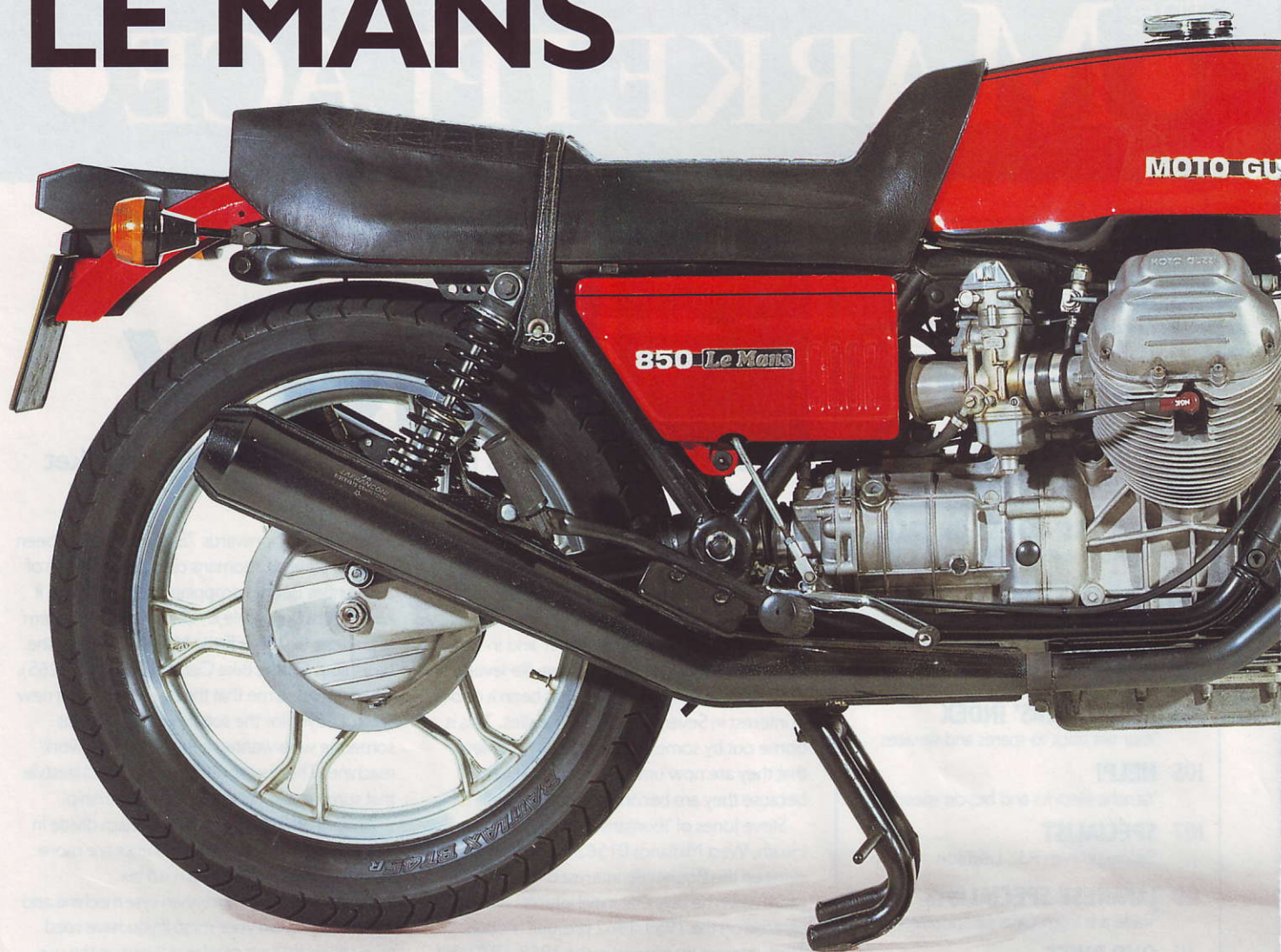


MOTO GUZZI LE MANS



1976 – 1991 ● £1750 – £4000 ● 135MPH ● 844/949CC ● 71/81 BHP

The Moto Guzzi Le Mans combines performance, handling and Italian charisma with surprising practicality. It's good value too – is this the perfect classic buy?

