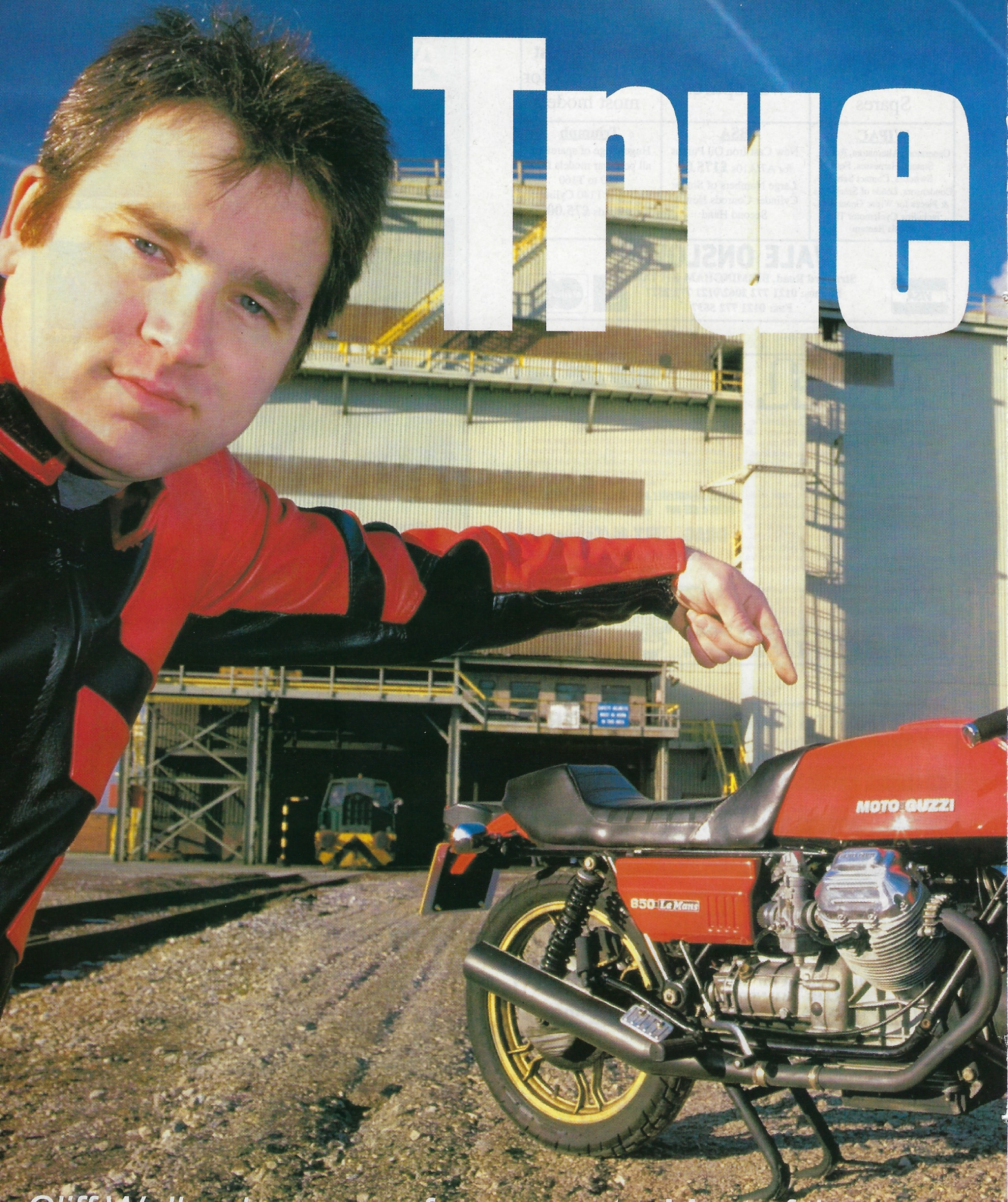


True




Cliff Walker is a man of many parts. Most of them are Italian, and when carefully assembled they result in occasional transport. He explains how ... and why

