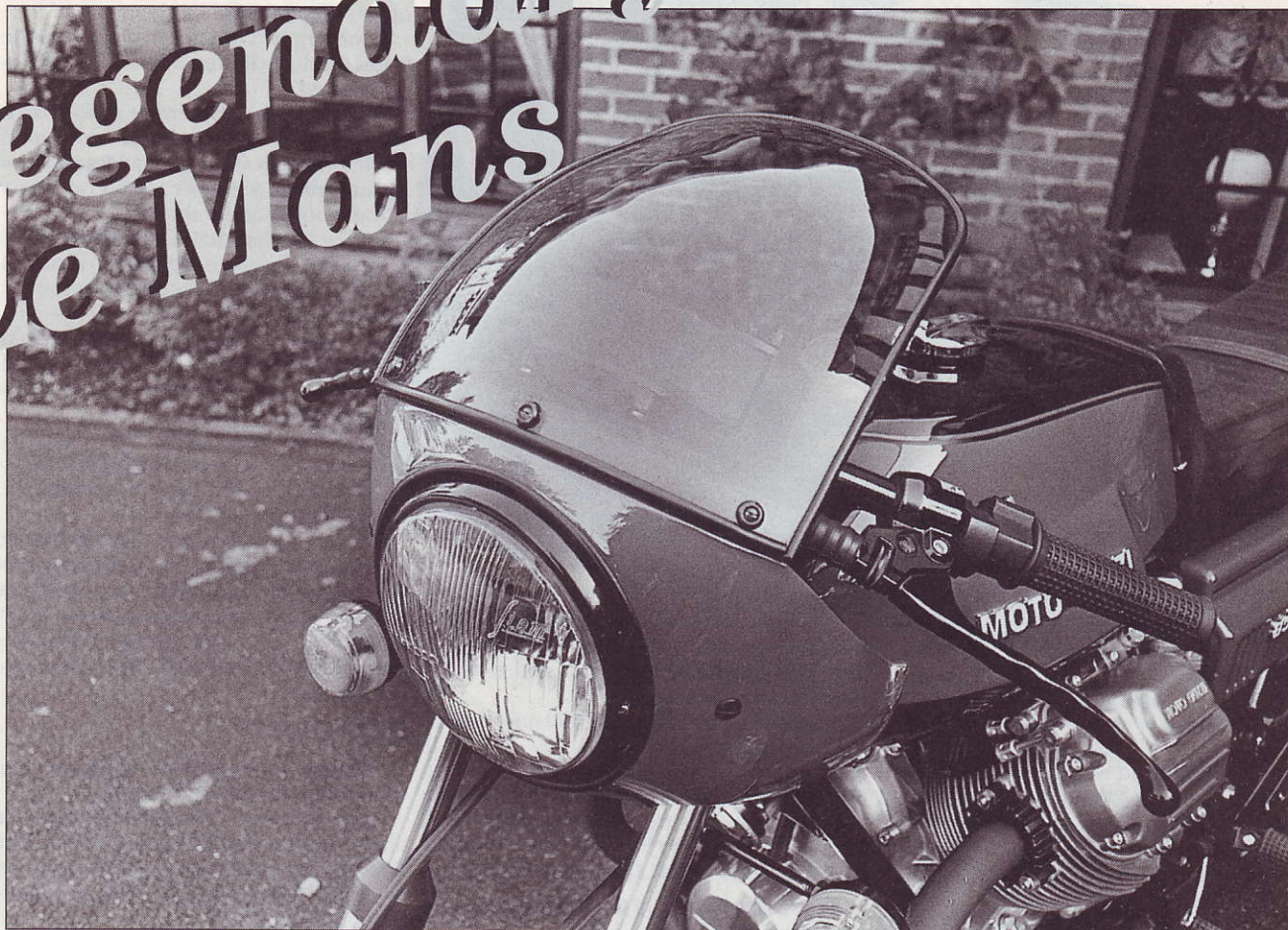


# Legendary Le Mans



**The Moto Guzzi Le Mans is a great bike to modify. And that was exactly the problem for a fan of the Italian vee-twin – where to find an original example. He did it, though. And restored his Mark 1 to an incredible standard. Ed Charles tells the story.**

Steve Harris pulled up at the side of the road, hooked off his helmet and swivelled his neck to speak to yours truly who was approaching clutching a half-eaten sandwich and ancient camera.

We'd been burbling along in convoy looking for a suitable location to photograph his bike and Steve stopped to let me know he'd spotted a likely setting.

