



### Moto Guzzi Le Mans

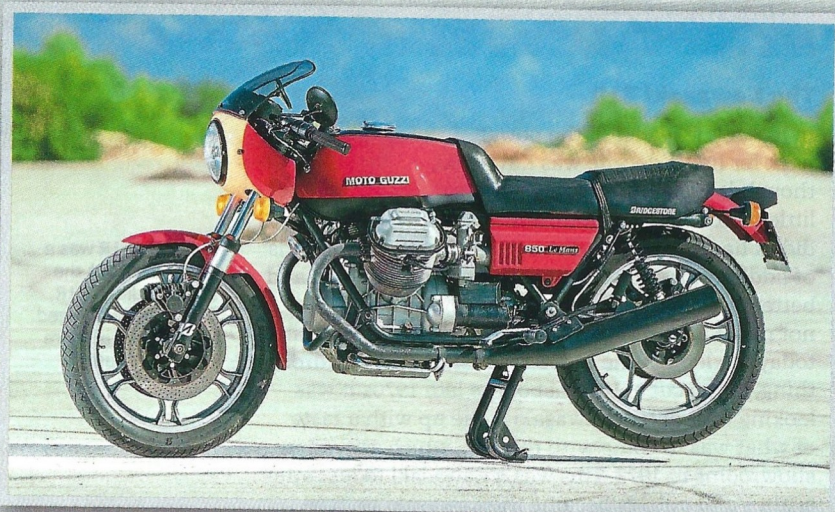
The Moto Guzzi Le Mans beat Laverda's Jota in the Avon Roadrunner championship – a race series involving stock(ish) bikes on road tyres, which was hugely popular with spectators but less so with Japanese importers, as their bikes couldn't get a look in... at first. A Triumph T140 Bonneville won it one year, and Laverda several times. Roy Armstrong won the series in 1977 on a Le Mans, beating the Laverda Jota of main dealer Slater Brothers on a bike he rode to meetings; no small feat for a pushrod shaft drive V-twin, with a 150cc smaller engine.

The Le Mans that arrived in showrooms in 1976 was something special. With 8mm added to the 750cc V7 stroke, increased compression and a whopping great pair of Dell'Orto carbs with mesh covers to stop them sucking in half bricks and small children, the Le Mans was a performance Italian bike to lust after. It was unusual in that it lacked the vast quantities of shiny bits that were in fashion at the time with next to no chrome, but with swept back black exhausts, dull alloy and a simple paint job, it was Italian style at its very best.

The paint job on the first Le Mans was Italian racing red with matt black panels, or a cool metallic light blue. The Le Mans would reach 125mph, had massive torque and punchy acceleration. The gearbox wasn't exactly slick by Japanese standards, so the massive torque helped a lot. There were cast alloy wheels too with twin Brembo discs using Moto Guzzi's linked braking system. The first Le Mans, with that striking paint and smart little nose fairing with orange headlight surround, is the most sought after.

The Le Mans could out-perform rival BMW sportsters and looked so much cooler than the Bavarian bomber, while the handling was close to that of the 900 Ducatis and superior to the Laverda.

The original Le Mans impressed the motorcycling press, and in the autumn of 1978 Moto Guzzi introduced the Le Mans Mk II. This was near identical to the first Le Mans mechanically and was more of a cosmetic revamp, with a look that hasn't aged as well as the first machines. It had a larger nose fairing featuring a rectangular headlight, as well as fairing



Most riders love the looks of the original 850 Le Mans, but the Mk.2 and Mk.3 were improved in all but looks and make great bikes at a cheaper price. Just make sure your knees can take the riding position

lowers. Inside the nose fairing was a huge foam and plastic instrument cluster with a row of idiot lights. The fairing lowers, when combined with the clip-on bars, made for a troublesome riding position and riders with longer legs found they had to stick their knees out into the breeze. The Mk II is usually seen in red but also got a less aggressive blue paint job and a rather classy black and gold livery too, thanks to UK importers Coburn and Hughes, which had the added advantage of being a bit more hard-wearing than the original Italian job. The early Le Mans has a challenging riding position, and how it got a reputation as a fine grand tourer is a mystery... or perhaps people were more flexible in the late 1970s.

The Mk II is very close to the first Le Mans, and that's why so many of them now sport earlier bodywork. The Mk II has a slightly different tank, the yokes are wider, the forks are 2mm bigger, and the brake calipers are on the rear of the fork legs rather than the front. An unrestored and careworn original Le Mans will cost you at least £7000. A restored one will have a price heading into the stratosphere, with dealers asking upwards of £17,000 for an immaculate example. An original and usable Mk II starts at £6000.