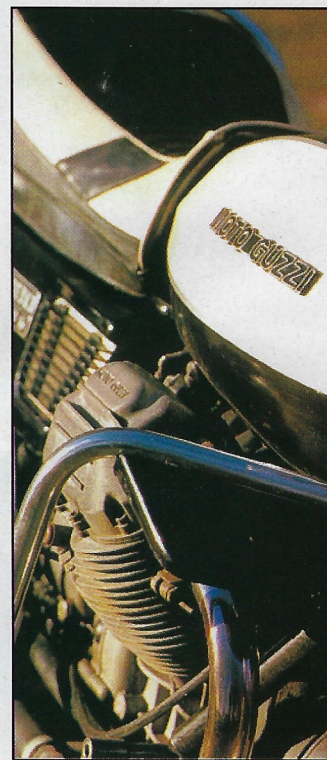
stories

A TALE OF TWO GUZZIS

I never intended to own three Moto Guzzis, but I'd got the bug again and decided I wanted a road bike. I scoured the ads in **CBG** and the local free paper, and settled on a Kawasaki 400-4 from a breaker. They had washed their hands of it after spending a fortune, only to find it would only select first gear. I offered £300 and took it home. After setting up the rose-jointed linkage properly, the gears worked fine! I decided that I'd rather get an Italian bike and a local lad snapped my hand off for £800. I added a bit to that and decided on a budget of £1000, £500 of it being the profit on the Kwak. I've always been a fan of the big Guzzis, although I realised my budget wouldn't stretch to a Le Mans Mk1 or a 750 S3, but perhaps a V50 would fit the bill.

I placed a wanted ad in the local free paper and, of course, **CBG**, along the lines of 'Italian bike wanted, pay up to £900'. I rang after four V50s within my price range and each time just missed it, while people were ringing up with Vespas and Lambrettas in response to my ad (are these people real?). Someone finally rang with a V50, stored since 1987, he hadn't had it running recently, but thought it should start. He said he wanted £400.

On first inspection the bike didn't seem too bad, and with a charged battery, it popped and banged into life. After haggling, we agreed on a price of £350. New plugs cured the misfire, a secondhand master cylinder was fitted and the bike was 



A man with a Moto Guzzi (or two). Cliff Walker surveys industrial dereliction. Salvation is present too, in the shape of a fine Le Mans...

Photos by Simon Everett.



taken for MoT, more to find out what needed doing than from any expectations, but it passed!

I sprayed the tank, guards and panels, polished up a few bits and the bike was transformed. I'd still got £650 of my budget left and wondered if I sold the 500 for a decent price, could I get a bigger Guzzi for £1500 – maybe a tatty T3 – and build a Le Mans replica?

The V50 was unceremoniously sold for £860 to a chap who was getting a hard time from his wife, as he was supposed to be buying a £500 runabout, not a £900 'investment' (his word). The following weekend saw me at Newark autojumble with £1500 burning a hole in my pocket. Amazingly, I couldn't find anything to spend it on! The only thing I bought was the latest issue of *CBG*, hot off the press, and there was a Guzzi V1000 G5 rolling chassis advertised for £500. I didn't know how much an engine would set



Handily colour-coded for easy identification. The Guzzi in red is the sportster, the one not in red is for touring purposes, mainly.

me back but figured it wouldn't take all my budget.

I hot footed it back to Nottingham and rang the number. The bike was still available. I enquired what had happened to the engine, assuming it had gone to a new home in a Triking three-wheeler. Apparently, it was still in the bike! I asked why he had advertised it as a rolling chassis and he told me that the wiring had been removed. This was getting better, I'd much rather wire a bike than fork out for an engine.

Sunday tea-time saw me setting off in the Transit to sunny Southport, sandwiches and flask of tea on the passenger seat and favourite tape in the cassette. I arrived at about 9.30. The whole bike was strewn across the yard, complete with a spare set of panniers and a seat the size of a single bed. We settled on £450 and loaded it in the van and I set off home about 10.30, pleased with my purchase, a big Guzzi, at last.

My original idea was to rewire the bike so it ran and then turn it into a Le Mans look-alike. After ringing

round for prices on tank, seat, mudguards, sidepanels, fairing and so on, I reckoned I could do it all for around £1000 – including the bike.

A couple of weeks went by and in the local free ads paper I saw a Le Mans Mk1 for sale, 'needs restoring'. The advert said 'ring after 6.00pm'. This was about 8.00am so I waited a full five minutes before ringing.

I was surprised when the seller led me to a little Astra van and threw open the rear door. Talk about basket case. Five boxes, a frame, three wheels (?) and two bin bags, not to mention an engine reduced to its component parts. Sadly there was no tank, seat, panels, etc. In fact all the bits I needed for the other bike were missing from this one as well. The price was pretty good though, so naturally I offered less...

