

McClure at RA, May 1982



The Guzzi that gave Yamaha the Finger

*What to do if your Ducati 900SS is protested
out of a race meeting: wheel out
an old Le Mans 850 and win anyway.*

WORDS: Fred Sahms PERIOD PHOTOS: Kerala Schilling-Cox

BATTLE OF THE TWINS



Final National Standings 1981 Battle of the Twins

Open Port				Modified Production Expert				Modified Production Amateur				Stock Production			
Rank	Name	Points	Team	Rank	Name	Points	Team	Rank	Name	Points	Team	Rank	Name	Points	Team
1	John J. Jones	100	100	1	John J. Jones	100	100	1	John J. Jones	100	100	1	John J. Jones	100	100
2	David Perry	85	85	2	David Perry	85	85	2	David Perry	85	85	2	David Perry	85	85
3	Michael J. Carter	70	70	3	Michael J. Carter	70	70	3	Michael J. Carter	70	70	3	Michael J. Carter	70	70
4	Raymond L. Smith	55	55	4	Raymond L. Smith	55	55	4	Raymond L. Smith	55	55	4	Raymond L. Smith	55	55
5	Raymond L. Smith	40	40	5	Raymond L. Smith	40	40	5	Raymond L. Smith	40	40	5	Raymond L. Smith	40	40

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Former road racer Madison Cox died last summer in Knoxville, Tennessee, USA. His ashes will spend eternity in an urn fabricated from a Ducati muffler. Early 80s photos of Madison and his black Darmah SSD race bike, sporting red "Darkroom" sponsor logos, dominated his memorial service. His last street bike was a Monster S4R. Madison's blood ran Ducati red. But his obituary focused on the Daytona Battle of the Twins race he won on a 1978 Guzzi 850 Le Mans, the same Guzzi that I found five years ago rotting in a damp shed.

Cox races the Le Mans on the ratty 1981 BOTT poster in my shop, alongside legends Jimmy Adamo, David Emde and Malcolm Tunstall. It was the only BOTT race Madison entered on the Guzzi, but it wasn't the only race the bike would win. Before I dragged it off Signal Mountain, Tennessee, the seller thrust a plaque into my hands. It read 1st - BOTT - Stock Class - Road America - May 21-23, 1982. The back bore an inscription: "Phil, thanks for the ride on the Guzzi. Dave MC." He asked me, "Do you want the trophy Dave McClure won on the bike at Elkhart Lake?"

Cox races the #12 Guzzi on the poster in a photo snapped October 4, 1981, the day he won the BOTT production class season finale at Daytona. The following May the same Guzzi was pressed into service again, when McClure, from Danielsville, Georgia, raced the bike as #441 at Road America, and won. McClure shows up on the poster too, but on his #17 Ducati.

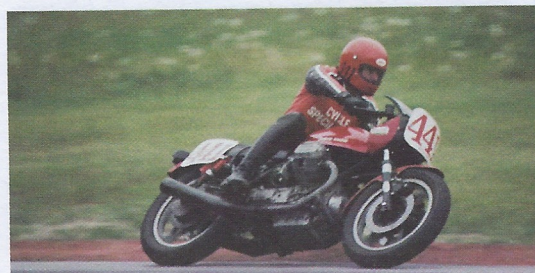
A protest against McClure's Ducati eventually pushed this street Le Mans onto the race track, twice: At the Road America round in May, 1981, Yamaha XV920R rider Michael Shilts lodged a protest against the two Ducatis that beat him, including one ridden by McClure. BOTT officials upheld the protest, costing McClure the win. Stock-class rules forbid the Ducatis' "kit" Conti pipes and 40mm Dell'Ortos, so effective immediately, the Ducats had to run the US-market pipes and EPA 32mm carbs. BOTT stripped the first- and second-place finishers of their results, and

Shilts was declared the winner. Shilts didn't find out he won until 10 days after the race, but he remembers it well: "I could keep up through the curves, but those guys (McClure and fellow protestee Dallas Wilson) had 10, 15 mph on me in top-end." Madison Cox was also running the kit parts but wasn't protested. He inherited second place.

