

By Gary Inman
Photography 'Fly' Tipping

ENTRANCE

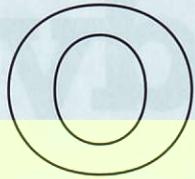


About bloody time too

*A brief glimpse of a
Moto Guzzi café racer
inspired Gary Inman to
buy a tatty SP1000 and
build his own special.
Four years later and it's
finally on the road*



FEATURE: Gary's Guzzi café racer



nce upon a time, long, long ago, I'd just finished some short-term contract work in an office in Islington. Shirt sleeves rolled up, the sun on my face and a spring in my step I walked back to King's Cross station. Halfway down Pentonville Road I heard the noise of a bike, and turned to look over my shoulder.

I focused on the rider first. Denim jacket and jeans, black open-face, then on his bike – an alloy-tanked Moto Guzzi. Opposite me he downshifted and peeled left, towards Clerkenwell. I only glimpsed the bike for five seconds, but that chance encounter on a hot August day in 2002 started a four-year journey to right here, right now.

I wasn't looking for a project at the time, but all I could imagine was a vision of myself sunny-day barhopping on my own Guzzi café racer. Within days I'd borrowed a few issues of *Gambalunga*, the Guzzi Club's magazine, and fixated on the first bike I saw within my price range. I acted like a love-struck halfwit.

I had money in the bank and a baby on the way. I did no research and looked nowhere else. I didn't cost the project up or work out if the brush-painted SP1000 half-breed I'd seen advertised was the ideal basis. It had the right looking engine, spoked wheels, twin discs and was within 120 miles of home – close to perfect for me. My friend, V7 Sport-owning former *CB* staffer Mick Phillips, said he'd check it out with me so I rented a van – convinced I was going to buy it – even though all I'd seen were two emailed photos.

It was dark by the time we arrived on a rough estate in a borough of east London I'd never heard of. Strangely many facts about the evening have stayed with me. What we ate on the way down (Scotch eggs, sausage rolls, pint of milk each), what floor the owner lived on (third) and the layout of the pub we visited later that night. My brain obviously realised this was an important night. Normally it struggles to remember my sister-in-law's name.

The Guzzi was parked under a streetlight with a cold engine. It started, the lights

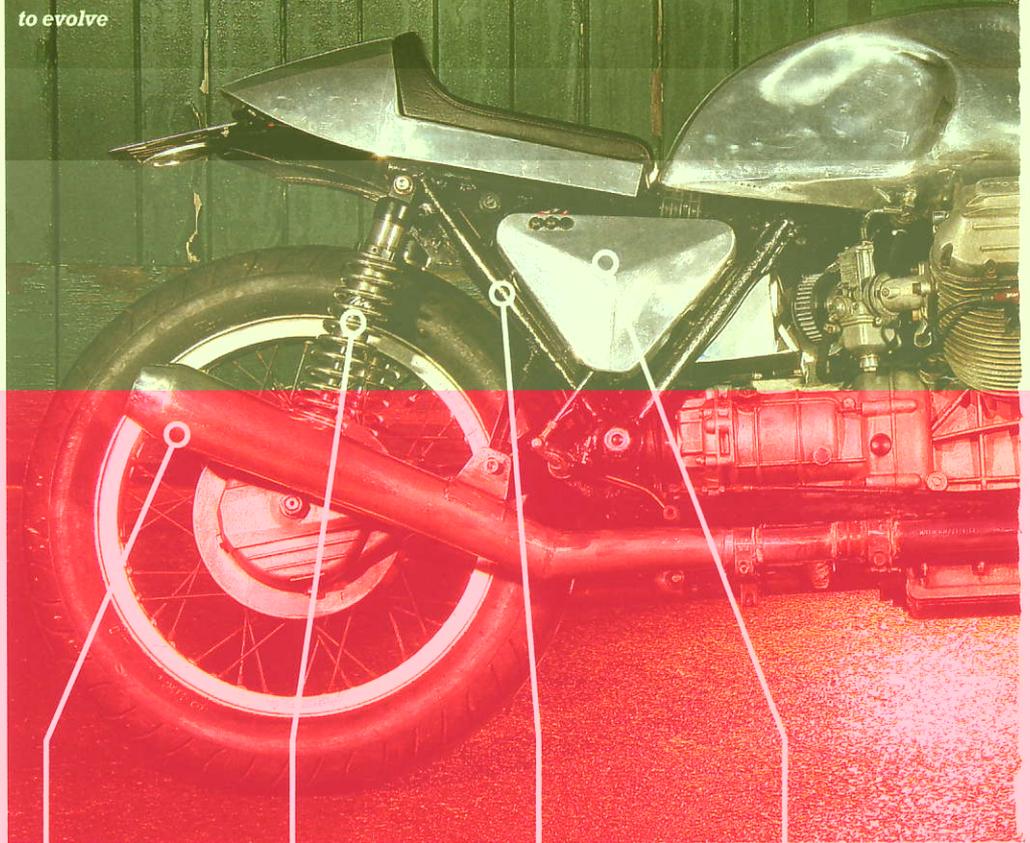
work, and the owner seemed none the wiser about its flaws and faults. I rode it around the car park, sans helmet, then handed over £880 for the W-reg twin. A current MoT wasn't part of the deal. Purchase in haste, repent at leisure...