He didn't get a chance to fire any words in my direction. As I ambled over, a Moto Guzzi rider homed in and parked alongside Steve's Mark 1 Le Mans for a chat.

The impromptu conversation must have lasted at least 10 minutes. And, apart from giving me time to devour the rest of my sandwich, it proved the point that Guzzi owners are pretty well devoted to their machines.

Understandable because they are that sort of bike. Charismatic, handsome in a functional way and still with plenty enough performance to keep ahead of today's traffic.

The other rider admired Steve's Guzzi – and well he might – and then rode off, no doubt promising to treat his mount to a similar re-build.

No mean task because this Le Mans is one of the finest examples in the country. And it represents a return to early motorcycling memories and the bikes Steve has always loved.

We've all been through that childhood stage of seeing something which refuses to leave the memory. In Steve's case, it was the Le Mans Mark 1. He just had to have one.

Sounds corny, that, but you know exactly what I mean.

Anyway, in true storybook fashion he bought one and was thoroughly satisfied. However, such is the wont of youth that riding a standard machine didn't really cut it in the street cred stakes and a spot of customising was in order.

Like a twin-headlight conversion, different shocks, single seat, sporty pipes and all the other paraphernalia youngsters traditionally bestow upon their bikes.

He spent a lot of money and the project was completely successful albeit that the Guzzi's originality had disappeared.

Then something happened. Steve was introduced to the blistering Honda VFR750 and the Guzzi went in favour of that projectile.

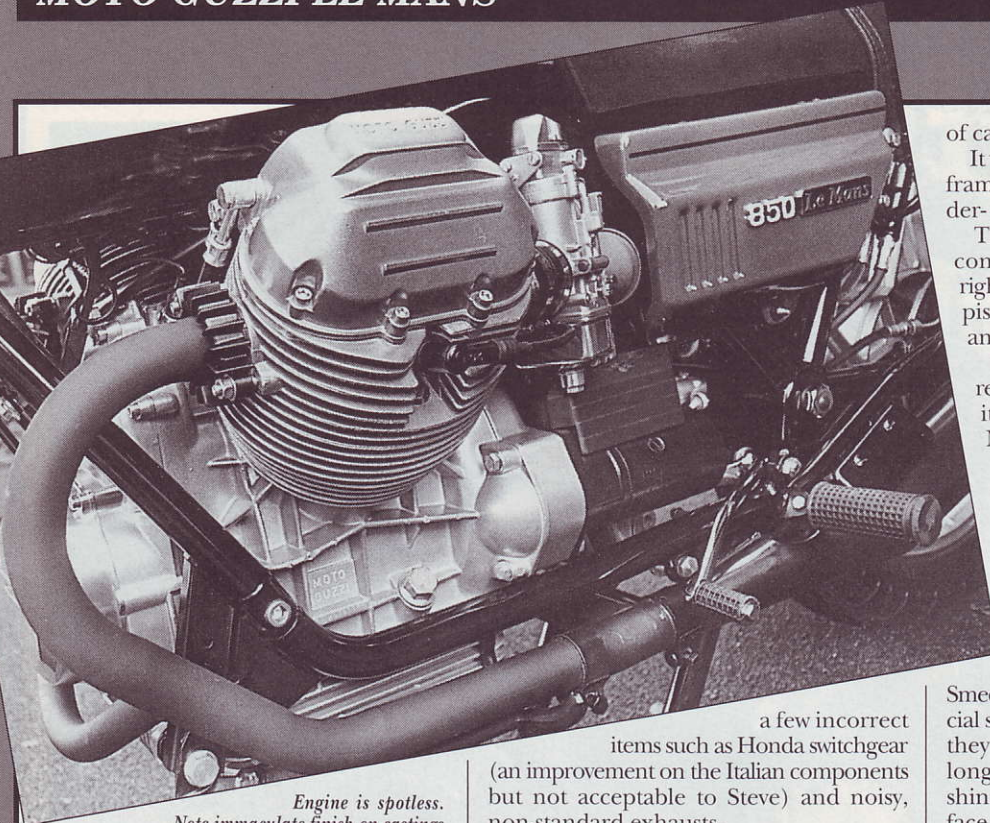
### *Tampered with*

He later bitterly regretted selling the Italian and decided to turn his riding full circle and buy another Mark 1.

It was then that the problems started. Steve wanted an original example but – you've guessed – everything he looked at had been tampered with.



*Twin discs sit up front. Brakes are Brembo, naturally, and front and back are linked.*



*Engine is spotless. Note immaculate finish on castings and also close-up on carburettor on opposite page.*

And you couldn't really blame the owners because the Le Mans is so easy to modify and there are plenty of parts available. Steve, of all people, wasn't in a position to moan because he'd taken exactly the same course a few years previously.