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PHOTOGRAPHY: **LYNDSEY CHURCH**

Low, uncompromising and uniquely Italian, the Moto Guzzi Le Mans still turns heads. When the 844cc MkI was introduced in 1976 it wasn't the fastest sportster, the best looking, or the cheapest, but there was always something that was just so right about the sum of its parts.

Weighing in at around 490lb and with a top speed of at least 130mph, the Le Mans was an impressive performer with good handling and, thanks to the simplicity of an ohv V-twin engine and shaft drive, it was easy to maintain too. The downsides were the slightly suspect build quality and the cramped riding position.

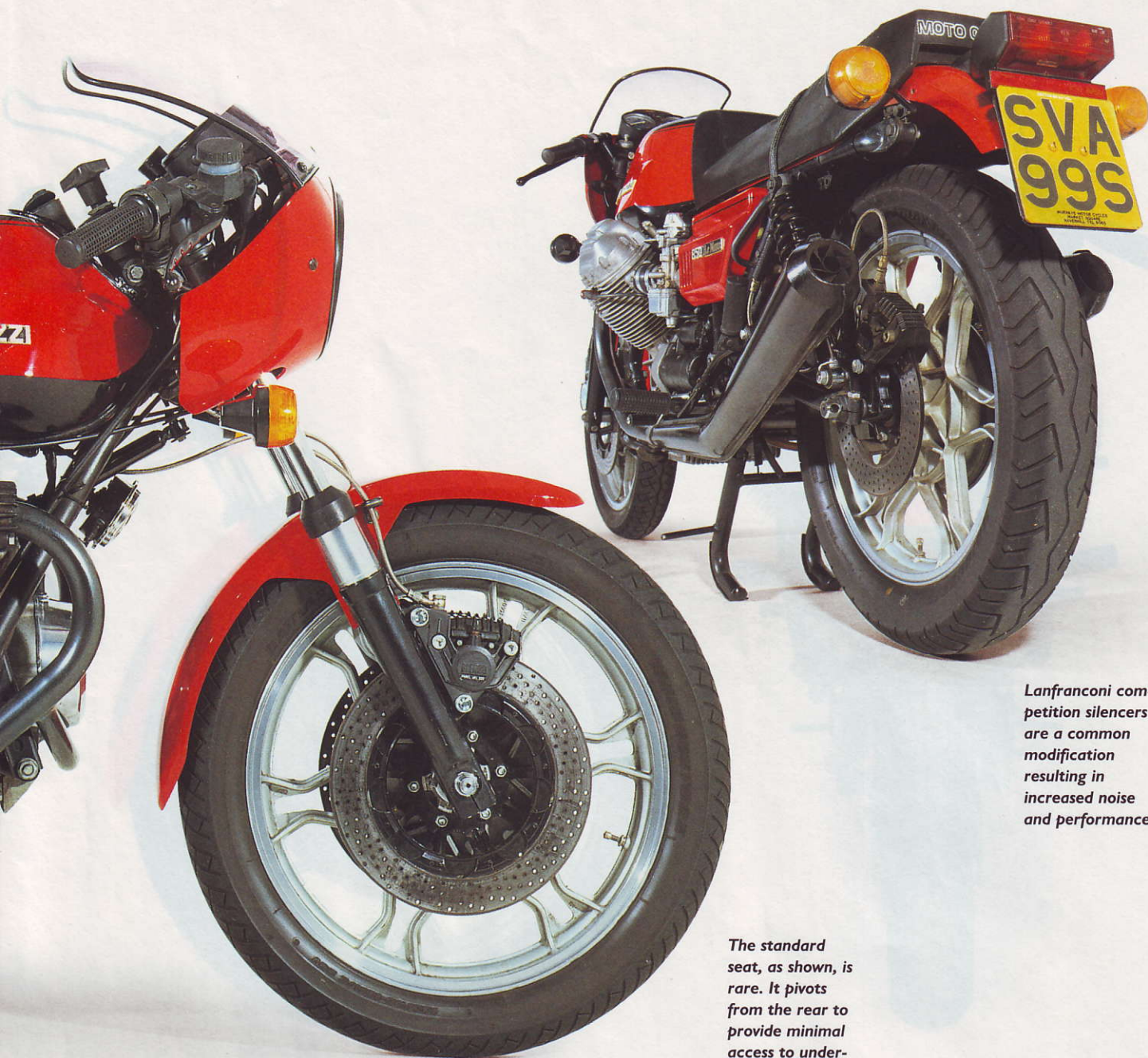
Like any Ducati, BMW, or for that matter Harley-Davidson, the Le Mans was a bike proud to parade the integrity of its heritage. In an age when the worth of a sports machine was generally measured by its number of

