

Suspension is conventional with Marzocchi telescopic front forks and rear shock-absorbers which, surprisingly, are not adjustable for load; the hydraulically-damped rear units have exposed springs.

A 7in Aprilia headlamp has a 40/45 watt main bulb – surely the 280 watt Bosch alternator would stand a bigger bulb? – and the cushioned CEV rear light relies on a single stop/tail bulb, though 1979 machines will have two.

Guzzi's own design of 12-spoke cast alloy wheels balance the bike's 522 lb (that figure includes a full petrol tank, ie five gallons) and we liked them. The Brembo brakes comprise two 11½in drilled cast-iron discs at the front and a 10in drilled disc behind on the nearside – the offside swinging arm tube doubles as an oilbath for the fully-enclosed shaft. Wheelbase is reasonable at 57½in and maximum width, across the handed bars, 28in.

The 850's sports-racing image speaks for it – little chrome is (intentionally) apparent: two or three inches on the front forks and plates rear shock-absorber springs, tank cap and sundry rods and linkages. The accent is on high-quality dull-finished aluminium alloy castings. Matt black covers the stylish (and, we would say, encouraging!) upswept exhaust system which is cross coupled in front of the engine and again by the gearbox. A distinctive seat-cum-stomach support (not really a dualseat to English eyes), top fork yoke, handlebars and instruments are also finished in dull black.

Vital controls and instruments are grouped behind a shallow headlamp fairing and screen – not optically true, by the way – and there are warning lights for neutral, oil, generator, high beam and brake fluid level positioned in the rider's

ITALIAN SPECIALIST

In five years of specializing in Italian exotica, Mike Ward of Nottingham has built up a staff of knowledgeable enthusiasts. He

rides a 500 solo Ariel in vintage road races, a post-war 350 AJS in Midland Classic Club trials and a 1967 ex-Roy Peplow 500 works Triumph twin in the Edinburgh. For trials, sons Mark, 16, and Simon, 15, have respectively a 250 Enfield and a 250 Greeves.

Workshop foreman Trevor Milner, 23, also rides in all weather. A keen rallyist, he has a 1961 350 lightweight Matchless, an Ariel Square Four and a GTS 860 Ducati, on which he did 13,400 miles including a trip to the Ducati factory during a fortnight's holiday this year.

He thinks nothing of fitting in a rapid Continental tour between Friday night and Monday morning in the summer months, and believes he set a record in attending eight motorcycle rallies in one weekend.

The Ward range of Ducatis, Laverdas, Guzzis and MVs attracts from near and far. Bill Emmerson, a previous winner of the gruelling Circuit de Pyrenees, dropped in recently for a T3. He lives in Newcastle...

line of vision hard by matching Veglia 0-160 mph speedometer and 0-8,000 rpm rev-counter dials...

A telescopic steering damper has a particularly neat control: the damper may be switched in or out by a lever which passes through the steering stem. The control knob moves through only 45 deg and can be operated while the machine is being ridden.

Handlebars switch layout is also neat and simple. Placed by the left thumb is a series of buttons and switches to control indicators (Left-Off-Right), lamp flasher and horn, and a rotating tumbler operates the lights. It has four positions: Off, Park, Low and High beam and a safety lock prevents overshooting Low when flicking from High. To obtain Park from Low, a release tab must first be pressed. Alongside the Tommaselli Daytona twist-grip is an engine Kill switch and electric-start button. All electrical contacts and wires are concealed within the bars to minimize the possibility of water penetrating them, and the ignition keyhole, which is next to the steering damper knob, has its own rubber shield.

The carburettor bellmouths are angled in away from the rider's knees and protected by the leading edges of removable glassfibre side panels which cover the battery compartment, electrical junction boxes and a hydraulic fluid reservoir for the coupled brakes; and they are another ingenious development.

The patented "Integral Brake System" works like this: a foot lever on the offside applies 75 per cent of the pressure to the right front disc and the remaining 25 per cent to the rear brake, and the usual handlebar lever separately controls the left front disc. It is intriguing – and it works. The only drawback we can see is that exclusive use of the foot lever must apply uneven stress to the front forks.

The Guzzi tickover is quieter than most, certainly softer than a BMW's but sometimes with the test bike one had to wait for it. Whether the engine was hot or cold appeared to make little difference. There is a knack to starting it quickly and several hundred miles passed before I mastered it. Once warmed up, the big twin settled



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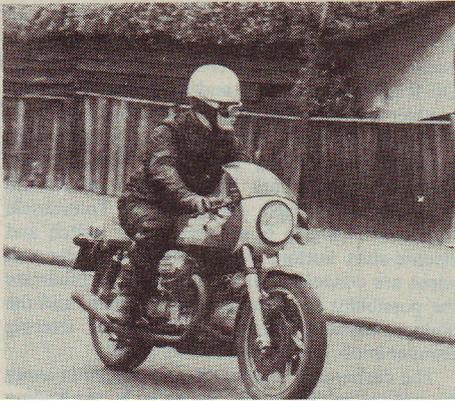
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with only a slightly deeper tone from the exhausts to indicate the effort.

