

Buying Bikes

Moto Guzzi Le Mans

with Neil Murray

THE Italians have always made horny sports bikes, but with the glitter of stunning styling, exciting performance and class-leading handling has usually come the tarnish of unreliability. And if the mechanical elements have been made solid, the electrical parts have let the side down.

The Moto Guzzi Le Mans is one of only two really desirable Italian sports bikes that have managed to combine excellent performance with decent reliability (the other is the Laverda Jota) and is one of only two pure sports bikes ever to be shaft driven (the other is the MV).



THE BIKES

The original Le Mans still does surprising things - its base was 75.2 inches down, seat height 29 inches, it leans 24° into a corner at 100mph, and can accelerate from 0-2500rpm in just 0.6 seconds (that's what we judge for yourself), with no adornment save that little dayglo flyscreen on the front.

The engine was basically the familiar 850cc Guzzi lump, equipped with bigger valves and 36mm Dell'Orto pumper carbs devoid of any filtration except mesh screens to prevent ingestion of rocks and small animals.

The Le Mans not only went like stink, but it handled and stopped. Guzzi's integral braking system was then a source of wonder, in an age when few Japanese bikes (and one or two British and Italian ones) didn't have the brakes to match their performance.

In 1979 the Le Mans II appeared

in a slightly more refined form.

The original Le Mans had a

Gorgeous. A Mark Two in gold and black and our man's choice as the best buy.

version adorned the Spada tourer.)

It also benefited from improved switchgear and a comprehensive instrument panel that incorporated a voltmeter, quartz clock and no fewer than eight idiot lights (left indicator, right indicator, neutral, lights on, main beam, battery charge, oil pressure and brake fluid level, if you're interested).

The clocks were more accurate too - the original Le Mans, or Mark One as it now became known, used to show speeds of 150mph-plus. Bike's test of the Mark Two revealed that at an indicated 120, it was only over-reading by 4mph.

The good aspects of the Mark

One remained. Top speed was still

raining didn't suit the long-legged, but the Mark Two was still one of the most desirable bikes in the world, even if the price had now risen by 50% to three grand.

And - and this is important - Guzzis had by now acquired a reputation for being as strong a motorcycle as anyone had ever built and incredibly easy to service. What other 130mph motorcycle used pushrods and could be fettled by the side of the road?

Late 1981 saw yet another revamp with the Mark Three. This got nikasil plated bores and a new exhaust system, which were given the credit for a 5hp power increase, although the Mark Three was no

applied to the rest of the bike, making it resemble the then-new V50 Monza.

The clocks were restyled to give pride of place to a large white-faced and centrally mounted rev counter, but in a retrograde move, the clock was dropped.

The Mark Three was superseded by (you guessed it) the Mark Four in 1985, and here things went downhill. The Four was taken out to 1000cc (okay, 949) and the carbs were upped to 40mm, which gave it 140mph potential.

Someone at Guzzi decided that the swoopy styling starting to appear on Kawasakis was a Good Thing and the Le Mans sprouted

Le Mans 1000



MOTO GUZZI Italian excellence admired throughout the world.

Brochure from 1985 for the 1000cc version.

wheel. The smaller wheel was simply dropped into the forks (as it was on other Guzzis) with no changes to rake or trail whatsoever.

broken cuzzari or Morini of the car and then through neglect it usually seizes. The front forks have sealed cartridges, which always fail and you lose all the damping.

Speedo and rev counter cables always fail, as does, for some reason, one of the twin bulbs in the tail light. Timing chains rattle but never actually seem to fail. All the rubber components rot early. That's about it. These are very solid motorcycles.

HOW TO BUY

BESIDES all the above, check that you're looking at a genuine Le Mans. It's quite easy to dress up a T3 or even a G5 to Le Mans spec. Note that it really *is* easy.

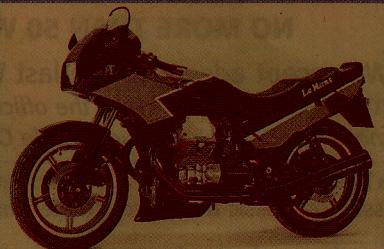
WHICH TO BUY

FOR sheer collectable value, the original Mark One is the one to have. The Mark Two is probably the most popular, and the practicality of the fairing and the useful clock make it, in my opinion, the best choice.

These came in red, blue, or black/gold. The black/gold is the best, because these were actually painted in the UK after a consignment of bikes got their finish ruined in winter transit due to a foul weather and a transport strike. The Spada Royale and Black Prince were also UK-painted models, victims of the same consignment. Of course, the paint job is hot.



Where things began to go wrong. The Le Mans Mark Four sporting that silly 16" front wheel.



Last of the line, the Mark Five got the 16" rubber back on the front and sold into the early Nineties.

SERVICING

THEY run on 20/50 oil. The filter is a metal spin-on affair, but is sited in the sump so you have to drop the engine to get at it.

Check the oil level every 500 miles.

It's worth unbolting the bevel box to check the sylvins on the drive

which was basically the Mark four with the addition of 16-inch front wheels. This time, however, the fairings had to be modified.

gear conversion is available without changing the engine.

Check for cracks from the little fairings that were added to the

FAULTS