Cox battled near the top of the points race during the summer of 1981 on his Duc, but he knew the rule "clarification" would hurt his chances at Daytona in October: "The EPA carbs killed the top end, and at a high-speed track like Daytona you needed top end." Cox knew that a stock Guzzi Le Mans, with its 36mm Dell'Ortos and open velocity stacks, would outrun his strangled Duc, and he knew where he could get one.

Cox borrowed the Guzzi from a friend in nearby Signal Mountain, Tennessee, Phil Levi (the same guy who sold me the Le Mans 26 years later). Cox's friend McClure, partner in Italian-bike shop Cycle Specialties of Athens (Georgia), prepped the bike, blueprinting the motor "to factory specs." More on that later. To prevent additional protests, they even swapped out the Guzzi's Dyna electronic ignition for the original points plate.

Cox won the October Daytona race and tied in points for the title, but lost out to BMW-mounted Devin Battley who had two more outright wins. Cox went home to Knoxville and the Le Mans went home to Signal Mountain. The year would mark the end of Battle of the Twins as a stand-alone series, owned by the Florida Grand Prix Riders Association. The AMA had purchased the series after the 1981 finale. ➔



At Road America, May 1982, winning rider Dave McClure. McClure's race number for this race had something to do with a stolen US Highway 441 sign. Allegedly.

McClure gave up on the BOTT stock class after forfeiting the win: *"I damn near lapped the guy [Shilts] and could have whipped him even with the EPA carbs."* He hadn't planned on racing the next year either, but McClure was re-energized when Yamaha took out full-page Cycle News ads following the March, 1982 Daytona race, proclaiming that Yamaha had *"Made Pasta of the Competition."* McClure recalled *"I think they protested a Guzzi rider in that race. That ad lit the fire under us."*

McClure decided to run a one-off in the stock class, as a raised middle digit to Yamaha. Through Cox, he borrowed Phil's Le Mans again for the May 1982 Road America round. During practice that morning, the bike's oil light blinked on, and McClure heard a faint knocking from the bowels of the motor. He eased the bike back to the paddock. Tuner Reno Leoni gives it a listen. *"Eez pinking,"* He concluded.

McClure was unconvinced, though: *"We flopped it over onto a pile of tires in the Michelin truck and pulled the sump, and sure enough there was a Taiwanese oil filter in there."* Under pressure, these filters flexed off their base plates enough to pop out the O-ring, killing oil pressure. *"We threw rod bearings in and buttoned it back up in time for the race."* Luckily for McClure, changing rod bearings on a Guzzi can be done in around an hour if you're motivated.

McClure didn't just finish; he won. His trophy was considerably downscale from Cox's Daytona hardware. He recalled the ride home: *"[fellow BOTT racer] Bob Ramsbottom and I stopped for gas somewhere, and Bob picked up a motorcycle magazine and read that Yamaha was paying \$5,000.00 in win money. Bob told me 'You just clipped that guy [Chris Steward, Yamaha's factory rider and eventual 82 champion] out of \$5,000.'" McClure laughed, "Hell, I would have let him win for half that!"* Road America was the only BOTT stock class race McClure would run in 1982.

After McClure's win, Madison Cox took out a small Cycle News ad of his own, proclaiming that the Guzzi had made *"Fish Heads and Rice of the Competition."* Cox remembers the reaction to the ad: *"I was called down by BOTT competition director Jesse O'Brien, who didn't want an ugly feud between competitors."* O'Brien, by the way, was one of the founders of Battle of the Twins and brother of Harley race boss Dick O'Brien.

Cox did one endurance race at Riverside aboard Dave Vendola's Le Mans, but otherwise stuck to racing his SD. He achieved second place in BOTT Modified in 1983 before retiring to a career in real estate.