cylinders and overhead camshafts, here was a primitive single camshaft V-twin that red-lined at a hardly earth-shattering 7300rpm.

The original Le Mans was followed by four updated successors so that the model survived a 15-year production run. Aesthetically, the balance of popular opinion rests squarely with the MkI which is distinguished by its skimpy bikini fairing.

The MkII that arrived in 1978 shared the same rounded cylinder barrels, 36mm Dell'Orto carburetors, black chrome exhausts and buttock-busting seat as the MkI. The key differences were a three-piece fairing and a more comprehensively equipped instrument panel.

The angularity that crept in with the MkII gained a few extra facets with the 1982 MkIII including the squared off cylinders. By the



Lanfranconi competition silencers are a common modification resulting in increased noise and performance

The standard seat, as shown, is rare. It pivots from the rear to provide minimal access to under-seat area.

time the MkIV appeared in 1984, the tank, side panels and seat had visually merged into a single more or less flowing unit. The engine was opened up to 948.8cc, giving the bike greater top end and a little extra mid-range grunt. The Dell'Orto carbs were also opened

up to 40mm, and the front wheel on early versions shrank to a then trendy 16 inches.

With the 1988 arrival of the MkV, easily identified by its frame-mounted fairing, the bike was barely recognisable as the progeny of the rough diamond MkI.

what you get for your money

Many Italian bikes, and Guzzis in particular, are remarkably cheap at the moment. The MkI model commands a premium – it's the best looking and the purest version.

Because Guzzis are rugged, capable and simple to maintain they tend to get used quite hard and there are a lot of high mileage and slightly dog eared examples around. Spend time trying to find a tidy bike.

£1750-£2500 Well used and unkempt examples, though it's not impossible to get useable bikes for this kind of cash.

£2500-£3000 At this money the bike should be tidy though it may be modified and have covered a high mileage.

£3000-£4000 High quality bikes change hands for this kind of cash, though dealers may try and get more for mint examples.

Engineering

Engine design is simple, beautiful and uncomplicated. Housed within the well-reinforced aluminium alloy crankcase, the one-piece forged crankshaft is supported front and rear by a single plain bearing. Set at 90 degrees to each other, the transverse, offset cylinders benefit from excellent cooling, while the single duplex-chain driven camshaft actuates each pair of valves via aluminium pushrods with hardened end-caps.

Power output over the cooking T3 model was boosted by increasing the compression ratio to 10.2:1, fitting larger valves, a lumpier camshaft and 36mm accelerator pump Dell'Orto carburettors, which were supplied without air filters.

Marelli contact breakers, housed in the distributor between the cylinders, are driven ▶



◁ by a gear taken from the camshaft. The ignition is split into two circuits, each unique to its own cylinder, so that with a misfire only one cylinder will be affected. Electronic ignition didn't appear until the MkV.

