



Glorious Guzzi

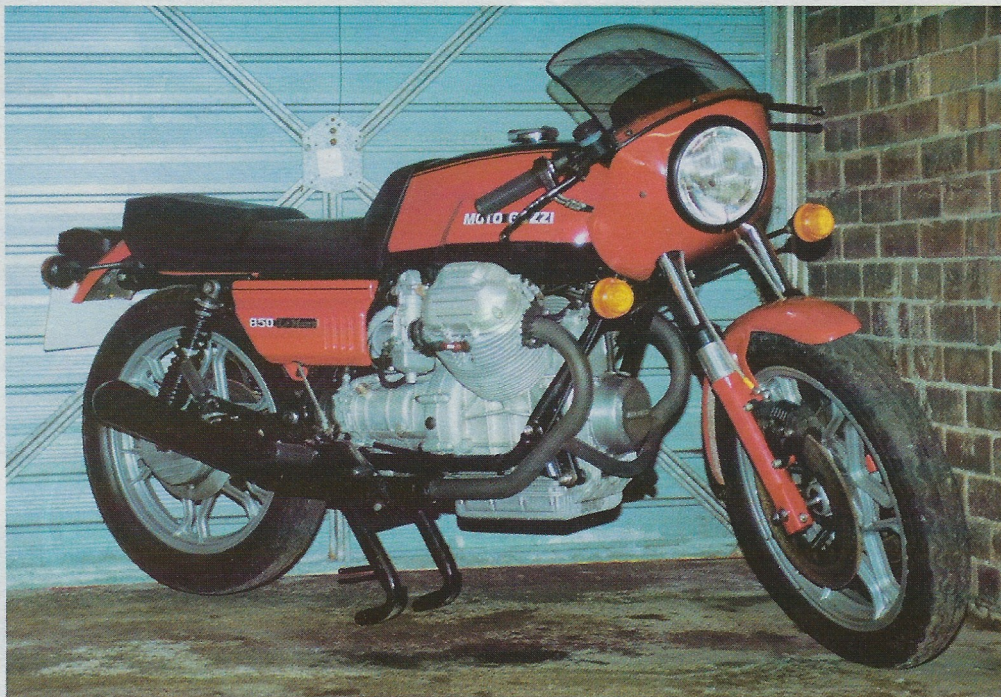
Keith Salway just had to have a Le Mans...

Jan and I parked up on Scarborough sea front, on a sunny Sunday in July, and strolled along the long row of lookalike pocket rockets lined up, sounding all crinkly as the motors cooled from the ride in, riders stretching the kinks out of their tortured limbs and holding animated 'Did you see that partially sighted elderly gentleman in the Mondeo? I had to take some radical action to avoid a collision there...' type conversations.

The race reps all looked the same, save for a bit of variation in colour. Nice bikes, all very fast and great handling no doubt, but there was nothing in the herd that said 'Look at me' bar a couple of TL1000s tastefully sorted into mean street fighters and sounding like an earthquake. I was just thinking about some real fish and chips when, wallop, timewarp - I was instantly back in 1978.

In the middle of the sea of plastic and carbon fibre was the Guzzi. It was gleaming red, long as a, well, as a long thing and lower than a snakes testicle in a wheel rut. It was more beautiful than any mere mechanised machine deserves to be - a Moto Guzzi Le Mans Mk1. And it was attracting a lot of attention from bikers and comforts (come for t'day's - for non northern readers) alike.

Rest of the Scarborough day was great, really good fish and chips. I kept an eye (and ear) out for the Guzzi, and was again stopped in my tracks as the beautiful racing tractor itself appeared, rumbling along the front at home time. It sounded like armageddon and stopped people in their tracks, as they turned to look at what the fuss was all about. No pocket rocket like the others, much more individual, a real good looking dinosaur. A velociraptor. 'Er indoors made the classic, simple



'how much would one of those cost?' mistake and the rest as they say is history.

For weeks I was a man possessed - looking all over the 'net, local and national adverts for The One 'til I finally tracked down what sounded like a good one, 150 Miles away in Gloucester.

