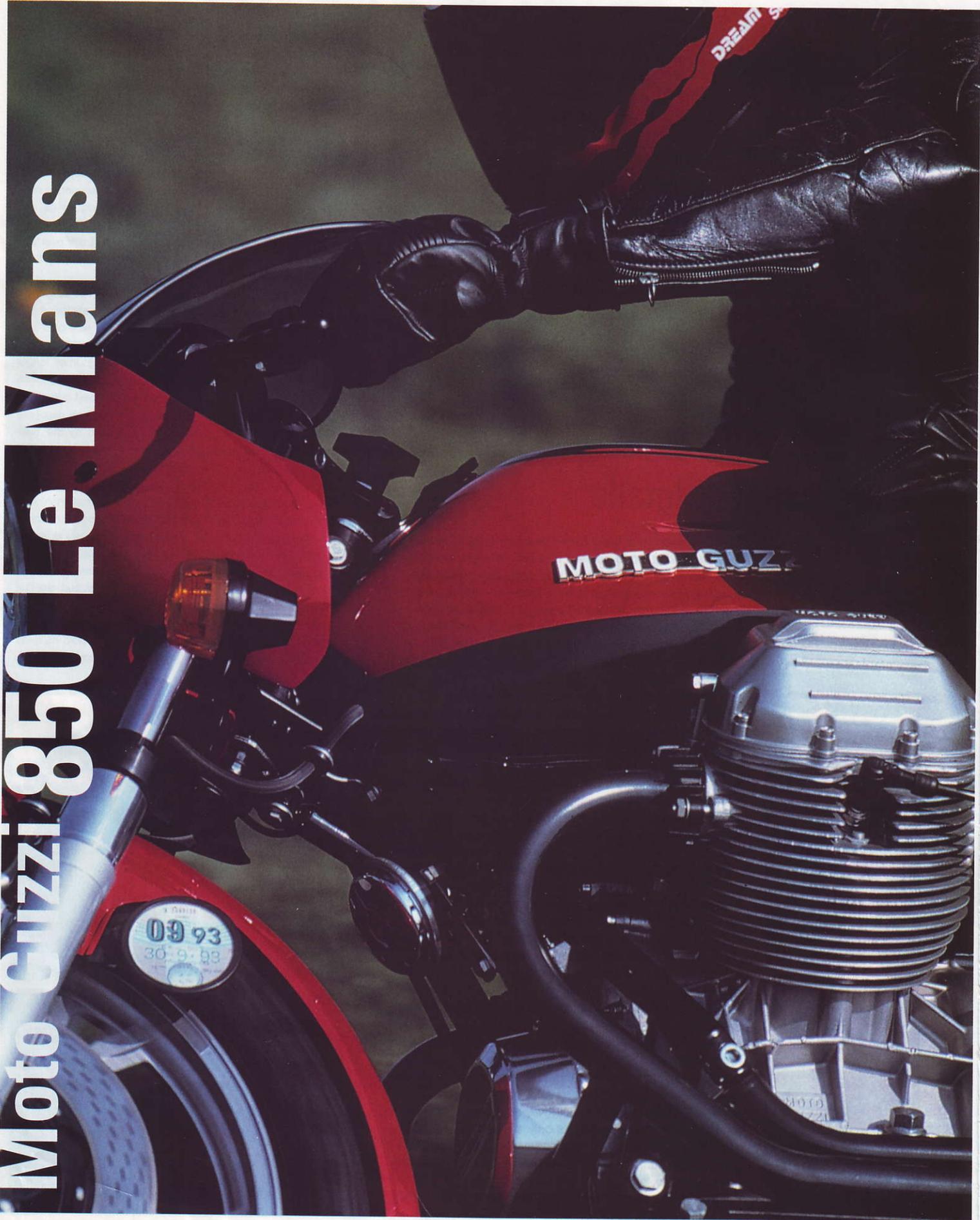


Moto Guzzi 850 Le Mans





850 Le Mans - 'Liscio e Rapido'

The first Guzzi to capture hearts in the UK must surely have been the Le Mans. It looked like it was doing 100mph even at a standstill, such was the styling and stance adopted by the big V-twin machine. Developed from the 1975 750cc S3 model, the Le Mans shared many chassis components although, with an extra 10bhp on tap, it was far faster. But it was the styling that set the new machine apart from the rest. Before the Le Mans, Guzzi's always appeared to accentuate the big V-twin engine and make it look like an afterthought. With the birth of the Le Mans it all seemed to gel into one; all of a sudden those big pots didn't look anything like as ungainly.

The Le Mans not only impressed all who rode one on the road but the bike was also a stunning track tool, with good showings in major production races all over the UK. The superb reliability showed up well in longer continental races. The steel chassis, largely hidden behind exhausts and panels, handled impeccably, only occasionally being ruffled by the heavy feel of the shaft drive, while the 833cc pushrod engine delivered a revvier power than one might have imagined. The feel is that of an over-stiff set-up that really comes into its own on those corners that knock the wobbly Jap stuff for six. Just sit back and watch a Guzzi laying down the power completely composed and unflustered, or better still get on one and do it - there is no finer feeling.

On first riding any disc-braked Guzzi it is crucial to use the rear brake in conjunction with the front; the right front disc is operated by the handlebar lever while the left front and rear are combined, working from the foot pedal. This feels strange at first but, once it is mastered, very little outrakes a Guzzi!

In many ways the Le Mans inspired a whole host of machines that followed, for instance the first Suzuki Katana with its flat and low stance and small, sleek nose fairing. In use the gearbox is a lazy affair and, like the big

Laverda Jota, you only have one chance to get the selected gear. Practice is needed before looking like a pro but, once a gear is fully home, the superbly torquey engine will pull for ever.

The Mk II Le Mans failed to improve on the very first version. In fact the power dropped and the weight grew, while the two models that followed didn't possess the fine handling or styling found in the first model. This makes the Mk I the best one to have, despite poor electrics and finish.