Carburation throughout the series is by Dell'Orto with an included accelerator pump for snappy take-offs. The Bosch Type DF

starter motor is a pre-engaged unit that spins the engine via the flywheel ring-gear. The 280-watt three-phase G1 alternator, rectifier and regulator is also by Bosch.

The five speed gearbox is driven via a double-plate diaphragm clutch which, because it is spinning at engine speed, is more clunk than click every trip. But it is still a durable unit.

It delivers its power to the rear wheel through a steel swinging arm that houses a steel drive-shaft.

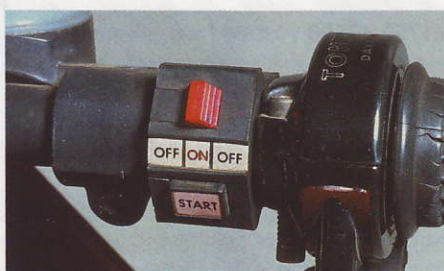
You only need to remove the engine for major crank work and when you want to replace the rear crankshaft oil seal. Removeable lower frame rails mean that separating the engine from the chassis is a relatively straightforward process. The chassis can be lifted off the engine/gearbox assembly and the lower frame rails.

The Brembo brakes are operated by Guzzi's linked system in which the foot pedal operates one front caliper and the rear brake, while the handlebar lever brings the second front caliper into action for rapid stops.

The front forks look conventional, but damping is provided by sealed units which can't be rebuilt.



