

REAR BEVEL BOX

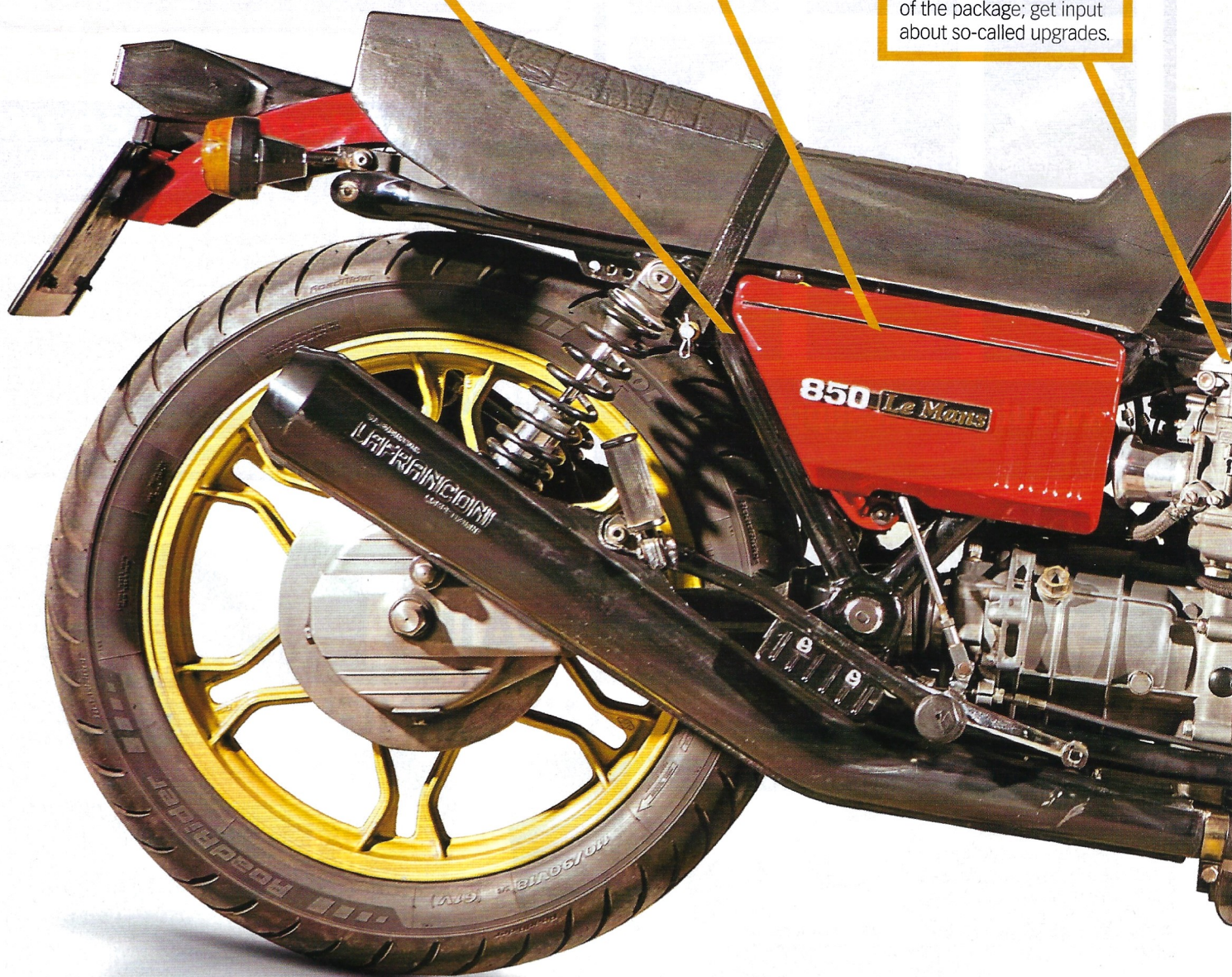
Normally bombproof if oil changes have been carried out, so avoid noisy examples.

ELECTRICS

Much better than you might expect: but a modern one-piece regulator/rectifier is a good idea and sensible upgrade of the 40-year-old original.

CARBS

A heavier throttle is part of the package; get input about so-called upgrades.



