



The Bigger They Come.

CONSIDERING THE TWO ITALIAN BIKES tested in this issue are both V twins and cost roughly the same, they couldn't be more different. The Pantah is the stuff of Italian sporting motorcycle myth and legend: taut, spare and offering an unequalled balance of performance and handling to anyone prepared to put up with its uncompromising nature. The Guzzi is 50 per cent more motorcycle in terms of mass alone and it's immediately and inescapably entirely different. It might be Italian in its component parts but it's 100 per cent pure West Coast cruisin' ethos in its styling and behaviour.

Once you've slid behind the barn door wind-screen, grasped the wide bars and fired 'er up you could be on a real Harley except for the

Moto Guzzi hopped up their State-side heavy cruiser to 1000cc and it's now the California II. Brecon Quaddy took one to the Italian Motorcycle Owners Club Rally on the Isle of Wight. Mally Shag? Oh, that's just a hairy bear

relative mechanical quietness of the motor and the way the whole plot tugs to the right when the throttle's blipped. It could be a Harley again when you lift a foot from the left footboard and toe the heel-toe gearlever down into first with a resounding clonk but the engine note as you move off is altogether too smooth to mimic the

blat-blat of a 1000cc Hog. And instead of the snagging rattle of primary and secondary chains there's a smooth lift at the back as the shaft drive bites.

No, pure Italian it ain't, nor pure Milwaukee muscle, but pure Guzzi the California II certainly is. Even so, it's the odd boy of the Mandello school (not counting the horrendous V50 'factory custom'), owing nothing to the precepts behind bikes like the Le Mans or superb long-distance fast tourers like the Spada. It's a hybrid so completely unlike most Italian machinery that it would be weird except for the fact that its almost identical 850cc T3 California predecessor has been around for seven years. And, to borrow a phrase from the Pantah test, it's hugely

enjoyable and equally impractical.

It seemed natural to take the California with its broad seat, screen and ample luggage space on a short holiday to Dorset, especially since it so happened that a bunch of Italian bike freaks had organised a rally on the Isle of Wight. Seeing as I was going in that direction . . .

All was well at first except that the Cali's motor had less than 1700 miles on the Nikasil lined bores and plain bearings throughout the motor. Moto Guzzi hasn't the resources to match components of varying finished dimensions to enable their engines to leave the production line in the same state of rev-readiness as Jap motors, so they build em' good and tight knowing they'll loosen up nicely in 10,000 miles or so. This one was nowhere near loose, especially at 3500rpm or less, when it shuddered and complained under the strain of carrying two people and luggage in any other than the two lowest gears.

A shame that, because it made it almost impossible to assess midrange tractability now that engine capacity has moved up from 844cc to 949cc. Guzzi have slotted a Spada motor into the Cali's frame to improve torque, though oddly enough they've never before quoted a torque figure for the 850. Now they claim 7.7kgm (55.7ft-lb) for the Cali II, though that's still less than the 8.6kgm at 5200rpm claimed for the latest Spada, and a power hike of just 5bhp (3.7kW) to 73bhp at 7000rpm. The power figure comes from Dave Martin, service manager at Coburn and Hughes, because this time Guzzi aren't quoting power output — seems they're relying on the increase in cubes alone.

In practice the bare statistics make little difference to a motor which was and still is a tireless roller. Crude it may be compared with the latest big bore Japanese shaft drivers but the way the 90° configuration smooths away the vibes without destroying the gutsy feel of two big pistons slinging up and down at 4000rpm and 70mph on the motorway makes for an incredibly satisfying and relaxed ride. If it isn't a whole lot pokier, it sure isn't any less.

That in itself might have been enough to give the Cali an extra lease of life but Guzzi have gone the whole hog and managed to alter just about every piece of bodywork and equipment. Some of the changes, like those to switchgear and the addition of cast wheels, are simple updates to bring the Cali in line with the rest of the range, while others, such as QD panniers are straightforward improvements. The overall effect is to change the Cali from a T3 with loads of tacked-on extras into a much more complete machine.

Deep valances on the mudguards, with heavy chromed wrap round stays at the front and an arrogant flip at the rear give it an old fashioned touch of class, especially with the contrasting black paint and chromed borders — pity the red and gold pinstriping is only stick-on stuff, though.