There is no tripmeter on the MkI Le Mans



Comedy switchgear is often replaced

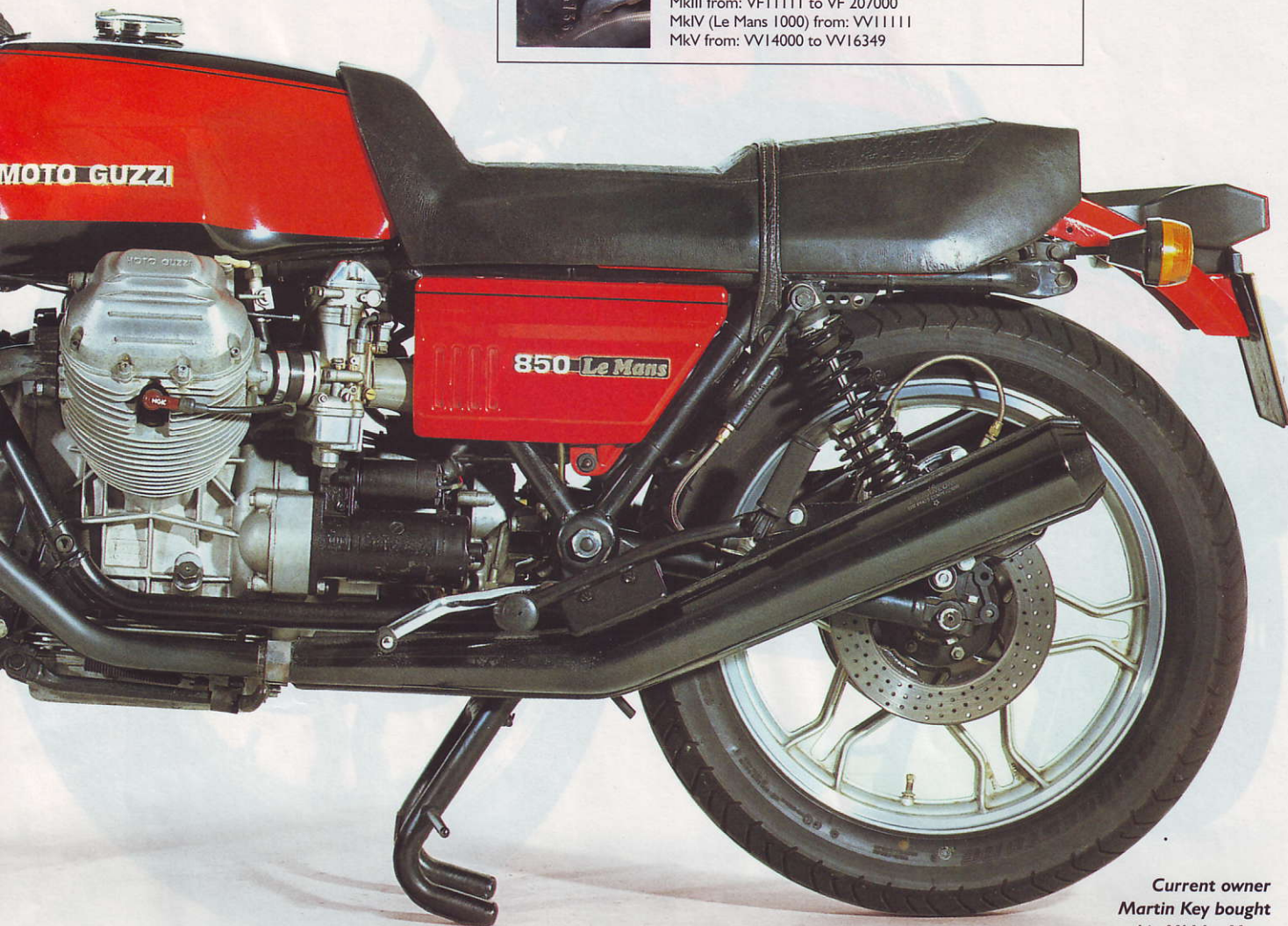
frame/engine numbers



Frame numbers on the headstock, engine numbers on the nearside crankcase. The first two letters identify genuine Le Mans. Frame and engine numbers don't match.



MkI from: VE 11111 to VE 13040
 MkII from: VE 13041 to VE 24086
 MkIII from: VF11111 to VF 207000
 MkIV (Le Mans 1000) from: VV11111
 MkV from: VV14000 to VV16349



*Current owner
 Martin Key bought
 this MkI Le Mans
 from former CB
 editor Phillip Tooth*

What goes wrong

Not a lot, actually. The MkI and MkII have cast iron cylinder bores which won't last as long as the MkIII, MkIV and MkV with their Nicasil-plated bores. Life spans of 50,000 to 70,000 miles are typical for cast iron bores. Nicasil bores can last for 150,000 miles.

The rear engine oil seals, like any seals that haven't been changed in 20 years, will harden. Seals are cheap. Labour is expensive. When you buy, check this has been recently done, and (if not) factor it into your budget.

Guzzi electrical woes are part of the folklore. The components are mainly Bosch items, and the problems are usually down to the wiring and connections in-between. Various switchgear contacts, particularly on the earlier models, are small and prone to corrosion.

The universal joints take a fair pounding

alternatives

DUCATI 900SS

1975-82 Lovely loping power and great looks, but expensive and with bankrupting engine overhaul costs. £4000-6000

BMW R90/R90S

1973-76 Soft compared to the Guzzi, but well built and amazingly capable. £1750-5000

LAVERDA 1000

1973-82 Brutal, heavy and loud. Laverda triples are great looking, but the riding experience is an acquired taste. £2500-4000

and will, depending on the usage of the bike, usually need replacing between 25,000 and 50,000 miles, though they and the UJ support bearing need checking every year.

The car type clutch is beefy and can last for 100,000 miles so long as it is treated well.

Regular carb balancing is a must and is best done with gauges or a manometer.

The duplex camchain will usually last around 25,000 miles though the tensioner needs to be checked annually. Camchain replacement is relatively straightforward.

The sealed damper units in the front forks lose damping quite quickly. Replacements are relatively cheap at £19.74 from Motorworks, though superior FAC units cost twice that. Some bikes may have been converted to conventional forks either by having their internals modified or their legs replaced.

The plentiful supply of new and second-hand parts, plus the simplicity of the Guzzi layout which makes them easy to work on, means that there really isn't much excuse for the bike not to be in decent nick. Regular oil changes and a bit of care are all it takes. ►



◁ Upgrades

There is a huge range of modifications and upgrades available for the Le Mans range. Guzzis encourage owner involvement and many bikes will have been altered from standard specification.