So me and t'lad took a Saturday morning trip to look it over - expecting, as usual, the worst - a raddled 21 year old 'classic' heap with an owner spouting 'They all do that' crap, but not this time. This one was clean, shiny, red, low and mean as a pitbull in need of a decent meal. Not perfect, but then that wouldn't have been much fun would it?

I did all of the checks recommended on <http://www.mc-h.demon.co.uk/> (a brilliant source of Le Mans info by the way- thanks Mike) and established that the UJ wasn't shot, numbers matched the book and started with VE, so it really is a Le Mans, not a cobbled up T3 or whatever. Front tyre was a bit on the bald - but still legal - side, the tank was a bit rusty inside, fork legs had a couple of stone chips, but it had got a sump extension, stainless steel exhausts, Tarrozzi rearsets, and it sounded awesome.

Dear reader, after an enjoyable haggling session I bought it. Complete with new MOT and battery.

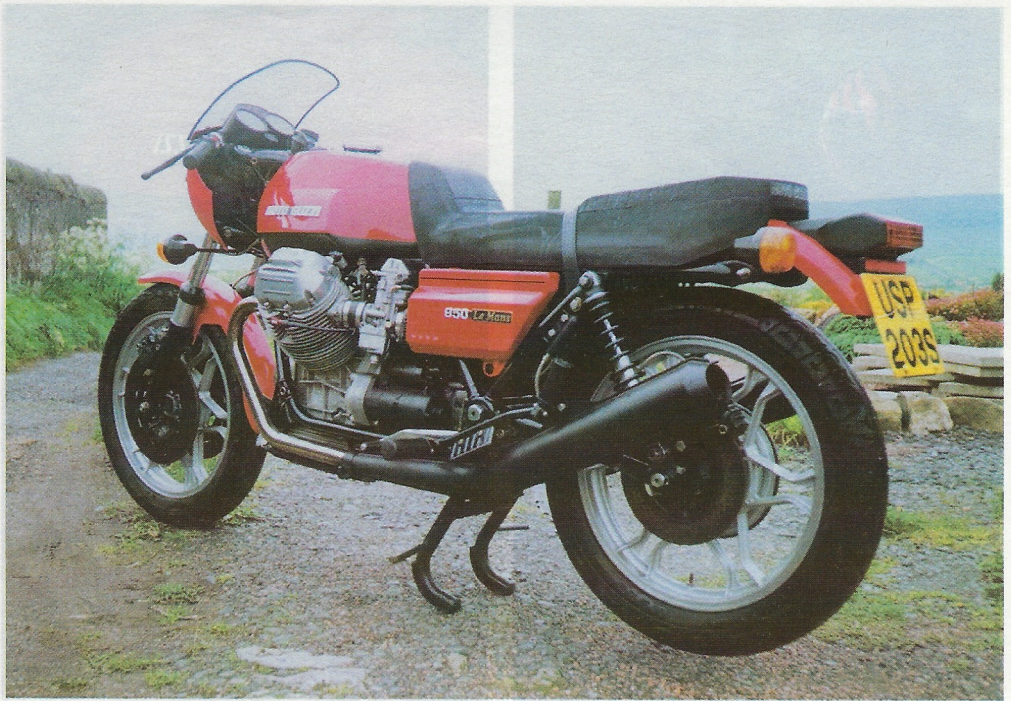
The following Sunday 'er indoors drove me down from Nottingham to Gloucester to collect it .

It had been a long time since I last rode a Guzzi any real distance and negotiating my way out of the narrow drive was a bit of a problem, what with the torque reaction flicking the bike about when I blipped the throttle on the gravel, and the very-direct-no-cushion shaft drive it was interesting.

The clutch didn't seem too heavy - compared with my Dharma, and the throttle wasn't too heavy either - what, I thought, was all of the fuss in the write ups all about? Mind you, the reach to the clip ons seemed a bit of a stretch.