The new revised plan was now to turn the V1000 into a Lemon look-alike by obtaining the missing tank, etc. so that I had something to ride while taking my time over the real Le Mans. When it was ready to take the tank etc. I would then turn the V1000 back into what it should be. Remember the 'Italian Wanted' ad I'd sent to *CBG*? No, me neither, but next issue there it was. Sod's Law meant that someone rang up with what sounded like the perfect bike. A 1980 Le Mans Mk2, running but needing tidying and a bit of wiring – mine for £1300. Oh no, if I hadn't

bought two unfinished projects I could have



bought it. As it was I was about £600 short!

Angie, my better half (much better), managed to shuffle money around enough to scrape up the difference with the proviso that one of the other bikes would be disposed of to repay the money...

This Guzzi was a runner and complete but had obviously been painted either

- a) with a trowel
- b) with a paintball gun
- c) by Stevie Wonder.

I took it for a short test ride and was amazed at the handling. It was awful. Here I was on an unfamiliar bike, and I couldn't get it to go round corners. When I did lean it over, it flopped into the bend and wouldn't straighten up! Was this what Seventies road testers eulogised over? I related my experience to Mark, the seller, and he expressed regret that I'd had a wasted journey.

'Oh no,' I said. 'I'll take it.'

Sensible or what?

I figured that the problem was probably the nut holding the handlebars (me), and that with experience, I could tame the beast. In the end I found that putting another 25psi in each tyre did the trick...

At last I had my dream bike (or three), although to be fair my dream bike was the Mk1 with the smaller, neater bikini fairing, rather than the Mk2's, which looks like something

designed by a Volvo man on an Etch-A-Sketch. It may be aerodynamic but it does nothing for the appearance, especially when painted with what appeared to be tar.

A Mk1 fairing and respray were going to be first on the shopping list but first I had to sort out the wiring. The engine started and charged the battery, but the rest of the electrics were a mess.

A previous owner had rewired it with aircraft wire, which was excellent quality but every wire was white, with numbered tags to identify what was what. Trouble was, most of the wires had come undone and the tags lost, which left dozens of identical wires. What a nightmare.

I finally got everything working, although a new headlamp was needed as it had lost its silvering.

A neighbour three doors away had a Fiat 126 and the headlight looked suspiciously familiar, so one night, armed with a torch and my old headlight... No, I didn't pinch it, I just checked that it was the same – and indeed it was. £26 from a Fiat dealer rather than £57 from a Guzzi shop. The MoT was a cinch. Classic insurance was duly obtained, road tax and I was on the road. For its maiden voyage, I set off to the nearest city via some back roads and twisty lanes. Magic!

Tragic!

Forty-two miles and the engine seized.

Mind you, it was a good forty-two miles.

Back home, inspection showed that the conrods had seized onto the crank. I didn't feel confident enough to strip and repair such a big project, so I rang Brian Clay of Stoke-on-Trent, a Guzzi specialist (01538 754522). I arranged to take the bike to him, along with the Mk1 engine for his opinion.

On arrival at his workshops, he showed me the remains of two cranks, one of which the owner had run low on oil and then tried to hide by filling the engine with oil. Brian, however, was not so easily fooled and spotted that the oil emerging from the drain plug was nice and clean.

I assured him that was not the case with my bike, and then watched in amazement when my oil came out clean!

On removal of the sump, the oil pressure relief valve could be seen rolling around in the bottom. No wonder the oil looked clean, it hadn't gone anywhere to get dirty.

I left the bike with him and a week later started to receive obscene phone calls along the lines of; 'Are you sitting down?' The bad news was a thousand pound bill! So much for my bargain bike. All my cash and more besides had gone on the bike.

I contacted the lad who sold me the bike and he offered to repair the heads if Brian would do the bottom end, but this still left a £700 bill. Meanwhile Brian had also looked at the Mk1 engine and was of the opinion that it needed the same amount of work....

One good point of all this was that when I eventually collected the bike I glanced up into the rafters of his workshop and spied a T3 California seat. I had it for a fiver as it had a slight rip.

