

◆ 1000cc MOTO GUZZI PRODUCTION RACER



# GAS GUZZLING GUZZI

*Riding and surviving  
Moto Guzzi's factory built  
production racer, capable  
of more than 150mph*  
Sean Hawker



PHOTOGRAPHY: KENNY P



## ◆ 1000cc MOTO GUZZI PRODUCTION RACER

**A** CLEAR stretch of dual carriageway opened up and I glanced over my shoulder furtively, a quick licence saver. Guilty as hell, I opened the Guzzi's quarter turn throttle to see if the claims were true. The needle swung round well into three figures, the bike magnetically sucked towards a rapidly approaching horizon. This is one fast machine, even allowing for a hopelessly optimistic Veglia speedo.

Those claims were extravagant, and I needed to discover their validity in the interests of science, your worship. A massive 155mph from a pushrod operated, two valve per cylinder vee twin? Pub companions are already stroking their chins in disbelief and nodding in that "yes, and then you woke up" sort of manner.

But this isn't just any Guzzi. It's a Mk1 Le Mans, one of the fastest bikes money could buy back in 1977. Still not impressed? The bike is also an ex-factory production racer, imported by Bryants of Biggleswade and raced by the late Charlie Sanby. It was Charlie who was clocked at 155mph on the Island between Creg-ny-Baa and Brandish during the 1978 TT. Sanby finished 12th after damaging the Guzzi's big ends and posted a 104mph lap on the tricky Mountain circuit. Not bad for a machine in standard road trim down to lights, starter motor and horn.

The machine was also raced in the 1978 Avon tyres production series. Sanby finished a creditable fifth in the championship behind bigger multis like Suzuki's GS1000 and Laverda's Jota. Bryants then advertised Charlie's Guzzi for sale in the racing section of *Motor Cycle News*.

Hemel Hempstead man Roger Hamilton bought the machine early in 1979 after trying unsuccessfully to buy a new PR Guzzi the previous year. Every dealer he approached said the factory racers were made to order, with half the money needed up front and an estimated six month wait. Roger was well pleased with the race bike in its Duck-hams livery and stickers for Champion plugs, *Bike* magazine and Avon tyres.



Many consider Guzzi's Mk1 to be the most stylish Le Mans made. Deviations from standard include stainless steel pipes, square rear light and awkward right hand sidestand



Foam mounted Smiths rev counter is accurate, speedo an ornament. Friction damper knob not connected

## Lord of Lydden

**A**FTER hanging out with the cafe race crowd at the Busy Bee riding BSA Goldies, Charlie Sanby began racing aged 21 in 1961.

He had successes with an AJS 7R and 636cc Manx Norton, and was crowned Lord of Lydden after proving virtually unbeatable at the Kent circuit during 1965 and '66.

The oversize Sanby measured 6ft 3in and weighed 17 stone at one time, but still managed respectable places on all types of bikes. He joined the Gus Kuhn race team in 1970 and won the Thruxton 500-miler sharing a Norton



Sanby: respected rider

Commando with Peter Williams.

Bryants of Biggleswade provided Charlie with bikes after he joined the firm as a mechanic. He raced a water-cooled Suzuki triple in a Seeley frame at the 1975 International Open Classic TT and finished third.

When the Guzzi arrived at Bryants in 1978, Charlie spent lunchtimes running it in. He would travel 100 miles north to the Norman Cross roundabout on the A1, back down to Stevenage and across to Biggleswade within the hour.

One day the police were waiting on a flyover at Eaton Socon when Charlie hammered past. They were forced to radio ahead for help. Charlie wondered what all the drama was about when he saw the police car wailing and flashing and still travelling in the opposite direction. "If I hadn't slowed for the Stevenage turn, they would never have caught me," he told CB contributor Peter Dobson.

Charlie campaigned the Guzzi in the 1978 Avon tyres series, but was very limited as to what he could modify. To get the exhaust flowing freer, he opened up the outlet hole by  $\frac{1}{8}$ in and cunningly drilled six or so  $\frac{1}{8}$ in holes on the underside of the silencers, out of view of the race scrutineers.

Sanby retired when the series finished to concentrate on his own bike business. But he couldn't stay away and returned to racing 10 years later. He succumbed to cancer in October '93 but was still racing just five days before.

"At the time Bryants were surprised anyone should want it for a road bike. I asked Charlie, who was foreman there, how fast it would go and he said it was originally geared to pull 160mph. I swallowed hard. He then altered it for 150mph at 8000rpm. I swallowed hard again. I'd love to be able to tell people I often saw 8000 in top, but I lacked Charlie's bottle," relates Hamilton.