Electronic ignition conversions save you all that fiddling around with the hard to access points. A Lucas Rita unit will cost around £100. A timing gear conversion makes camshaft timing more accurate and reliable. Expect to pay £150 per set.

Deep sump conversions increase crankcase oil capacity and improve engine breathing and are around £90. If you want to convert to an external oil filter at the same time the price rises to £170.

If an 850 needs a rebore many owners opt for a 950 conversion at £150 per cylinder.

Buying a Le Mans

Check the usual things: leaks, rattles, and general signs of neglect, abuse and damage.

The bottom end should be solid and rumble-free. Cranks are very durable, but only when properly lubricated with good quality oil. Look for general oil tightness and, as ever, ask for servicing details.

Some of the early gearboxes had weak pedal return springs. Feel for looseness or sloppiness here and ask intelligent questions and take it for a test ride. Check for corrosion around the engine bolts. Inspect the fork stanchions for wear, the rear shocks for leaks, and the brake discs for scoring. All these parts are fairly hard-wearing and shouldn't be knackered.

The cast wheels fitted to the Le Mans series are fairly durable but can crack.

Examine them carefully, especially if you suspect any kind of frontal damage, and look for chips, welds, or anything that gives you cause for misgivings.

Lastly, get the rear wheel off the ground and feel for backlash in the bevel box. Excessive movement probably means that the cush-drive splines are worn and require attention. They can be welded and reclaimed but it can cost hundreds of pounds.

The original seats were uncomfortable and many were replaced. Decide if you want comfort or concours, and be aware that original seats are almost impossible to find.

Check engine and frame numbers. Quite a few cooking models have been converted into Le Mans lookalikes, and some Le Mans have been kept running using later engines. Make sure you know what you are actually buying.

specification

1976 MOTO GUZZI LE MANS

Engine/transmission	
type	overhead valve V-twin
capacity	844cc
bore x stroke	83 x 78mm
compression ratio	10.2:1
lubrication	wet sump
carburation	36mm Dell'Orto
primary/final drive	straight cut gears/shaft
clutch/gearbox	dry twin-plate/5-speed
electrics	12v alternator
ignition	battery and coil
Chassis	
frame	Duplex cradle
front suspension	telescopic fork
rear suspension	twin shocks, swinging arm
brakes front/rear	twin 300mm Brembo discs/ single 300mm Brembo
wheels	
tyres front/rear	cast alloy 3.50H x 18/4.00 x 18
Dimensions	
dry weight	476lb (216kg)
seat height	29.25in (743mm)
wheelbase	59.5in (1470mm)
fuel capacity	5 gallons (22.5 litres)
Performance*	
top speed	132.15mph
standing quarter mile	13.09sec
power output	71bhp@7300rpm (claimed)
mpg	37mpg
price in 1976	£1999

*figures from Bike magazine August '76

CONTACTS

Corsa Italiano Official Guzzi agent, full workshop facilities and new spares for V-twins. 0208 540 7155

In moto Official agent, full workshop facilities and new spares for V-twins 0208 6892341

Italia Classics 01522 511851

Italian Vintage Company Imported secondhand bikes and spares, new silencers. 01673 842825

Moto Guzzi Owners Club

www.motoguzziclub.co.uk Postal address below

Motori Di Marino Official agent, full workshop facilities and new spares for V-twins. 01798 813260