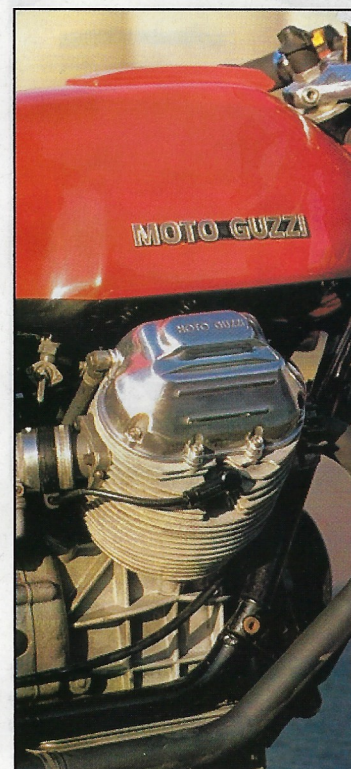
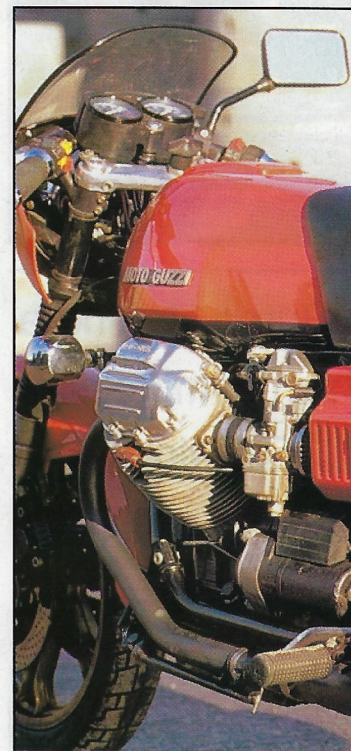
The V1000 was now going to be a Cali lookalike, I decided (especially as I'd swapped the seat with someone for a few bits for the Le Mans Mk1). By now I had connected enough of the loom up to hear the V1000 running, so now I had two running Guzzis.

My Mk2 heads had returned, unrepaired, with a cheque for £50 towards having them done, as Mark decided they needed more doing than he thought. Thanks, pal.

I now started using the Le Mans, the plan being to finish the V1000 as a Cali replica, pay back the borrowed money when it was sold and have the heads, respray, Mk1 fairing, etc done.

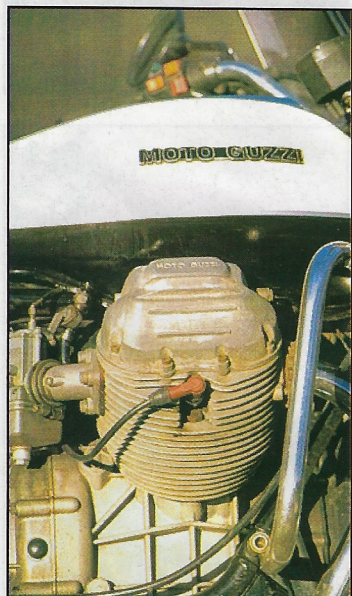
The seat was dismantled; the base was fibreglassed, hammerited and Angie stitched a small panel in to hide the rip, with a matching

I took it for a short test ride and was amazed at the handling. It was awful.





Bump-starting a high compression 850 twin is no joke, especially in full leathers...



All the travails are worth the effort when it comes to riding time. The committed Guzzi pilot has leathers for all occasions. And all bikes...

one on the opposite side. When it was all back together, it looked superb. Well worth a fiver.

When I swapped the seat, I had also swapped the screen, which I now regretted, and the lad I'd swapped with had sold his Guzzi so I couldn't buy it back. As soon as I'd finished the wiring, I started on the respray. The seat has a white panel and I decided to continue this feature up the tank. After a dozen coats of paint I was happy with the end result.

I made some pannier mounts out of mild steel bar and welded them myself; my welding would get 2 out of 10 but it's held so far. Now it was starting to look like a Cali, albeit with cast wheels and a 950cc engine.

I bought a screen from a chap with a Cali 3 who had replaced it with a fairing – it was more modern than the original but still looked good.

This left thousands of little jobs to do. At a car boot sale I bought a bag of bits for a fiver. It contained a pair of mirrors, two sets of indicators (the other pair later went on the Le Mans) and a pair of K&N filters. I didn't expect the filters to fit but they did. The seat grab rail and petrol filler cap were chromed, the wiring finished (after spending hours trying to fix a broken ignition switch I admitted defeat – only to find that a new one was a paltry £11). New fork seals and oil were fitted, new brake fluid bled into the system and, bearing in mind the Le Mans disaster, the sump was dropped, checked and new filter and oil put in.

At the same car boot sale, I found another set of K&Ns on another stall for an exorbitant 50p (mind you, that was for the pair). These slotted straight onto the Le Mans. One thing I did spend money on was an expensive set of chrome and foam grips. These looked good, so I put a pair on the Le Mans.