The angular bars on the first California have been replaced by a more elegant continuously curving item 30in across the soft rubber grips and well pulled-back. At the rear is a larger chromed rack and a pair of capacious Vignano hardcases.

These alone make the Cali II better value for money at £2899 than any unsold Californians (now renamed Eldorados) remaining in showrooms at a recommended price of £2499. The old cases were quite a bit smaller and getting them off the bike meant undoing six bolts each side. The Vignano cases pull off with no more

than the effort required to unlock a flip catch and pull out a spring loaded security plunger. The German-made locks on the 35-litre cases themselves, though, would look cheap and tinny on a school satchel and locking them with nasty stamped-out keys was a hit or miss affair. All the same the cases took all our clothes, odds, sods and camera gear, leaving the rack above free for waterproofs. Luckily, it didn't rain all week so I can't vouch for the rain seals on the cases, though we wrapped everything in polythene just in case.

Before we finally set off I had to adjust the screen. It's taller and deeper than the old one and I found the top edge cut across my line of sight. It wouldn't go lower so I could see over it, which is usually the best option so I jacked it up the full 5cm of vertical-only movement allowed by the screw clamps and settled for looking through it. Looking through a gradient tint visor and a tinted screen wasn't so hot at night but there you go.

Crossing London was a slow business thanks to mirrors which stick out horizontally to an overall width of 43in, plus the 30-odd inches of crash bars and panniers below and behind. While I pretended not to notice the amazed stares the Cali attracted every time we halted in a line of cars, my pillion began fidgeting around on what was to set the tone of the whole trip, the buddy seat.

The old Cali had a very comfortable perch for its rider but the pillion half sloped steeply downwards, sliding the passenger forwards on to the rider. The revised seat is stepped slightly; enough to make it still comfortable for the guy in front but not enough to remove the slope. While this added to the silly giggles factor when I gave a friend's wife a lift, it quickly became a headache on the 120 mile trip to the New Forest.

With the best of intentions, Guzzi have provided folding pillion footrests instead of expecting passengers to hook their feet over the rear crashbars but they're too far forward. My ol' lady can't help being only five feet four inches tall but the long stretch from the high stepped rear of the seat, exacerbated by its width, meant she was virtually standing up even when I'd shuffled forwards as much as possible. The rider can only go so far before his knees meet the rocker boxes anyway.

So there we were on the M3, girlfriend clinging to the grabrail and me thankful that I was wearing knee length boots so my shins weren't roasted. At 70mph the motor got into its stride, lunging up to 80mph whenever necessary with admirable speed seeing as the whole plot — bike, me, her, luggage — weighed close on half a ton. Seventy was as fast as I could comfortably manage in the turbulence behind the screen. Big it may be but it also possesses the aerodynamic qualities of a close boarded fence, sending air over your head right enough, but allowing swirls and eddies to buffet your chest and arms, and creating an updraught sufficient to hold the visor on a full face helmet half open unless popped down.

Engine noise, particularly from the valve gear, is also reflected back. It's not such a problem during solo riding because it decreases sharply if you sit back but, forced to sit close to the screen two up, I was getting a full dose — mental discomfort from noise being more fatiguing on a long run possibly than the physical strain of holding unprotected bars into a headwind.

The Cali scored on Dorset lanes with surprising agility. Sure it'll never catch any of its

Guzzi sisters on the backroads but it rolls majestically through bends at the slightest bidding, seven inches of ground clearance and stable tracking allowing you to make full use of the treads on its high profile, fat Pirelli Gordon tyres — same size and pattern front and rear. It wasn't entirely without fault: bumps caused the bars to jiggle in bends and set off a queasy fore and aft pitching on straights. Unfortunately, the Cali was sent out without a toolkit, which meant we hadn't the means of upping the spring preload on the inverted Paoli rear shox from the minimum setting. Even so, they coped remarkably well with the Cali's weight.

Previous experience of trying to adjust Guzzi's air assisted front forks and rear shox with garage airlines decided me against such a simple solution so we left it. That was fine for the week we had the beast (it was running about 20psi front and 28psi rear — a little low but not drastically so) but the valve problem can be such a hassle that owners run their bikes without any pressure for a time and then discover the air suspension's naffed when they get round to trying again. The air sac sticks to the valve without any pressure and the tugging suspension movement finally causes the material to split. Coburns are now doing an effective special tool for injecting a pre-set dose of air pressure. Only costs a few quid, so it's a worthwhile investment.