To cut a long story to little shreds, he finally tracked down a suitable case for treatment. It meant a round trip of more than 600 miles and the bike cost him over two grand – he knocked the owner down £100 which paid for the petrol – but it was the perfect basis for a project.

The bike was damn near original with just

*Below: The shaft-drive is a tough unit but the universal joint needed replacing which is not uncommon on the Le Mans.*

a few incorrect items such as Honda switchgear (an improvement on the Italian components but not acceptable to Steve) and noisy, non-standard exhausts.

It had covered around 34,000 miles and was tidy but tatty.

Incidentally, Steve carried it home on a trailer. He figured it wasn't worth risking an unknown quantity for that length of jour-

*'The deal was simple. Paint my bike and you get a pair of leather jeans. The paint went on and the guy happily creaked off in his new leg coverings.'*

ney. And anyway, the weather was chucking it down. Sensible man.

The Guzzi obviously needed pulling apart and re-assembling with large helpings

of care. That it got.

It was stripped to a pile of pieces and the frame and ancillaries blasted and powder-coated.

The mechanicals weren't in too bad a condition and the engine was put to rights with new valves and guides and new piston rings. A re-bore wasn't necessary and a hone-up did the job.

The Le Mans has a cush-drive in the rear wheel which is supposed to float. But it had seized and knocked out the UJ. Not that uncommon.

Steve wanted the aluminium finished to the highest possible standard and turned to Classic Japanese Motorcycles in Manchester.

We've mentioned the company before and aren't frightened to do it again because the results are quite remarkable.

A technique developed by Steven Smedhurst using a ceramic media and a special solution finishes aluminium castings as they were originally manufactured. The longer you leave the components, the shinier they become and without any surface damage.

### **Better quality**

Yes, I know the company have Japanese in their title. But they do diversify.

As an aside, the boss said the aluminium on the Guzzi was of better quality than that found on Jap machines and was comparable to British bikes (see, we did get something right).

In his pursuit for originality, Steve polished and then masked off the outside of the wheel rims before they were powder-coated.

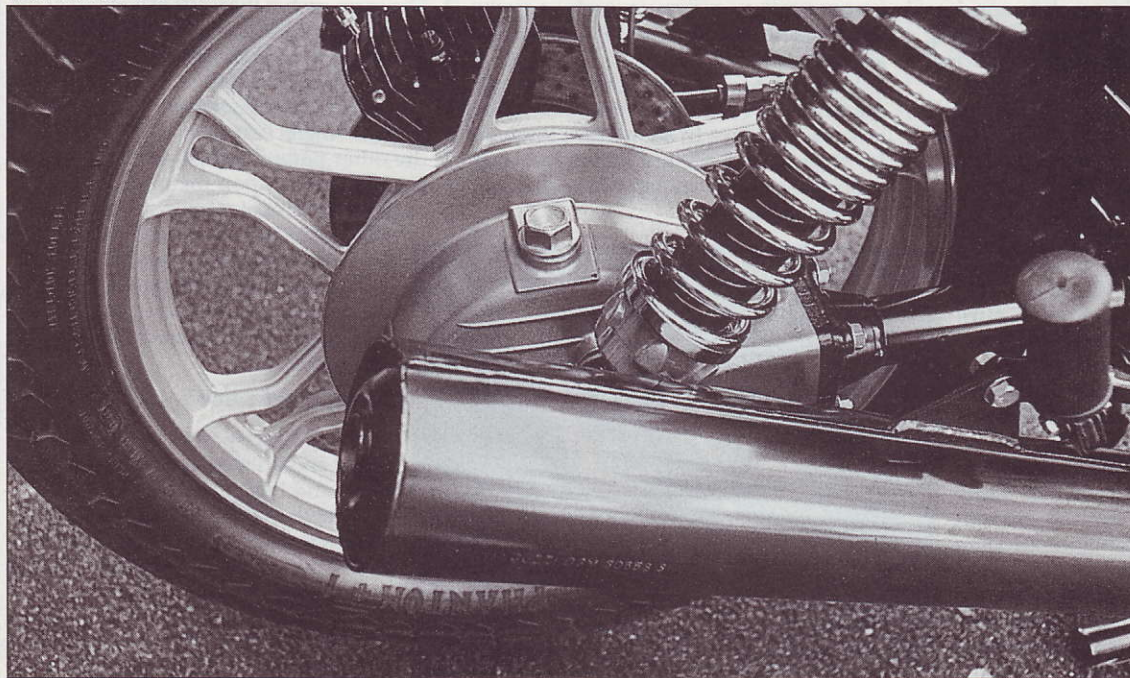
The edges are supposed to be shiny and that's how they were going to end up.