"The Guzzi is one of the few modern road-burners for shorties. Its slim girth over the foot rests and a seat 2in lower than most would not embarrass a woman. But the weight might..."

Acceleration is satisfactory but there's a qualification. Elapsed standing-start times suffer because the motor needs to be doing about 3,000 rpm before it will respond to a snapped-open throttle. At 4,000 rpm it was just finding its stride and from then on a steady flow of power - no carburation flat spots - propelled the bike towards the horizon like a sprinter (excuse the vague imagery, repairs to our timing equipment are proving long-winded).

Good low-speed balance offsets to some extent a heavy clutch which in traffic can become tiring.

Moving the steering damper In or Out makes little difference to the steering in 30-40 mph built-up areas: when the big tank is full, one is conscious of the Guzzi's 522 lb all-up weight all the time in cities. Increasing front tyre pressure a couple of pounds lessens the sensation but the bike is wasted in those conditions.

On plunging country roads and fast going like the A5 from Nuneaton to Towcester, the Guzzi comes into its own. It holds line exceptionally well, wet or dry. The limit of adhesion is elusive. Disconcerting at first, the left-right left-right pull of the V-twin at traffic roundabouts can be ignored - in fact, "fighting" at low revs never upsets the bike's equilibrium. It pays to synchronize revs and road speed, however, when changing down: get things wrong and the

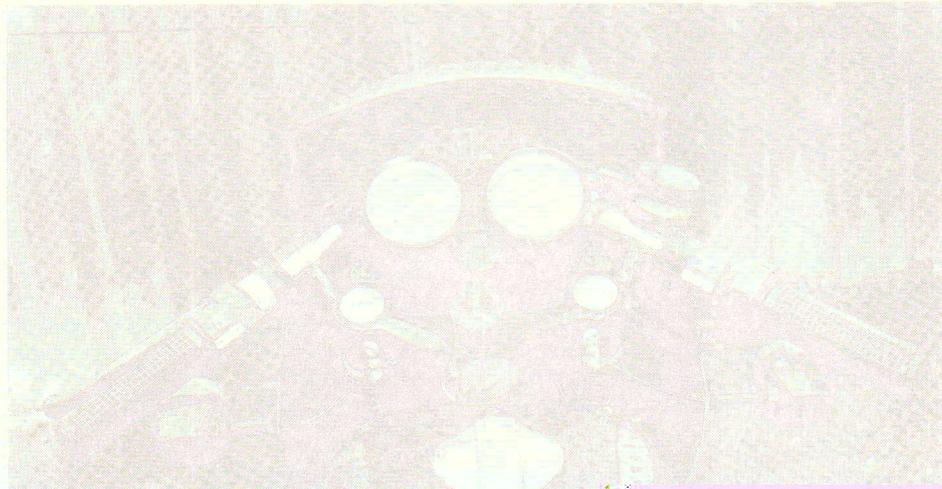
inflexible driveshaft will jerk the back tyre. In rain and while heeling through an unexpectedly tight bend, the lesson can be dramatic. . . .

The nose fairing keeps the row of warning lights and twin dials legible in the filthiest weather but is otherwise little more than ornamental. It is too small to have any noticeable effect on frontal area but without it the outline would be less attractive and we think it is worth retaining for that reason alone. A dolphin fairing seems superfluous as the big leaning cylinders effectively keep what mud and spray gets past the short front mudguard off the rider's legs.

Gear ratios suit the power characteristics. With a high-performance big twin like this, a fairly low bottom gear is required to get it rolling. The standard ratio, 11.6:1, is just right but second could stand being a shade lower. The other three ratios, being very close, enable one to hold the engine within its optimum powerband, between 5,000 and 7,300 rpm without difficulty. Even second pulverizes the 70 limit.

Only one really surprising incident occurred.

After a five-minute stop at the MI Labors Forest Inn, we took off on one dark stormy night, the storm refused to wait. The tank was almost full again in order and the big Bosch spare wheel bearing with it - for the engine would not charge for over a eight minutes. Both wheels were dry and in good condition and spaced enough to see all imaginable. In desperation I used the stock spring. The engine fired and sailed in a gearshiftover.



It's a regular 10-tank-to-tank mile at about 2000rpm. The test machine had a power reserve on occasion.

Front fairing and mudguard are provided behind a shield resulting better wind draft. The steering damper is a particularly nice touch.

It was a very good ride, and the engine was very responsive. The Guzzi is a very good road-burner, and the engine is very responsive. The Guzzi is a very good road-burner, and the engine is very responsive. The Guzzi is a very good road-burner, and the engine is very responsive.

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