Roger took the Guzzi back to the Island and claims to have travelled from

Ramsey to Ramsey in just under 24 minutes at 4.30am on the morning of the 1979 Senior TT. That's a 94mph lap. "But I wanted more out of it — heaven knows why. So I had it bored out from 850cc to 1000cc by Bernie's, a then Guzzi spares dealer of Watford. The normal conversion in those days involved 9:1 pistons, but I wanted more still. So Guzzi sent over 11:1 pistons, costing nearly £200 back in 1980."

Hamilton enlarged barrels from a fire-damaged Le Mans he previously owned and kept Sanby's 850cc barrels and pistons. Back on the Island for another thrash, Roger had expectations of a quicker lap. But approaching Brandywell he missed the left turn and carried straight on, writing off forks, front wheel and both mudguards.

Roger contacted Charlie at Bryants who repaired the bike for just under £1000.

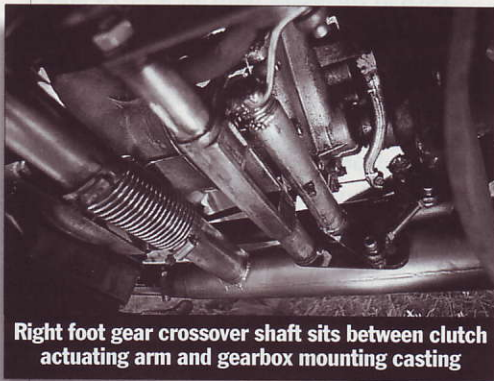
"I popped along to see how things were progressing and there in a box of my bent bits was a new set of fork legs. 'You're putting new ones on; you're not going to



## ◆ 1000cc MOTO GUZZI PRODUCTION RACER

straighten the old ones?' I asked. He said he'd made a spare set of modified Norton Commando forks for racing, reckoning that Guzzi forks were alright on the road but useless for racing," explains Roger.

Charlie had ground 0.10in from the



Right foot gear crossover shaft sits between clutch actuating arm and gearbox mounting casting

diameter and added 0.40in of hard chrome, then ground the legs back to Guzzi size. Because the wall thickness is greater than the Guzzi leg, the forks will not accept the same amount of oil. The adapted units are full with 75-80cc of oil instead of the 120cc listed in the Guzzi workshop manual.

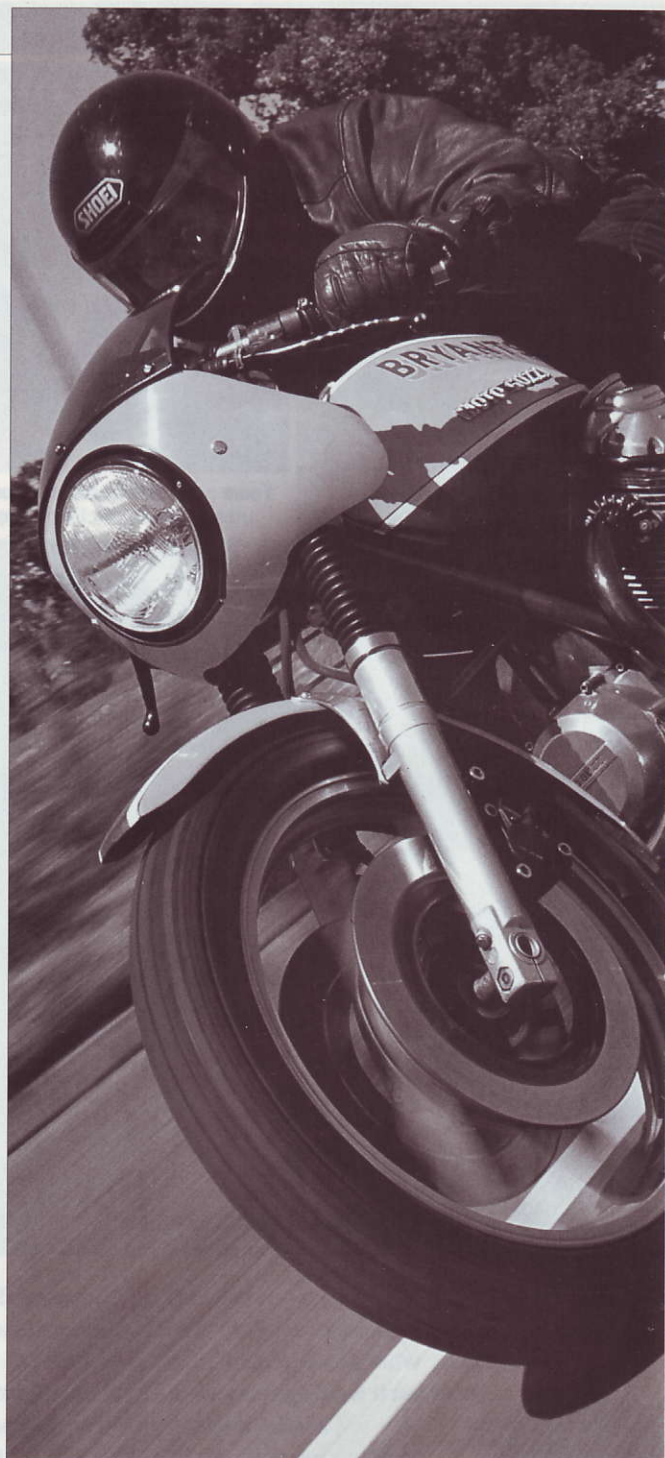
Another clue to the Guzzi's former life is its right-foot gear change, available from new as a kit. Charlie was used to racing British machines and he wasn't going to change late on in his career. A neat crossover shaft does the job and works well with no trace of slop through the linkages.