Coating the wheels proved real hassle because the heat involved kept blowing tiny holes in the aluminium's surface. It was a case of repeating the process until the finish was as Steve wanted.

Virtually all Le Mans Mark 1 parts are available but there are exceptions. One is the seat and Steve is still trying to track down a replacement for the item fitted at the moment which he reckons is tatty (but I reckon is OK – I'm not such a perfectionist).

The other is a wiring loom. You can't get hold of them. Steve had to settle for a Mark 2 loom and adapt it.

The bodywork has been finished in two-pack and Steve struck up a





deal with a customer at his bike shop (yep, he runs a bike shop. But I can't reveal the makes he sells 'cos they're not Guzzis).

The deal was simple. Paint my bike and you get a pair of leather jeans. The paint went on and the guy happily creaked off in his new leg coverings.

The rest of the build was a straightforward case of cleaning, checking, repairing and replacing as required.

*'The Guzzi obviously needed pulling apart and re-assembling with large helpings of care. That it got.'*

Even the brakes didn't cause any hassles. As you may know, the Le Mans has linked brakes. The foot pedal operates the left-hand front disc and rear disc. A compensator pushes 30 per cent of the braking to the rear and the rest to the front.

Pull on the handlebar lever and the right-hand front disc does its stuff.

It's a system which Guzzi owners swear by but something a non-convert finds hard to handle at first. After all, how would you feel about using the foot pedal in a bend when, on a normal machine, that could get you into trouble?

Steve used DOT 5 brake fluid which doesn't harm paintwork. Just as well because he spilled a few drops.

At this juncture, I will – at Steve's request – name a few names. For parts and advice, he used Moto Mecca at Dorset (0202

823453) and Rotodale of London (081-684 1141). He rates their services and wants to let other Guzzi owners know.

He is also indebted to one Paul Scanlon. Paul lent a great deal of help with the rebuild as a reciprocal gesture for Steve helping him build his show-winning Z1 Kawasaki (featured a few issues ago – it's that man again).

Well, you can see from the photographs that this is one beautiful Italian machine.

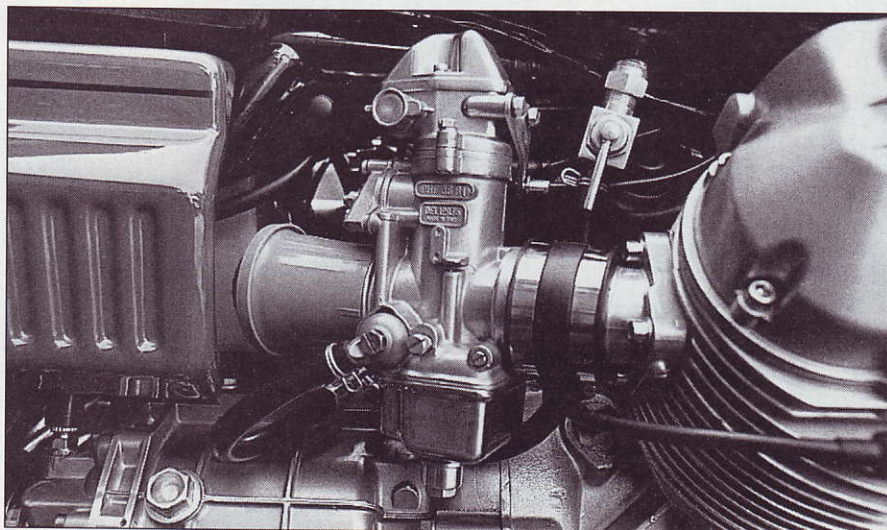
For the record, Moto Guzzi quoted 81bhp and a top speed approaching 130mph. Still quick enough to make it a fast

bike.

Steve says: "This is one bike which you have to treat with a lot of respect. You can't throttle off on corners because if you do, it wants to do its own thing. It's got such a heavy flywheel that you get torque reaction coupled with the reaction from the shaft-drive.

"But it's a great bike to ride. It's not an ultra-quick modern bike and you've got nothing to prove against the performance boys. Just cruise along and enjoy it."

And keep it original. As I'm sure you undoubtedly will. ■



Steve Smedhurst of Classic Japanese Motorcycles in Manchester was responsible for the immaculate finish on engine casings. The process gives an as-new appearance.