Should the footboards touch down in a bend they're supposed to fold up but the test bike's items were overtightened and wouldn't budge. This didn't matter because (a) I was being too cool to try and impress my pillion with scary cornering, and (b) on minimum spring preload the first thing to touch down on lefts was the centrestand tang.

Talking of which, the Guzzi is unbelievably easy to lift onto the stand, even with heavily loaded panniers. When I couldn't be bothered to impress bystanders with my apparently Herculean strength, kicking out the long propstand not only made the job easier but cut the motor as well. An Eytie bike with a sidestand cut-out, eh? Next thing you know we'll have diagnostic readouts on the instrument panel, though heaven knows, if they're no brighter than the usual Guzzi idiot lights no one will ever be able to read them.

I soon learned never to believe the neutral light: ending up pussy-footing the gearlever and clutch until I was sure the bike wasn't still in gear, by which time the lights had probably changed anyway. The shift itself always snicked quietly into first gear first thing in the morning but then became progressively more horrendous as the motor warmed up. It was either e-a-s-e it in oh-so gently, thus diverting concentration more usefully spent enjoying the ride or klunk-

Late night in the office instant competition: anyone who can identify this Guzzi wins one of BQ's old socks.



CHECKOUT

MOTO GUZZI CALIFORNIA II

Price (inc VAT and Sales Tax)	£2899
Guarantee	12 months/unlimited mileage
Engine	ohv 90 degree V twin
Bore x stroke	88 x 78 mm
Capacity	949cc
Compression ratio	9.2:1
Carburation	2 x 30mm Dellorto
Ignition	Battery and coil
Air filter	Paper element
Oil filter	Gauze plus cartridge
Oil capacity	3.5 litres (6 pints)
Max power @ rpm	54.5kW (73bhp) @ 7000
Max torque @ rpm	7.7kgm (55.7ft-lb) @ 5200
Power per litre	57.5kW (77bhp)
Power to weight	4.6kg per kW (7.5lb per bhp)
Clutch	Twin plate, dry
Primary drive	Duplex chain
Gearbox	5 speed
Electrical system	12V 24Ah battery, 280W alternator QH 60/55W headlamp

CYCLE PARTS

Tyres	Pirelli Gordons
Front	120/90 H 18in
Rear	120/90 H 18in
Brakes	
Front	2 x 300mm (11.8in) discs
Rear	242mm (9.5in) disc
Suspension	
Front	Air-assisted/coil spring, sealed dampers
Rear	2 Paoli shock absorbers with air assist and 5 way spring preload

EQUIPMENT

Indicators	Yes
Electric start	Yes
Trip odometer	Yes
Steering lock	Yes
Headlamp flasher	Yes (dip only)
Others	Screen, panniers, carrier, footboards, hazard flashers, voltmeter, linked brakes, crash bars

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	1427mm (58.5in)
Overall width	1092mm (43in)
Seat height	775mm (30.5in)
Ground clearance	175mm (6.9in)
Weight (with 1 gal fuel)	256kg (565lb)
Fuel capacity	25 litres (5.5 gal)

PERFORMANCE

Top speed	115mph (est)
Standing ¼ mile	14sec (est)
Fuel consumption	
Average	45mpg (7.3 litres/100km)
Ridden hard	41mpg (6.9 litres/100km)
Supplied by	Coburn & Hughes Ltd, 53-61 Park Street, Luton, Beds.

▷ bonk-kunk along the road to keep up the new motor's revs.

Cruising across the forest towards Lymington and the Isle of Wight ferry, I put up with the occasional clunk; at least there were no false neutrals in the box. On a couple of occasions it was necessary to slam on the brakes, making full use of the linked front and rear discs operated by the foot pedal. I found it difficult to use until I

realised there was a short tab on the pivot on which to rest my heel but it means you have to lift a foot off the footboard every time you brake. Thanks to the ferocious stopping power of the Brembos, the linked brakes were usually all that was needed but in emergencies the other front disc, worked by the handlebar lever, stopped the plot even faster. Most of the time such antics were rendered unnecessary by judicious use of the twin Fiamm horns on the front crash bar. The foghorn bellow they blast out would do justice to a truck (and to look at the expressions of drivers who saw the huge Guzzi bearing down on them, that's more or less what they thought it was).

