



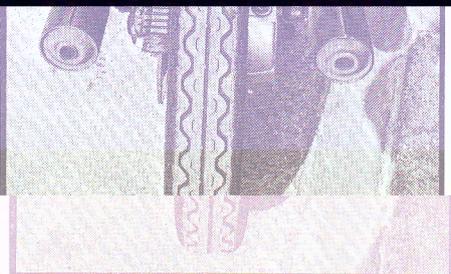
No one could deny Moto Guzzi's Le Mans Mark II is a looker. Dave Calderwood took one to the Isle of Man during TT week to test the bike and his own endurance.

SIX AM FRIDAY MORNING OF TT WEEK: Leaden legs stumble down the stairs of Mrs Connolly's guest house and slouch across the slim seat of the Lemon. Flip up the choke lever on the left carb and, as always, the rumbling beat chunters into life immediately. Fortunately, the ferry terminal is less than 200 yards away across the deserted Douglas street 'cos I'm fast asleep again by the time I'm installed in the shuffling queue. Thank God it's Friday, even hardened degenerates couldn't last another day

sealed dampers within the stanchions instead of free flowing oil. The 90cc of transmission fluid in each fork leg is there for lubrication only.

The Guzzi forks combine soft springing and firm damping with the intention of providing reasonable comfort with taut, controlled action — a very difficult bill to meet. On previous Guzzis I'd ridden there'd never been any problem so upon return from the Isle, the bike was returned to importers Coburn & Hughes for examination and repairs.

Upon stripdown, it was found that the dampers were faulty and new ones fitted. This stiffened the front end considerably though they still lacked the smooth, easy action of Marzocchis. At least they didn't plunge and rise dramatically as do many so-called sporting



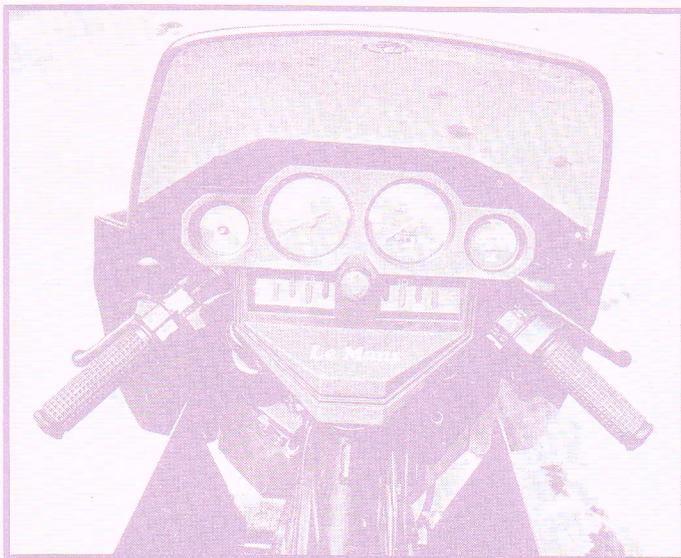
Ducatis. Not all the differential between the bikes was down to rider error even though one of the Dukes was ridden by Mac McDiarmid, who knows his way sufficiently well around the TT course to put in a roads open lap of 29 minutes. There was also the fact that I'd lost all the damping on the front forks of the Le Mans.

Now before all you potential Le Mans buyers rush into your dealers and cancel your order saying Guzzi forks are u/s, read a bit further. The fault lay entirely with the De Carbon sealed dampers within the forks. Guzzi forks are different from usual practice in having long thin

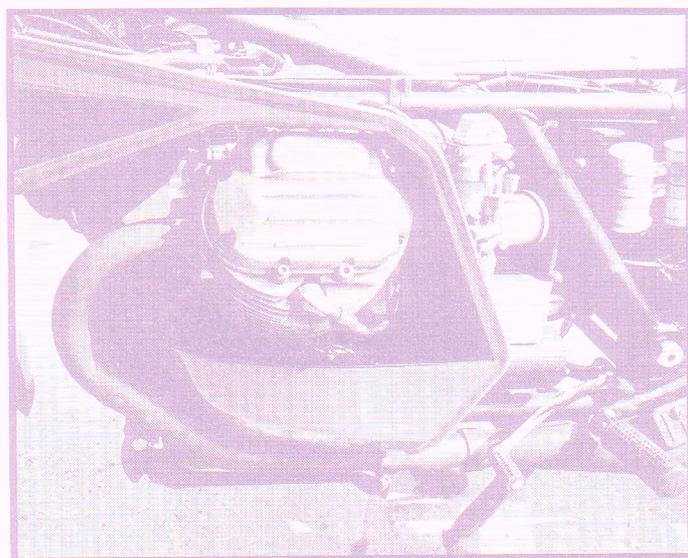
fairing, the image is complete. There's enough of the dull alloy motor poking from beneath the bold, angular lines of the fairing to know that it's a big V-twin. And yet, many of the ugly nooks and crannies inevitable on such a collection of bits as a motorcycle are hidden by that luscious red glass fibre.