Motomecca New spares and Brembo brake components 01202 823453

Motorworks New and used parts 0845 4580076
www.motorworks.co.uk

NBS Spares 07958 584889

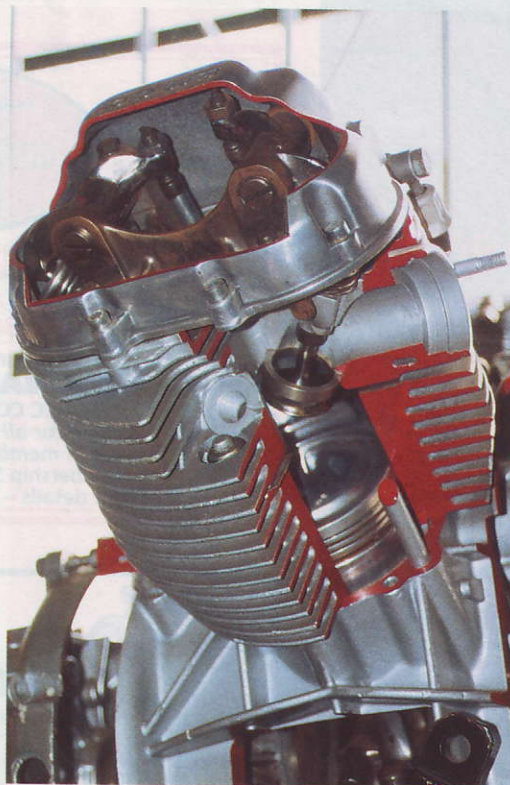
North Leicester Motorcycles Spares and secondhand bikes for sale 01530 263381

Wessons New and used parts 01435 810468

Parts and availability

Expect to enjoy around 95 per cent availability. For originality enthusiasts some items, including genuine seats and switchgear, are hard to find. Engine and chassis spares are generally not a problem so your bike should never be off the road waiting for parts.

Typical prices for rebuilt driveline universal joints are around £80. A new set will cost approximately £130. A matched pinion and crownwheel set costs £250-£300. Most other fast-moving items are on a par with similar performance classics and won't break the bank.

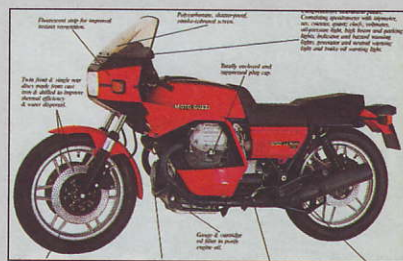


Simple ohv V-twin engine was originally designed for a three-wheel military vehicle. It's bomb proof

Le Mans identification

**MkI**

1976-1978 The original 'bad to the bone' 844cc Le Mans. Colours red or blue

**MkII**

1978-1982 Son of Le Mans. Essentially the same package, but with a bigger handlebar fairing, engine panels and other minor improvements. Colours red or blue

**MkIII**

1982-1984 New bodywork, squared edge cylinders with Nicasil bores which extend engine life. Comparatively rare. Red or white

**MkIV**

1984-1987 Engine capacity increased to 948.8cc, rounded sidepanels and tailpiece. 16in front wheel makes tyre choice tricky. Later models revert to 18in

**MkV**

1988-1991 Now with frame mounted fairing and 18in front wheel. A good road bike, but it lacks purity of early models

Top Le Mans tips

- Original silencers are no longer available and Lafranconi competition pipes are the popular replacement. They are shorter and louder than the originals.
- Koni shocks were the recommended replacement, these have now been superseded by the very similar Australian made Ikon units.
- Join the Guzzi Owners Club. Contact Polly Foyle, 43 Poplar Avenue, Bedworth, Nuneaton, Warwickshire. www.motoguzziclub.co.uk
- Use a decent quality 20/50 oil and replace it every 2000 miles. Because of the separate gearbox you don't need to

use specialised motorcycle lubricants.

- The front engine mounting bolt can seize. Copper grease it regularly or replace it with a stainless bolt.
- The engine oil level is checked with the dipstick screwed in. Don't overfill.
- 'Guzziology', a book by American Guzzi freak Dave Richardson is expensive at £38.00, but contains priceless info.
- Clean the black chrome exhausts and silencers with a proprietary non-abrasive cleaner after every dirty run. The system is prone to corrosion if neglected. Sadly, they're also prone to corrosion even when looked after.