McClure never raced a Moto Guzzi again after his win on Phil's Le Mans. After testing for the Motor Company in late 1982, McClure raced for Harley-Davidson from 1983-1985, honing the XR1000-based Lucifer's Hammer and winning BOTT Modified Production titles in 1984 and 1985. McClure sits 25th on the AMA's all-time rider win list, with 20 victories. His first? May 23, 1982. On the Guzzi.

Phil Levi parked the Le Mans in 1987 for good, with just 9,600 miles on the clock. After two race victories and a perfect record, its retirement eventually resembled abandonment. The next 20 years were unkind. Sharing a leaky shed with a deteriorating Norton Commando, the Guzzi mouldered. Five gallons of \$0.95-per-gallon premium rotted through the bottom of the Le Mans' steel tank.

By early 2007, the bike's condition was painful to witness. It had never even been dropped. The pavement-kissed footpeg tips and safety-wired drain/fill plugs were the only hints that it had ever been on a track. The wheels and plastic alone were worth the asking price, so I persuaded myself I could always recoup my money one day if need be. But I knew deep down that would never happen. I wasn't high-fiving after the *"pick"* like the dudes on American Pickers; I was merely happy to save it from the breakers.

After a year of parts-collecting, I tore the Le Mans down in mid-2008. The wiring harness, plastic bits and the speedometer were in surprisingly excellent shape. The moist environment on Signal Mountain had painted the Guzzi with a demi glaze of red rust and green mildew, but that outer crust had sealed the bike like a deep-fried turkey. All of the fasteners freed easily, and the original plating on the threads was just as it had been when Guido bolted the bike together in Mandello del Lario. But all the ancillary parts that connected aluminium to steel had turned to mush during the 20-year electrolysis experiment. The glop that leaked through the tank-shaped colander ate right into the alloy of the engine cases and stuck like a 3:00 am tattoo. Demon moisture snuck past an open valve on the left cylinder and rusted the piston rings to the iron bore.

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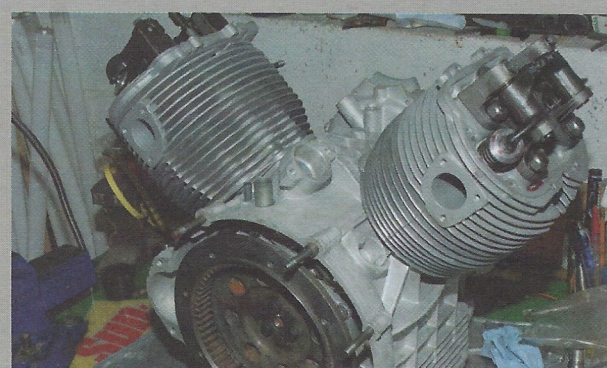
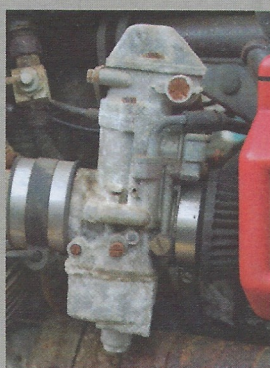
Phil Levi parked the Le Mans in 1987 for good, with just 9,600 miles on the clock. After two race victories and a perfect record, its retirement eventually resembled abandonment.

Madison Cox at Daytona, October 1981.
Devin Battley (5) in the background.