MOTO GUZZI

Le Mans Mk1

Large capacity, reliable Italian classic that's sporty? That'd be the Le Mans then.

HEADLIGHT SWITCH

Unusual operation often results in units being forced, leading to poor operation.

SWITCH GEAR

Often upgraded and no real issue. OEM stuff isn't bad.

MOTO GUZZI

OIL & FILTER

Filter originally sat inside the sump. Sump extensions with external oil filters make oil/filter change much easier and give the motor an easier time.

Unless you are in your late fifties or older it may be difficult to understand just how important and significant the launch of the Moto Guzzi Le Mans was back in 1976.

It had first seen the light of day the previous year at the Milan Show and caused something of a stir. Moto Guzzi had, in one fell swoop, totally changed the profile of their famous V-twin machines to something that looked like a true road burner. The abbreviated seat that climbed up the rear of the tank, the tank itself with what looked like arm rest pressings, a fairing for crying out loud, a matte black exhaust system and dropped handlebars. Almost overnight Moto Guzzi had suddenly ceased to be a quirky little Italian manufacturer and had morphed into a real threat to the status quo. Here was an Italian motorcycle capable of giving Japan's best a run for their money.

And when the bikes arrived at the dealers in the UK those lucky enough to blag a test ride came back burbling almost incoherently about the machine's speed and handling. Already well known for its 'on-rails' road-holding the company now had a motor to exploit its very best capabilities. The Le Mans was said to deliver 81bhp and be capable of 134mph. Even if those figures were a little embellished the truth was that at last here ➤



IT'S MY BIKE: Kate Wain

I've used this bike for rallying abroad and at home, work and shopping transport (well, a gal has to do what a gal has to do!) and riding racetracks. We are never more at home than at Cadwell or Mallory Park on a fine day, footrest dragging and looking for a race. A good Le Mans gets under your skin like no other: they handle well, stop well, will withstand loads of abuse and get to serious mileage and anybody who says different has never done a lot of miles on a good one.

The Le Mans may be small, but they are mighty! Turn the front engine bolt regularly, make sure control cables particularly throttle are not tortured, twin plug it unless you are a serious rivet counter; it all makes a big difference, mine also has Dyna Electronic ignition and their dual output coils. Then go ride the wheels off it, it's tougher than a 900SS and handles better than a Laverda; of which I have both.

Beware of so-called 'experts' who mutter about duff electrics, and heavy throttles. Join the club and prove them very wrong.

What to buy and how much to pay

The key to finding a decent Mk1 Le Mans is to get expert help and advice. There have been several periods where demand has outstripped supply and some less than reputable elements have converted 850Ts and Mk2 Le Mans examples into Mk1s. Seriously, if you are looking for a decent Mk1 Le Mans, join one of the organisations detailed here; none of them are expensive and they could just be the people who could save you from making a very costly mistake. Guzzi owners tend to be dedicated types and often choose to fit considered upgrades. For once this might not be a bad thing. Sump extensions, revised timing gear drive, modern electronic ignition, barrel and cylinder head protectors, engine breathing upgrades and the like will all enhance the bike's usability.

For once high mileages shouldn't be a reason to raise eyebrows; those motors are rock-solid and, if serviced correctly, go on for ages. If specialist work is claimed to have been done ask to see receipts; fettling carried out by acknowledged gurus needs to be authenticated. Other than that there's just one other thing that a Le Mans needs... to be ridden. They may look drop dead gorgeous but they were built to be ridden long, hard and far!



Solid, soulful and gutsy.

was a machine that could be ridden fast and hard as long as there was enough fuel in the tank and the rider didn't flag.

Possibly difficult to believe but until the Le Mans big machines had been severely compromised by mass, handling or reliability. Laverda triples had the speed but required substantial physical effort to get the best out of them. Kawasaki's legendary 900 fours had the power but lacked decent handling. Ducati's various V-twins had the power and the handling but could be woefully unreliable. Finally, here in one package was a machine that could cruise at three figures, required little physical input and, crucially, would prove to be disgustingly reliable. By and large the only foible was the shaft drive which took a little getting used to.