Pretty soon we were chugging on to the ferry, the bike getting the usual stares and comments from other passengers — and was it my imagination or did the boat develop a distinct list to port when we parked it by the gunwale?

At Cowes I picked up the first direction sign for the Mally Shag Rally and turned for Newport where a couple of guys on Pantahs spun by in the other direction with a flash and a wave. I tried to return the compliment but the Guzzi's flasher only illuminates the dip beam which was already switched on. Wave, wave. Following the signs through Newport and southwards eventually took us down a narrow lane where the sound of Motorhead pounding out across a field told us we'd arrived.

Soon as we pulled into the field someone recognised the Guzzi as the latest Cali and a small knot of people came over for a closer look. Some sympathised about the seat while others peered intently at its frame and motor, looking for obvious changes. Someone said he thought the wheelbase was longer: 'Bet it's a pig in hairpins.' It certainly wasn't a pig in tight turns and the wheelbase is the same as the old T3's — 1427mm (58.5in) though that's hardly in the short, quick steering league. The Cali II definitely looks longer than its predecessor but that could be because they've moved the hardware at the rear backwards a few inches.

One change which was appreciated is the re-arranged breathing system. Now the air filter can be changed in 15 or 20 minutes instead of an hour and a half and the battery can stay in place. I guess the seat has to be unbolted, though, because in common with most Guzzi saddles it only lifts a couple of inches before binding on the carrier. The test bike's didn't even have a catch, let alone a lock.

The bigger 7in headlamp (60/55W Halogen instead of 45/40W Tungsten) was duly clocked, too. No-one asked how fast the Cali was: just as well because there wasn't time to take it to MIRA. Nor did anyone ask about fuel consumption, which strung out to a best of exactly 50mpg, worst of 41mpg and an average of 45-ish. The tank would go on to reserve after 180-190 miles, using four gallons in the process, though better fuel consumption could be expected from a looser power plant.

Over in a battered caravan, one of two the club picked up for £15, we met the organisers. First question had to be about the name of the rally. Mally Shag, it turned out, is IoW dialect for those furry caterpillars they call 'hairy bears' down my way. Sounded too clean to be true but Serena Powis who, along with Marie Kingswell, seemed to be doing most of the organising at that point, pulled out a very tasteful enamel rally badge showing the island in green on a white background with a grinning grub curving across it.

The IOWIMOC, or iowimoc for short, is just

over a year old and the Mally Shag was their first rally. They were pretty pleased with the turnout: 250 bikes turned up, the long distance award going to a Dutch guy who'd come across on a Spada. Oxford Motorcycles' Eddie Reid had turned up with a trailer and a white MKIII Le Mans demo machine. He sucked on his pipe and remarked that the Cali would be a very nice bike in 15,000 miles' time.

The rules said Italian bikes only but inevitably some 'foreign' machinery had turned up, including some ratty small bore Japs, some rattier Trumpets and a clean-looking Triumph twin chop. Nothing there came anywhere near a T3 with Vetter fairing and fringed saddle, finished in purple and green spray can paint. Seemed few rallyists could bring themselves to park their bikes near it . . .

Apart from these, just about every kind of Eytie scooter was represented somewhere on the site, including several Californias. All were clean and unmodified . . . well, what on earth would you do to one except maybe increase the motor capacity, which is where we came in.

The night before an excellent (by all accounts) local R&B band had played in the beer tent and the day we were there a folk outfit, also local, was booked. My, my, how restrained — but the PA was pumping out heavy metal loud enough to blast the crows from the trees. Among the bikes in the club parking area was a black Jota whose owner was trying out a Crossbow sports fairing. Said it was pretty good and to judge by the dollops of weld on his bike's well-chamfered alternator casing, the island does offer at least a few corners in which to unleash the horses of Breganze's rortiest beast.