The handlebar part of the fairing is separate from the lower panels (straight, Spada in effect), and the gap between the two is sealed by a rubber mat revolving with the action of the bars. This keeps out the weather and draughts efficiently and is a good example of the de-

Red Sunset Across The Mountain



Top Left: All tubes lead to the steering head. Every available space on the Le Mans is used



Left: New look fascia for '79 has accurate

Above: Side panels are similar to the Spada

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Paints to handle the heat

veloped during the 1970s

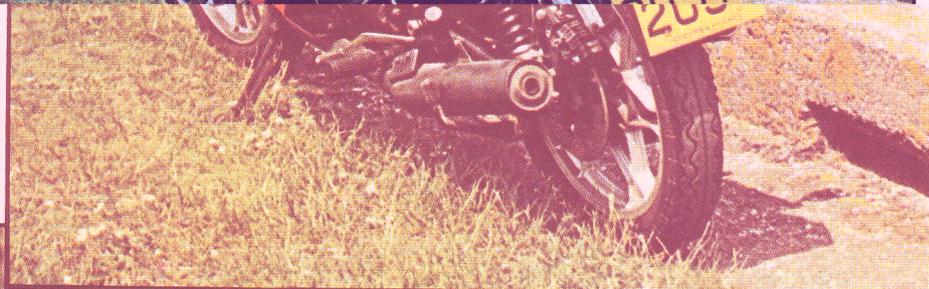
signers turning a potential nasty compromise into advantage. Those drop 'bars tuck your head and shoulders behind the tinted screen just beneath the airflow rippling off the top of the screen, but not so much as to create wrist or neck ache over long distances. With a well-packed tank bag to rest upon, the riding position is near ideal.

It's good that Guzzi have gone for full coverage of hands because once you're up to a comfortable cruising speed there's no reason for rain or cold winds to affect sensitive fingers. Because of this and other relevant factors such as chassis and tyres, the Le Mans makes a superb wet weather bike since you're not suffering from the usual battering storm riders endure. This must be a primary safety consideration for intergalactic tourers; once you've moved into Warp Factor Five you're isolated from the tiring and concentration-sapping wind-buffeting that often curtails such journeys.

Unfortunately, in their quest for neatness and flashy looks, Guzzi dropped a bollock with the footrest position — I'm sure the bike is designed for a short-legged, long-footed, indented-knees monkey. Since I'm none of those things (I hope), the only way I could get comfortable behind the side panels was to have my knees poking out the sides. A fair cross section of other people also tried sitting upon the bike to assure me that there's no way a normal shape human being can get his knees tucked in — and hope to control the foot pedals with any degree of success. Either the pegs have got to be brought back a good three inches or the fairing trimmed.

Such considerations as actually riding the bike aside, the total effect of the flamboyant bright red bodywork and subtle black shadowing could melt the heart of even the most fervent of bike haters. Just the thing to woo the daughter of Maj Herbert Gussett (ret) when he's in a whatever-happened-to-the-Empire mood.

Regular TT goers will understand when I say that '78 was the year of the Le Mans; everywhere you looked there seemed to be one of the spectacular Mark Ones. This year it was



Red Sunset Across The Mountain

the turn of the 900SS Ducati, presumably as a result of Hailwood's success last year. It was while attempting to circulate with these Ducatis that I really got to know about the Le Mans. Ordinary road riding can tell you about the relevance of a motorcycle in everyday life; take it to a course like the TT circuit and it's a whole different affair. Where the Guzzi feels secure and precise aimed through a smooth, constant radius ringroad turn around an insignificant urban sprawl, it would suddenly feel alive in your hands through a similar bend in the Isle of Man. I noticed odd effects which never manifested themselves to any great degree under the hardest mainland riding; things like the massive torque reaction under sharp acceleration or, worse, sharp deceleration.