The Le Mans might have looked like an all-new machine but it had a long line of forbears with a distinct high-end lineage. The bike was essentially a combination of all that had gone before it and was recognised as being the best from the marque. The concept was based around the legendary V7 Sport (1972-74) which in turn had given rise to the acclaimed 750S (74-75) and the sublime 750S3 (75-76). All had been stunning machines but nebulous dealer support, variable spares back up and quirky switchgear had limited their appeal... that and the high price. The infamously volatile lira had seen the cost of Guzzi V-twins fluctuate wildly and even if the bikes were truly outstanding few took the plunge.

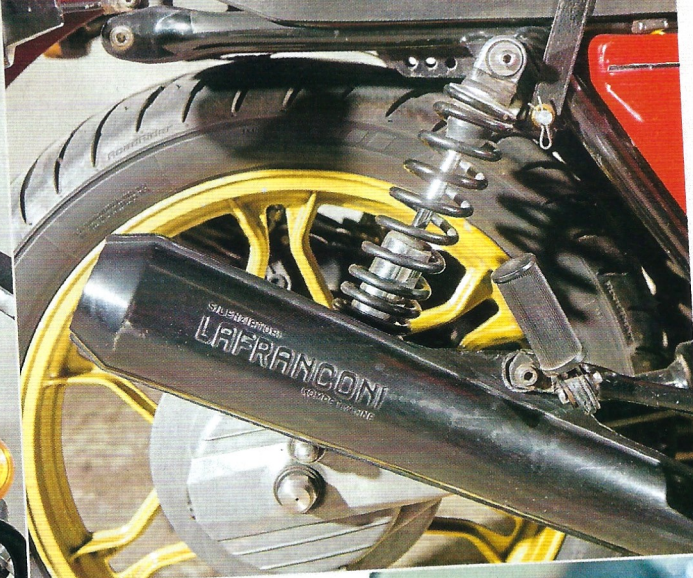


Classy cockpit, idiot lights not so.

To produce the Le Mans, Moto Guzzi took the S3 as the baseline in terms of chassis and running gear and added an engine taken from the 850T touring machine. The extra oomph came from higher compression pistons, larger valves, bigger carburettors, a revised cam profile and large plastic bellmouths on the inlet system. In essence the bike was little more than a parts bin special with some trick fitments and new bodykit but where, from some companies, such an approach might have failed here it worked and for good reason.