After following me for five miles or so on the home run, 'er indoors flashed me over to the roadside to complain that she couldn't tell which way I was indicating. To be honest I didn't know which way I was indicating. The indicator switch movement left to right was no more than 2mm, with 1mm back to centre and as I was a tad worried about matching revs and gears because...

*DIRE WARNING I from road tests - if you don't match revs to speed you'll lock the back wheel when changing down and be on the deck faster than bambi on ice.



*DIRE WARNING II from road tests - precise throttle control required -never, ever close the throttle in mid corner or you'll be off before your sphincter can squeak. Or worse still, get into a long weaving session and fall off after your sphincter has squeaked – and you know how they insist on clean underwear in hospital.

So, I didn't want to look down too long to look at the long winded indicators and miss a corner planning session. Imagine the embarrassment of falling off first ride out! Not me sir. No Way!

She didn't want to do the round the houses A38 non motorway route I'd planned (and incidentally had spent three hours in the car doing on the way down to show her the way). She decided that I had probably got the measure of the beast by now so she would bugger off – up the motorway and see me at home later. Ok – see you love – off she goes.

Would the bugger start then? No. I couldn't get the motor to turn over at all. Just dead but then I found that the starter switch likes to be pressed in a certain Italian way – one corner only. Ok, so it turns over but will it fire. NO. Killswitch? No that is Ok. So I risk flooding it and try choke, bearing in mind it had been running for five miles and should

be warm surely... Choke on, press starter switch corner in the prescribed Italian way and wahay!

Exciting exit from the gravel at the roadside the clutch, which had become a bit on/off now it was warmed up, had the rear wheel trying to beat me home. Onto the carriageway sideways, got massive traction and shot off toward home revelling in the massive torque of the mighty, rumbling v-twin. Feeling really good and bloody pleased with myself. The bike felt great – but just a bit agricultural in the gearchange department – just like a racing tractor.

The man had told me that there was enough LRP in the tank for 'a 100 miles, easy' so naturally after about 25 miles I thought 'I'll top it up and be sure to have enough to get home.' Bit of an excuse to stop really as I was beginning to lose the use of my hands and arms due to the increasingly heavy controls, the loooooong reach to the clip on 'bars and the resultant unaccustomed strain. My left knee was inexplicably starting to hurt too. So I pulled into a petrol station.

Well, the forks on my Lemon are non standard, slightly overlength Marzocchis and were fixed just a little high in the yokes making the bike slightly taller than it should be. The centre stand reached



the floor, but didn't actually support the bike upright as I discovered when it fell over onto a petrol pump and trashed it. The clip ons even pulled the hose off the nozzle, broken plastic and bits of mirror everywhere. What did I say about embarrassing? Some big lads helped to get it upright.

The pump guy came over and was really cool about it.

'Never mind' he said. 'Nice Bike' he said. 'How long you had it?' he said.

'About half an hour...'

Then I opened the tank and discovered that I couldn't get a spoonful of petrol in it – it was still full! I had to go into the shop, apologise again and buy some crisps and things I didn't want really. Face hotter than cylinder head now.

Chokey start involving Italian style button pressing soon had me pogoing back onto the main road (I WILL get the hang of this bloody clutch).

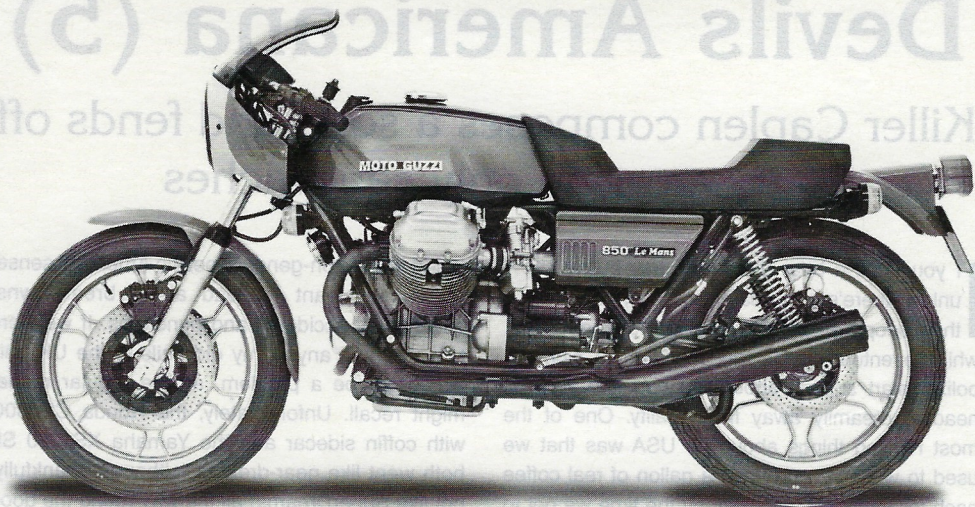
I found out, by getting a first degree burn over the next couple of miles, that the cause of my knee pain was clonking contact with the left cylinder head when I sat far enough forward to not break back and arms reaching for the clip ons.....