When the California was finished, it looked so good that Angie told me not to sell it as she loved it (I wasn't going to argue with that, was I?). So it was added on to the Lemon insurance for £20. Thanks, Carole Nash.

Bearing in mind my preference for clip-ons and rearsets, it came as a surprise to find I really liked the riding style of the Cali. It's a world apart from the Lemon despite 90% of the bikes being the same.

By now I had clocked up a couple of thousand miles on the Le Mans, with no problems whatsoever, although it took exception to being jetwashed one day and the starter packed up when I went for petrol,

fifteen miles from home. Bump-starting a high compression 850 twin is no joke, especially in full leathers in summer, so I set off home determined not to stall it. One hundred yards later the clutch cable snapped! All the way home I was planning my route with only left turns and no T-junctions...

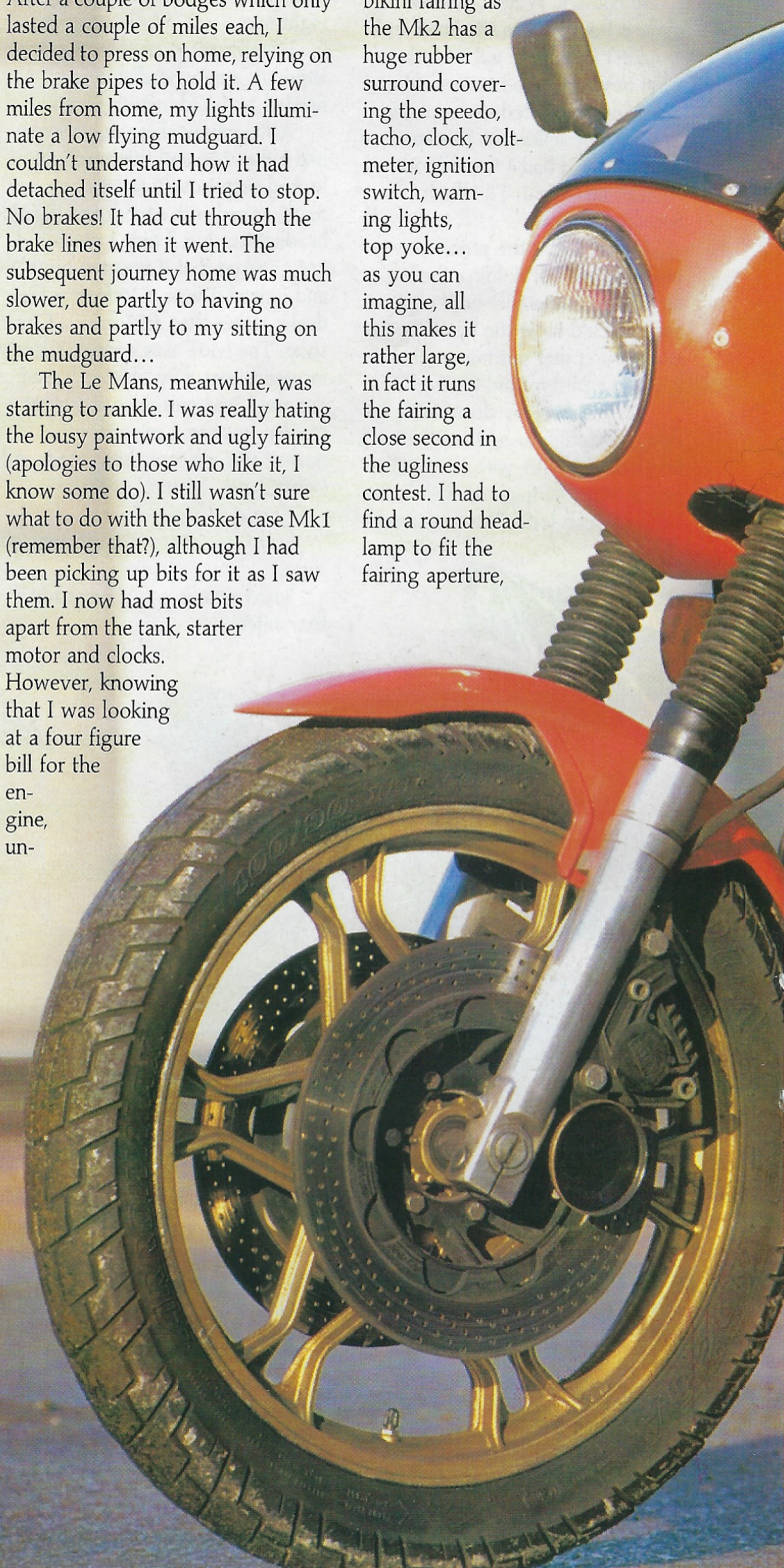
My maiden voyage on the Cali was on the same route as my maiden voyage on the Le Mans, which as it turned out was tempting fate too much. I stopped to investigate a rattle from the front end and found the mudguard bolts conspicuous by their absence with only the brake pipes stopping it from falling off. After a couple of bodes which only lasted a couple of miles each, I decided to press on home, relying on the brake pipes to hold it. A few miles from home, my lights illuminate a low flying mudguard. I couldn't understand how it had detached itself until I tried to stop. No brakes! It had cut through the brake lines when it went. The subsequent journey home was much slower, due partly to having no brakes and partly to my sitting on the mudguard...