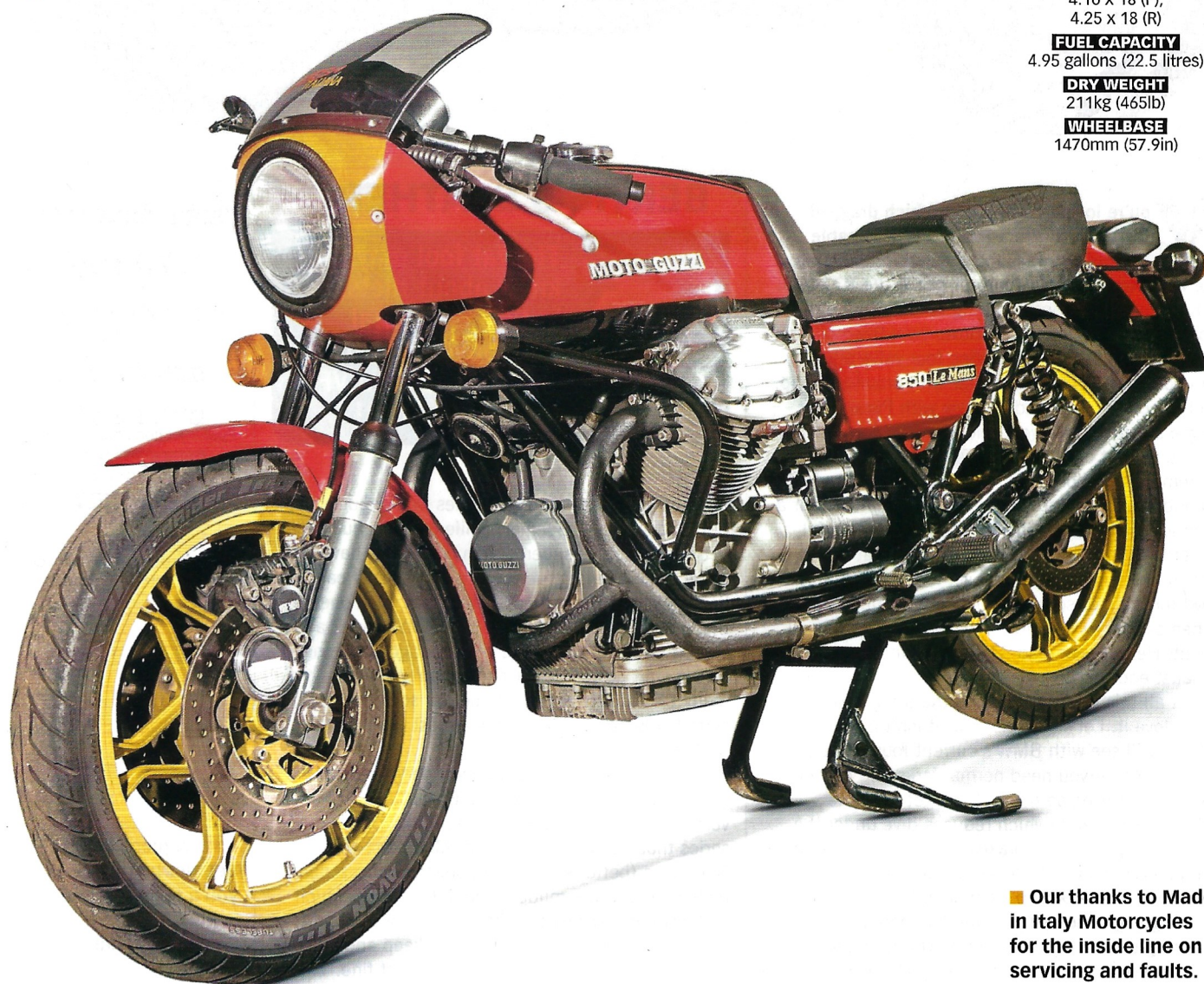
Although Moto Guzzi was a commercial vehicle manufacturer it was run and staffed by people who had a genuine passion for motorcycles. It is said that a camel is a horse designed by committee; with the Le Mans it was an indisputable team effort and the end result was a true thoroughbred race horse. In reality Moto Guzzi had been there before with an earlier project. Taking a V7 Sport as their baseline the factory had endowed the bike with full race kit. A substantial half fairing, a humped single seat, bigger Dell'Ortos, triple discs to spoked Borrani alloy wheels and a tuned motor delivered a machine sometime in the early 70s called the Le Mans. Details of the engine don't seem to be available but it's a reasonable bet that a lot of what appeared on the production machine had been piloted on the earlier one-off.

Why would you want one today? How long do you have? Class-leading handling, looks to kill for, reliability built in as standard, huge long distance potential, easy to service, decent spares back-up, stunning brakes for the period and cheaper than an original Z1. If we have to explain further may we politely suggest you wouldn't understand? **cmm**



USEFUL CONTACTS

- www.motoguzziclub.co.uk
- www.mgcgbsscottishbranch.co.uk
- www.mgnoc.com
- www.motoguzzi.com
- www.guzziriders.org
- www.gutsibits.co.uk
- www.madeinitalymotorcycles.com
- www.dimarino.co.uk
- www.motorcycleservicing.co.uk
- www.motomeccaspares.com



SPECIFICATION

MOTO GUZZI

Le Mans Mk1

ENGINE TYPE

Air-cooled, 4-stroke, transverse, 2 valves/cylinder, push rod operated, 844cc

BORE AND STROKE

83 x 78mm

CLAIMED HORSEPOWER

71bhp @ 7300rpm

MAXIMUM TORQUE

57lb-ft @ 6600rpm

TRANSMISSION TYPE

5-speed, shaft final drive

COMPRESSION RATIO

10.2:1

CARBURETION

2 x 36mm Dell'Orto pumper units

BRAKES

2 x 300mm disc (F), 1 x 242mm disc (R)

TYRES

4.10 x 18 (F), 4.25 x 18 (R)

FUEL CAPACITY

4.95 gallons (22.5 litres)

DRY WEIGHT

211kg (465lb)

WHEELBASE

1470mm (57.9in)

■ Our thanks to Made in Italy Motorcycles for the inside line on servicing and faults.