A bit of a misfire seemed to develop over the

next 20 miles or so and I had to pull over again to investigate in a layby in the sticks (and to rest my arms and wrists again, administer first aid to my knee plus by now I had lost the ability to look over my shoulder and what with the smashed mirror, overtaking was getting hazardous). Well, the falling over incident in the garage had exposed the right spark plug cap to something hard and it had cracked. Some bits of plug cap had subsequently fallen off and the rest was only making contact with the plug top every now and again.

Pocket rummages produced no instant fixes (couldn't bend arms enough to get hand in pockets) so a few minutes aerobics were in order. Just as I was getting some use back into my limbs, and could actually look over my right shoulder again a large unsilenced four stroke belched into life, in a barn in a field behind me. Jammy or what! Late on a Sunday afternoon, miles from home, I had stumbled across some vintage motor enthusiasts firing up their latest project. Ten minutes chat later and they kindly gave me two plug caps (just in case...). Thanks lads.

Italian touch with the starter button, juggle choke and pogo-pogo off we go again. A few miles



further on the bugger starts to misfire at small throttle openings and will not tick over at traffic lights. So, at a stop I needed to blip the throttle constantly – in gear with the clutch pulled in – because it's a Guzzi and you can't get it into neutral when standing still.

By now, it would not pull away on a small throttle opening and needed quite a fistful if it was not to bog down and stall embarrassingly in front of whole streets of tourists (the noise, beautiful as it was made everyone turn and look – just what I didn't want right then). Fistfuls of throttle combined with the hot on/off clutch made traffic starts a bit hairy. I didn't want to filter to the front of a queue of traffic in case I stalled it (as happened every one in five starts) so I'd need to stay where I was in the queue. I had to wait till the car in front was at least five metres away before roaring off to a GP start or I would be parked in the car boot in front in a flash. I swear it wheeled once..

I'm sure I need not describe the fun I had when



tightly turning right or left from a standstill at traffic lights or roundabouts. How I laughed..

'Er indoors beat me home by an hour and a half and, after her arduous car journey was still able to look over her shoulder, comb her hair and pick up coins etc, unlike me. I had given up hope of ever being able to perform those simple functions ever again. I had trouble getting my gloves off.

When I manhandled the brute onto its side stand in the garage I just stood and looked at it for half an hour, it is SO beautiful. As soon as I regained the use of my limbs and patted it fondly, burning my hand on the still hot head.

So there are a few teething problems – so what. It has a character. The handling is precise and really stable and if you counter steer it turns quickly enough. That front tyre has got to go though as it white lines terribly. The direct shaft drive (pogoing apart) caused me no problems, gear and speed matching are a doddle – can't see what the fuss was about. Torque reaction? By the time I'd got home I didn't even notice it anymore. The sound and feel of the thing on the open road? Priceless.

The low throttle thing turned out to be rust in the carbs jets. Lowering the yokes on the forks fixed the stand problem and doesn't seem to have affected handling at all.

Looking forward to a winter of buffing up the ol' girl, replacing the switches with Jap stuff (I'm no purist) ready for next spring's serious profiling – Scarborough sea front here I come. Well, Matlock maybe!