Four years and two months later the bike has turned into a 90 per cent complete café racer and has passed its MoT. In those 50 months I've fallen in, out and back in love with my Guzzi. I've spent at least double what I thought it'd cost me. But – I'm guessing because I wisely didn't keep a log – still only around £3000. About as much a late-Nineties dull, but efficient Japanese Supersport 600.

It'd be nice to efficiently despatch project after project like *CB*'s Rick P but I'm no mechanic, just a shed-based fiddler. It has



Ugly duckling Guzzi SP1000 turns into a silver swan (well, almost). As it racks up the miles Gary's Guzzi will continue to evolve



● EXHAUSTS

The original scruffy drainpipe-straight

pipes were cut and kicked-up by Simoto. I bought a couple of £10 stainless clamps from Aidpac. I need a couple more.

● HAGON SHOCKS

Made for a Hinckley

Thruxton. Adjustable but current settings are fine. Well made from stainless and anodised alloy in England. £299.50.

● FRAME MODS

Simoto re-angled the

top rails, extended the triangulated spar to meet the frame rails and welded on new top shock mounts. £150.

● CONTROLS

I wanted clean bars, so I moved the starter

and horn buttons to the Tank Shop sidepanel. Left to my own devices I do regrettable things like this.

taken so long to get here, that even though I know every square inch of the bike's surface, and a little of its interior, every ride is a still a nervous shakedown. And I'm off for another.

A prod of the sidepanel mounted starter button and there's life. The note of the chopped and kicked-up silencers is a masculine burble, meaty enough to set off my wife's car alarm next to us on the drive. After a fiddle

with the DellOrtos' tickover screws, the Guzzi settles to a constant, contented idle. Still a pleasant surprise. An outstretched toe flicks up the shortened sidestand before a purposeful stamp on the one-off Simoto gear lever clunks us into first. The clutch is dragging slightly. Could be four years of inactivity, could be a leaking seal contaminating the dry plates.

After the first ride I flattened the clip-on

FEATURE: Gary's Guzzi café racer

“I haven't even turned the engine off before a fella is drooling over the bike”

Living the dream. After four years, 1068 cups of tea and countless evenings in the shed, Gary's Guzzi finally runs – on a damp fen road...



BUILDING A SPECIAL

Do:

- Ride your project for a while to check if it has got problems before you start.
- Research. The web's made it especially easy to look for inspiration.
- Buy an unfashionable model if you're radically overhauling it. Think SP not Le Mans – you'll save a packet.
- Be aware craftsmen take their time.
- Consider someone else's unfinished project. They're always cheap.

Don't:

- Be afraid to try a job for the first time. An expert can always bail you out.
- Be in a rush to finish. You'll only set yourself up for disappointment.
- Buy Raask rearsets for a Guzzi. They look bad and there's a lot of play in them.
- Make a mistake when measuring for new throttle cables.
- Buy the big biggest Tank Shop petrol tank unless you're over 6ft.

“carriageway it's not over-awed by an extended spell in the fast lane. The clutch isn't helping, robbing the low-revving engine of acceleration, but it's not so slow that I feel I've built something I'll tire of. It'll cruise at 80. In a Davida lid and Levi's that'll do.

No sunny barhopping today. I need a defrosting cup of coffee. Parking outside KC's on the A1, I haven't even turned the engine off before a fella is drooling over the bike, lacquering my ego with a coat of compliments.

Parked at a classic bike show my Guzzi would struggle to attract anything but barbed comments, but in the grotty car park of a Midlands' truck stop in December it's something special.

I'd no plan for shiny steel covers, polished cafe racers. All along I wanted to leave a patina of scrapes, dull alloy and corrosion. A Japanese builder of radical chops and bobbers, Shinya Kimura of Chabott Engineering became my inspiration. He reuses old brass nuts and bolts to give his bikes unmistakable character. It also suited me that I wouldn't have to have forks polished or rims re-laced.

Still, the biggest mistake I made was not having an image of the finished bike before I started. I'd just pick up the project after six months of total inactivity, decide it needed

rearsets and buy some that fit. I didn't find out which were the best, because I was trying to keep costs down. I ended up with Raasks, which were replaced before the bike even ran. I did the same with the bars.

Since starting the project I've discovered there are dozens of alloy tanked Guzzis around the world, knowledge that would've been handy early on. But with mistakes and ignorance came hard-learned knowledge and individuality. Those were two of the three elements I wanted to end up with when I bought the Guzzi bitsa back in September 2002. The other was a tasty, usable café racer and I reckon I got that too. **CB**

CONTACTS

Exhaust clamps: **Aidpac**, 01902 560327
Wiring: **Ben Auty**, 07970 192043
Clip-ons: **Disco Volante**, 01654 71389
Shock absorbers: **Hagon**, 0208 502 6222
Tail light: **Motrax**, 01933 418 414
Seat: **Neil's Auto Interiors**, 01702 530930
Engineering: **Simoto**, 01371 831999
Alloy tank: **Tank Shop**, 01387 740 259
Cables: **Venhill**, 01306 885111
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