While I investigated having custom pistons made and scoured the tiny Guzzi universe for vapourware oversized OEM versions, a Good Samaritan from Bungendore, Australia shipped me a usable piston and cylinder at his own considerable expense. This benefactor also included a can of local beer inside the cylinder, cushioned with a can cooler from his neighbourhood watering hole. Viva Guzzisti! Oddly, the stock piston from Australia outweighed the stock pistons in the bike, which showed evidence of having been lightened under the crowns, so the piston from Oz got a massage as well to balance it all out. Maybe this Le Mans wasn't exactly "stock" after all.

exhaust system (loud and non-stock enough to have drawn another protest in 1981) from an unfinished race bike project. The "Reservato Competizione" lettering on each muffler is even slightly crooked, an unmistakable mark of fine Italian craftsmanship. Zydeco Racing in New York tore through the transmission and rear drive and declared them sound. The old Dyna ignition still sparked, but the coils had corroded to uselessness, so the 30-year-old pick-ups and black box now trigger new Dyna coils. The Bakelite Pirelli Phantom tires, oversized on the front per misguided 1982 best practice, hit the dumpster, and the skinny alloy wheels now wear gummy Sport Demons in the correct sizes. I binned the saggy fork



I found more protest-worthy evidence as well; the carburettor mouths bore the bright signature of a small die grinder. I emailed McClure the photos, to which he replied "A little extra air never hurt anything." The removable lower frame rails, nearest to the damp ground during its long dirt nap, were severely pitted and had to be replaced with good used items from a Guzzi T3. And sure enough, one connecting rod held a set of mismatched rod bearings, just like McClure said it would. Wisconsin's MG Cycle unearthed a used Lafranconi

springs and rusted S&W shocks and installed Moto Spezial springs and rate-matched Hagons.

Finally, I won a new old stock tank in tan Italian primer (for slightly more than I paid for the bike) on eBay. Risking purists' scorn, I changed the bike's original Rosso Red to the rarer Ice Blue. Dave Vendola, who tipped me off about this treasure, already had two red Le Mans 850s (one of which he races on the old BOTT poster). Truthfully, I always liked the blue version better anyway, because it makes the

Day-Glo panel pop. My genius painter matched the Guzzi azure from the unfaded backside of a borrowed bikini fairing, and dusted off his Peter Max colour chips. That signature high-viz panel on the bikini fairing, which McClure hated and spray-bombed flat black, is already starting to fade. How's that for original?


I finally fired up the old lump in 2010 and took it to Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin in June for AHRMA's vintage weekend for photos. The old girl looked and sounded great on the historic course, the site of McClure's win 28 years before. Photo-op rider and racer Jack Parker, who normally races Yamaha two-

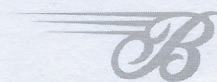
happily lost in 1981, with Adamo, Emde and Tunstall on the old poster. Rarely do good things come to motorcycles that wait. But for this Guzzi something other than rot and entropy waited at the end of its 20-year sleep, perhaps something deserved. Guzzi's then-superbike is almost stately in 2012, but still with a gleam in her eye from a couple of youthful wild weekends.

After its long journey from dealer showroom, to the street, to the racetrack, and to that shed on Signal Mountain, my Le Mans has come full circle, back to doing dull duty as some slow guy's street ride. The reborn goose will spend its second retirement



strokes, liked it. *"It's faster through the Carousel than my race bike."* Photos snapped, I circulated Road A for a few laps myself, albeit behind the annoying safety car. For normal-sized adult riders the Le Mans is a tiny thing, albeit a very dense tiny thing. Among the BMWs and Goldwings on the track for the fan laps, it was a shark among tuna, and a few big fat fish waved me by on the long wooded section into Canada Corner. I know inanimate objects can't feel, but if they could this bike would be

prowling the hills of East Tennessee and Western North Carolina, attracting loquacious 50-something cognoscenti at every gas stop (the Day-Glo pulls 'em from across the lot). After all, this Le Mans is and always was a street bike. It simply came from a time when the distance between "stock" and "race" was much smaller. The Lafranconi exhaust system, one of the few non-stock parts on the bike, may still draw a protest or two from bystanders and car alarms. They'd be wise to think before protesting a Guzzi, though. Just ask Yamaha. **FINALE** 





The Guzzi that gave Yamaha the Finger