Roger worked for

Those silencers contain a 3in sleeve tack welded inside that can be removed to reveal a series of holes in the baffles. Roger says the bike goes a lot faster with the free flow exhaust, but the noise increases a thousandfold.

Charlie's Guzzi was sold by Hamilton to Velocette enthusiast Allen Wilson. "It was a liability in the end. Every time I rode the bike I did over 100mph," recalls Roger. That included being stopped for speeding at an average of 129mph. Wilson didn't own it long before selling the Guzzi to Verralls, a bike dealership then based in Tooting Bec, South London.

Present owner Graham Reed bought the PR Guzzi from Verralls in 1987. The 47 year old electrical maintenance worker from Somerset and his brother-in-law Rob Mitchell stripped the Guzzi to check it over. Comparing parts with standard bits, they discovered Hamilton's 1000cc barrels. Reed fitted a new dry-plate clutch using a Fiat 124 car unit and the oil pump was rebuilt using stainless steel parts.



### Performance

THUMBING the starter button was hit or miss, because the small, weight saving battery struggles to turn over the high

compression engine. Use too much throttle and it'll never fire because oversize 40mm Dell'Orto carbs soon flood the combustion chamber.

But get it right and you're on a winner. Blip the throttle at a standstill and the spinning flywheel flips the bike to the right. Even on the move the bike lurches to the right every time you twist the grip — necessary to keep the engine running because there's no tickover.

Comfort isn't a priority. Leg room is nil, the seat's too narrow and no good for a pillion, but I find the clip-on position spot on.

Gear changing requires patience. The five speed close ratio Guzzi box fitted is an improvement over a standard MkI unit, but is still some way off the effortless shift-

ing of many British and Japanese boxes.

With a 59in wheelbase and close to 500lb kerb weight, the Guzzi is far from agile. But at least it's stable at high speed. Long sweeping corners are lapped up, but if the long sweeper turns sharp on you, grab a load of Brembo disc.

Guzzi cast iron disc brakes are normally linked, with the front left disc and the rear operated by the foot pedal, while the front right disc is worked by the handlebar lever. Many owners swear by this safe set-up and it's certainly difficult to lock the rear wheel. But racers need separate control of the front and back end, so the linking has been dismantled on Charlie's bike.

Other mods carried out by Sanby include disconnecting the accelerator pumps on

INVOICE No. 3623

MAIN DEALERS FOR  
NORTON  
SUZUKI  
HONDA  
YAMAHA  
DUCATI  
Any other makes of New Machine supplied

HOURS OF BUSINESS  
Monday to Friday 8.30 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Saturday 8.30 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
2 p.m. to 5 p.m.  
Closed on Sunday

**BRYANT'S**  
"THE RIDER AGENTS"

Proprietors: R. B. Shaw, A. E. Sharp, P. G. Brown

MOTOR-CYCLES OF EVERY DESCRIPTION BOUGHT, SOLD OR EXCHANGED

VAT Reg. No. 116 435 27

Office and Showrooms:  
25-27 and 72-74 SHORTHEAD STREET,  
BIGGLESWADE, BEDS. SG18 0AT  
Telephone: 313108 (STD 0767)

Customer's Name and Address:  
Mr. Hamilton  
88, Chambersburg Lane,  
Hemel Hempstead, Herts

Date: Feb. 10th 1979

TO THE SALE OF:  
One used Moto-Guzzi Production  
Racing motor cycle as described  
in Notes. Cash bought no warranty,  
at the special price of 11750.00

**Roger Hamilton's 1979 Guzzi invoice from the now defunct Bryants of Biggleswade**

an aircraft components firm when he owned the Guzzi, with access to top quality chromers and the ability to get parts made up in stainless steel. So the bent Norton forks were straightened, crack tested, X-rayed and rechromed. Handlebars, headlight brackets, battery platform, brake pedal, rocker oil pipes and silencers are made from stainless steel.