After a while, I realised that shutting off in a bend would pull the bike's attitude rightwards, while accelerating would pivot the bike about its central lengthwise axis to the left. Thus, if you were leaning through a tight lefthander and put the power on hard it would tend to make the bike lean further; shut off and you'd be aimed through the nearest stone wall. For a righthander, it would be the opposite. This effect wasn't so much dangerous as interesting though I'd hesitate to claim it could be used to advantage; certainly once I'd accepted it as normal, things didn't slow up at all.

You may consider this analysis unnecessary and beyond what's expected of a road bike; don't forget the Le Mans has been marketed on the production racing successes in *Bike's* own Avon Roadrunner Championship. In case you've forgotten, Roy Armstrong took the top class in '77, riding his own Le Mans.

I should've realised it was going to be an incident-packed week after nearly being wiped out on three occasions within the first 12 hours of leaving Peterborough. The first was when touring into Liverpool late one evening and a dog beamed down from a tree just over 100ft away from my front wheel. This was in the outside lane of an urban dual carriageway — its owner had taken it for an evening stroll along the central reservation! The other two incidents

were the first of many near-misses on an overpopulated Island full of cretins attempting contorted manoeuvres on blind bends.

In each of these incidents, full panic power was applied to the Guzzi's now famous integral braking system and since I'm still here to tippex my opinions, I'm assured that the three discs are collectively fantastically powerful. However, they do lack that fine touch of 'feel' expected of a high performance machine but this may be that I'm not used to applying most of the braking power by foot. At slow speeds — not a common occurrence — applying both foot and hand brakes causes the fork legs to twist slightly, just enough to feel it. There's no brace between the fork legs and the simple inclusion of one as a mudguard stay would solve this.

This must be the only part of the bike that does flex for the rest of the chassis is constructed to extremes. The ultra-rigid frame is dedicated to the idea of straight tubing: two top tubes run from the steering head to the end of the seat with an extra top tube from one of several cross-braces. The engine is held in a full cradle with massive-triangulated support to the swing arm pivot.

Steering geometry is such that, like Ducati's 900SS, fast long-sweeping bends become a work of art. Once on the right line it runs round as if on rails. This stability, however, means that tight, twisty bends are hard work. It's not that the bike doesn't handle through swervery, just that you need to keep on top of the situation. You need to force the 'bars round and if you're going quick, it's necessary to manhandle the plot quite determinedly. Previous tests have criticised the lack of ground clearance but I never found this a problem; the only change is in the design of the centre stand which now has its access arm tucking up around the left silencer.

Though the Lemon didn't take too kindly to the 'point and squirt' technique necessary on some 1000hp-plus megabikes, it proved very effective in staying ahead of a GS750 Suzuki and an immaculate T160 Trident round the tortuous, narrow lanes on the south of the Island. The Guzzi set the pace by virtue of its ability to hold

the brakes on well into a bend, and with its surprisingly quick acceleration out.

The Le Mans engine doesn't feel particularly quick when you first ride it. Unlike the softly tuned T3, there's little urge below 4,000rpm. Reach this point and the tacho needle takes off and a careful eye has to be kept to avoid going full tilt over the 7,500rpm redline. There's some mighty big valves working overtime in those cylinders and they're controlled by conventional springs and pushrods. This power step poses a gearchange problem since it's impossible — not to mention noisy — to make a clean change from first to second or second to third, if the revs are above this point. This was most felt on the vital second-third change used so much (on the Lemon) pulling up the Mountain from Ramsey.

To take the hairpin in first, obviously, and attempt to accelerate hard once I'd pulled up from maximum lean. Then it'd be up two gears on the approach to Waterworks when I'd have to decide whether to plod through in third and not have maximum acceleration out of the bend, or go down and into the awful ker-ker-ker-ker-lunkbonk getting back into third. During this time, I'd lose speed so I'd be out of the power band anyway.

This, I maintain resolutely, is why I couldn't get past that 500 Velo until the straight before the Gooseneck — another flat in second turn. Back in saner climes (the mainland), the poor gearchange wasn't so noticeable because the riding wasn't so extreme. The Isle Of Man is a very special place in having no speed limits outside the towns which may encourage lunatic riding from some but there's also many examples of safe, competent, high speed skill. By the time I was back in Liverpool I'd also developed a technique of holding the pedal up hard until I could feel the dogs (of war?) engage.

While in the Island, I got into all sorts of conversations with owners of Mark Ones and picked up all sorts of ideas. One chap said that if you drilled a series of small holes around the silencer's one exit, you'd improve lowdown response and get better mpg. He'd actually knocked the whole of the end of the silencer out

Note knee pads inside fairing. Open carbs have only wire mesh to protect them.

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