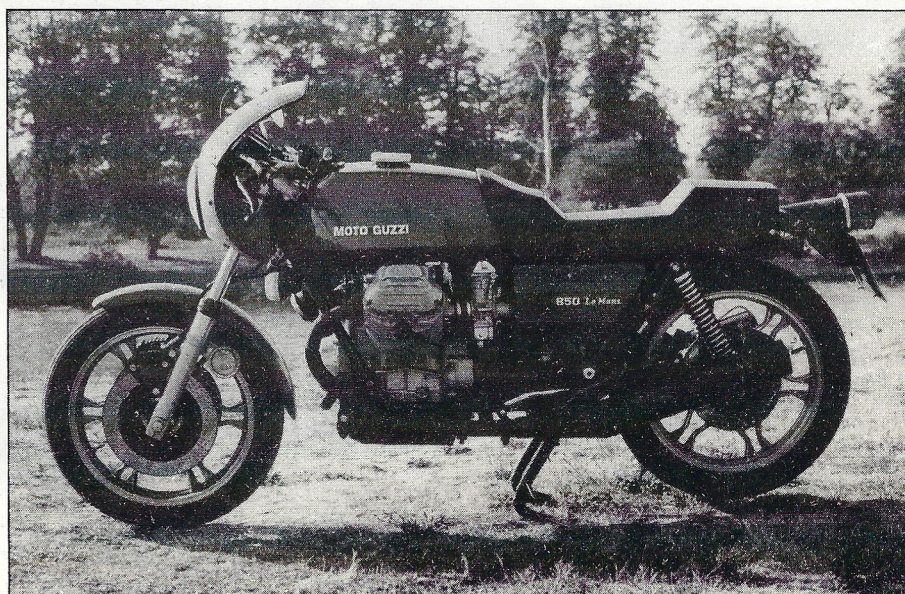


Hefty Bosch starter motor has no trouble turning the 844cc engine

Current prices range from £1,450 to over £2,100 for a Le Mans I, and from £1,500 to £1,750 for a Le Mans II. But, expect to pay over £2,000 for a clean black and gold Le Mans II from a dealer. Early models that have been fitted with the later fork will command a higher price than those retaining the original equipment.

LITERATURE

The best source of workshop information is the Haynes Moto Guzzi twins manual, which covers service and repair of the Le Mans at a level that the ordinary motorcyclist will understand. The development and specifications of the various Le Mans models are described in Mick Walker's *Moto Guzzi Twins* (Osprey), while the Moto Guzzi Club GB publishes its own magazine — contact Chris Anthony, 38 Burlington Road, New Malden, Surrey KT3 4NV.



Dayglo orange fairing flash only appeared on the first Le Mans Is