Up in a corner of the field, Mr Reid was running an obstacle course for anyone who wanted to try their hand at scaling a seven foot high heap of sand on an MZ Simson Enduro moped. All good clean fun apart from a 10-foot-wide slurry pit on the down side. Apparently everyone cleared the hazard — unlike the guy who'd found the latrine trench by walking into it the night before.

Any profits from the rally were going towards a mentally handicapped children's home mini bus fund. The club also went a long way towards improving islanders' image of motorcyclists by organising a 60-bike toy run to the home last November, getting plenty of favourable coverage from local papers and starting the mini bus fund with £25 from a helmet whip-around.

We only planned to call in on the rally so we hadn't packed a tent but with the bar opening the thought of staying seemed pretty attractive. It wasn't blues and booze on a five star roller coaster like Martin Christie's winter rally trip on a BMW R100RT (Bike, May), more folk and booze on a four star roller (loss of points because of the Cali II's seat). The booze was a treacle local brew called Burts (is that the brewer's name or is it an appropriate amalgam of burp and farts?)

After a pinta that, plus some headcracking homemade wine while I chose the lucky ticket numbers, I decided to say 'bye and head for home. The direct route from Yarmouth to Newport was pointed out to us and it turned out to be a lot better than the way we'd come. Plenty of visibility on the bends, good surface but slow cars. Again the Guzzi showed a surprising turn of acceleration for its size, sling-shooting past traffic with a chug-chugchug-brrrrr so we could swoop through oncoming bends without being held up.

It's amazing how average speeds rise when

you're dying for piss. It's probably the ultimate resource of the endurance racer. First point of call on the ferry was the heads (note casual use of nautical parlance), where I met the captain. Turned out he was a biker too, riding a CB750 and instructing at a mainland training scheme, and he invited us up to the bridge where his long-suffering steersman put up with my efforts to keep the boat on a straight course against a running cross tide — I'd possibly have fared better steering a Z1300 with twisted frame and shot shox.

The ride home is best forgotten. The only thing that got my pillion back onto the Guzzi at the M3's Fleet services was the closure of the cafeteria at 10.30pm. She promptly fell asleep, sliding forward until her whole weight was being taken by my arms. She was shagged out, I was shagged out, oil was leaking from around the gearbox and an Allen bolt had fallen from the mudguard bracket just after we got off the ferry.

Riding solo, with no passenger to literally cramp your style, the Cali II really delivers. On the one hand there's the effortless fashion in which it makes speed... so deceptive in fact that at 80mph on the motorway my pillion thought we were travelling at 40mph because she mistook the tacho (calibrated in rpm x 100) for the speedo.

Cutting through Bedfordshire B road twists to Luton on the last day saw 100mph coming up on the speedo at every available opportunity, the Guzzi wriggling its ass violently on the soft-set shox but staying resolutely on line over the worst undulations and potholes. At one stage I realised too late that a light blue Marina visible through the shuddering screen was a Panda car but I guess the sole occupant was so taken by the sight of a huge motorcycle literally bounding past him at 80mph that he decided to let the incident pass.

If he'd stopped me I'd have adopted the time-honoured stance of genuine contrition somewhere between him and the rear tyre, which was perilously close to illegal round the centreline after 2400 miles. I guess that's the kind of rear cover life people who go for such bikes are prepared to put up with. The Guzzi owners at the rally obviously were, even though many of them looked less able to afford the cost of running and maintaining Italian exotica than a guy on a 1000cc slushbox we ran into at an Oxfordshire pub. He strolled out into the garden wearing cowboy boots, nylon anorak and matching diahorrea coloured designer corduroy jeans, pulled a fat cigar from his mouth and asked whether the Guzzi was mine. Before I could reply, he gave us chapter and verse about what a load of rubbish the Convert was compared to his old Goldwing. Seemed the only thing the Guzzi had going for it was the automatic gearbox and the fact it looked more expensive than other people's bikes. Wanted to know what I thought of a Suzuki RE5 rotary he was going to look at. I put him off but now I wish I hadn't. It would have served him right.

Riding the Cali did nothing to lessen my liking for the qualities inherent in big Guzzi's motors and chassis. Nor has it done anything to stop me wanting to own one. It's just narrowed the field to two, neither of which have wide bars or a buddy seat.

Despite its bulk the Cali was quite happy indulging in a little bend swinging, but if you want to do it in any comfort forget the pillion.