The secret of this Guzzi's performance is still at the Mandello factory. Previous owners don't know, Charlie Sanby didn't know and all I know is it's quicker than my standard Mkl Le Mans

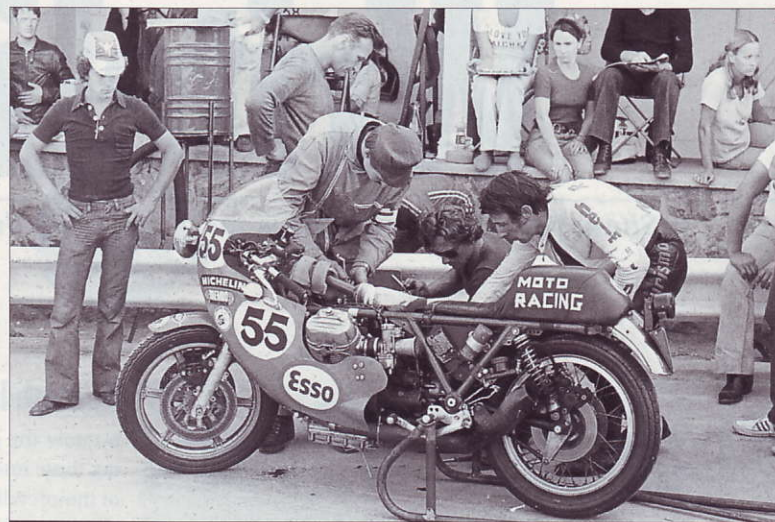
the carbs, dismantling the friction damper and adding a Smiths rev counter in place of the inaccurate Veglia instrument.

### Equipment

A STANDARD Mkl Guzzi Le Mans uses 36mm Dell'Orto carbs and 10.2:1 compression pistons to give a claimed output of 80bhp at 7300rpm. Actual bhp measured from the crankshaft is 71bhp.

*Motor Cycle* tested one of the red beauties when they were launched in 1976 and squeezed out 126mph, with a 14 second standing quarter. Fuel consumption worked out at just under 40mpg, but the big Vee was thirsty for oil to the tune of 375 miles per pint.

Light alloy barrels have chrome plated



Guzzis like this one at the 1974 Liege 24-hr event make ideal endurance racers

bores for long life. The crankshaft is supported by two plain main bearings and big ends are also plain. Wet sump lubrication employs a gear driven oil pump while the clutch is a two-plate dry car type and final drive is by shaft.

Early lemons, as owners affectionately call them, are mainly red with a strange day-glo orange stripe down the middle of the handlebar fairing. Options include metallic grey and blue or, from 1977, white.


The MkII came out in 1978 with oblong headlamp, three piece fairing and instrument panel with clock and voltmeter. Calipers moved to the rear of the fork legs and the friction steering damper was replaced by a hydraulically operated unit. Performance stayed much the same.

The later model also shared dodgy switchgear, shoddy frame paint and a seat that fell apart as soon as it was out of the showroom. It retained the Mkl's style — but only just. Post MkII models improved in certain aspects, but can't hold a candle to the sensual curves of the Mkl.

### Conclusion

STABLE handling, monster performance and classic looks are an attractive package. But images of this long, low, shaft driven bike with time consuming gear change being manhandled round Ramsey hairpin brought me down to earth. There's no doubt about it, Charlie Sanby was a hero for lapping this Mkl Le Mans at 104mph.

Like the man with the razor company, I

liked the Guz so much I tried to buy it. But unlike him I didn't have the necessary funds. Now I just look on the bright side — at least I still have my driving licence 

## Specifications

### 1977 MOTO GUZZI LE MANS MKI

(Test bike figures in bold italic where different)

#### ENGINE

Type	ohv transverse 90° V-twin
Bore x stroke	83mm x 78mm <b>(90 x 78)</b>
Capacity	844cc <b>(992cc)</b>
Compression ratio	10.2:1 <b>(11:1)</b>
Carburation	2 x 36mm Dell'Orto PHF with accelerator pumps <b>(40mm, no pumps)</b>
Output	71bhp <b>(85bhp est)</b>
Electrical	12v, 32Ah battery, 280w alternator, twin coils

#### TRANSMISSION

Clutch	two plate dry
Gearbox	five speed

#### CYCLE PARTS

Frame	duplex cradle with removable tubes
Suspension	(front): Guzzi telescopic <b>(Norton modified)</b> (rear): swinging arm
Tyres	(front): 3.25 x 18in Metzeler <b>(Avon Roadrunner)</b> (rear): 4.10 x 18in Avon Roadrunner
Brakes	(front): 2 x 11 1/4in disc (rear): 9 1/2in disc
Wheelbase	59in (1498mm)
Seat Height	29 1/2in (749mm)
Ground Clearance	7 1/2in (190mm)
Kerb weight	485lb (220kg)
Fuel capacity	5 gallons (22.73 litres)
Oil capacity	5 pints (2.84 litres)
<b>PERFORMANCE</b>	
Top speed	126mph <b>(150mph est)</b>