The Le Mans, meanwhile, was starting to rattle. I was really hating the lousy paintwork and ugly fairing (apologies to those who like it, I know some do). I still wasn't sure what to do with the basket case Mk1 (remember that?), although I had been picking up bits for it as I saw them. I now had most bits apart from the tank, starter motor and clocks. However, knowing that I was looking at a four figure bill for the engine, un-

less I attempted the rebuild myself, and that I already had a Mk2 with a sound engine (a grand engine?), there didn't seem a lot of point spending money I hadn't got to end up with two essentially identical machines (especially when I still had to sort out the Mk2's heads).

To try and improve how the Mk2 looked, I fitted a Mk1 fairing I'd bought, which was black, although a different shade to the rest of the bike, but I was intending to spray it soon, so what the hell?

I'd picked up a V50 instrument surround which is very similar to the Mk1, in order to fit my speedo and tacho inside the bikini fairing as the Mk2 has a huge rubber surround covering the speedo, tacho, clock, volt-meter, ignition switch, warning lights, top yoke... as you can imagine, all this makes it rather large, in fact it runs the fairing a close second in the ugliness contest. I had to find a round headlamp to fit the fairing aperture,



a task made more difficult as I wanted a convex lens to continue the shape of the fairing. Then all those white wires had to be crammed into the shell, but the final result was a great improvement.

For some reason, Guzzi saw fit to put a top yoke with handlebar lugs on the Mk2 despite it having clip-ons. It isn't normally seen due to the boot I mentioned earlier. I thought of using the top yoke from the Mk1 but it turned out to be narrower. So I had the lugs ground off and polished and had the levers of both bikes polished as well.

I'd sprayed the exhaust with VHT matt black paint, which seemed to get dirty quickly, but found that ZEBOR grate blacking brought it up well and stayed cleaner longer.

Now was the time to have it resprayed. I had been given a quote to do the entire bike; tank, guards, side panels and fairing, all for £120 (no, that's not a misprint), but I

had a few days where I had no work (I'm self-employed; the hours are bad, but the boss is great), so I decided to do it myself.

I spent an entire day flattening everything down, then the first coat of paint went on. Disaster! Everything bar the fairing crazed over on contact. Whatever the black stuff had been, it reacted badly to primer.

I rang the sprayer, tail between my legs, and asked him to sort it out. I chose the colour I wanted and left him to it. A week later he rang to say it was ready for collection.

Now I realised he'd had a difficult task, but I wasn't 100% happy with the result. I'd waited so long for this that I wanted it perfect. Nearly every item had a flaw of some sort. The sprayer said to leave it with him and he'd do it all again. I felt terrible. He asked if I liked the colour and I had to tell him no. Although it was the colour I had chosen, in the flesh it was far too orange. I told him that the colour was my fault and I'd live with it, whereupon he told me that he had to buy some more paint, so if I did want a differ-

ent colour to let him know the following day before he ordered it. I deliberated all the way home and rang him up to say yes, go for a different colour.

The second attempt was perfect, not only that but he'd lacquered it for free!

With everything back on the bike it looked superb, just like my dream. I just stood and looked at it for ages...

The bike is practically finished now. The heads are currently off at Raceco, the Guzzi tuning specialists, and I just have to save up for the wheels to be powder coated. They should be silver, but I've got quite used to them being gold, so I may have them redone that colour. The trouble is, there's no other gold on the bike. The rocker covers are being polished to match the yokes and I'll have the ones on the California done next. The basket case has been sold to a dealer who is going to break it. I'd rather have sold it to someone who would restore it but I had no takers despite advertising it for four months. He gave me a good price so I can't complain.

I've just picked up an old style Cali screen, so that will go on next and then I think I'm about done. Well...

