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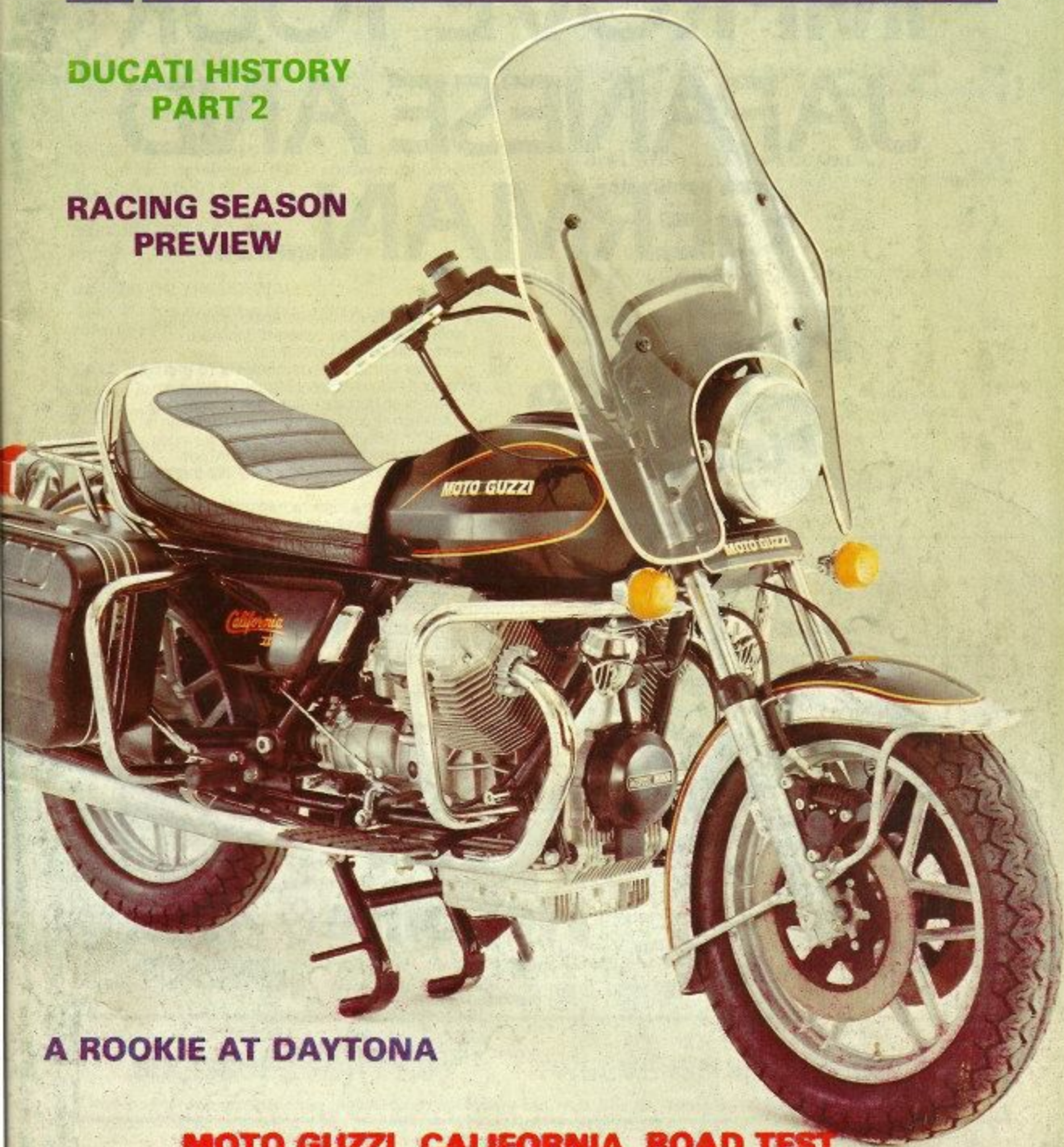
# ENTHUSIAST

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**DUCATI HISTORY  
PART 2**

**RACING SEASON  
PREVIEW**



**A ROOKIE AT DAYTONA**

**MOTO GUZZI CALIFORNIA ROAD TEST**

# California Dreamin'

BY RICHARD STEVENS



When I picked up the California II from Coburn & Hughes, for a tightly scheduled trip to the Cologne show, the Bol D'Or, and Guzzi factory in Mandello del Lario, I must admit to having had serious doubts as to its abilities as a high speed long distance tourer. The California has been uncompromisingly built and styled for the American market, and in best Highway Patrol tradition sports high rise bars, footboards, large slab screen and buddy seat. "Built for comfort not for speed", sums up the looks of the Cali.

Whether you like the looks is entirely subjective. Personally I do, and they took me back to my Harley days in Australia some 15 years ago, when I worshipped anything and everything that originated in Milwaukee, and my 10/12, 1200 side valve, bore more than a passing resemblance to the Cali. It's ironic that the

California II has become Europe's second best selling large Guzzi (after the Le Mans), when you consider what excellent bikes both the Spada and T4 are, and that they are specifically designed for the European market, while the Cali is pure West Coast. To my mind it's a somewhat sad expression of life that European fashions almost invariably originate in the U.S., and the majority seem to accept mindlessly that American is good. But I suppose 15 years ago, I was

The writers 1200 SV Harley in Australia in 1967.



no different, and anyway I do actually like the Cali. Not so one Cornish Guzzi purist, who adamantly refused to believe that the Cali could possibly be made in the same factory as Bill Lomas's 1955 350cc World Championship winning single. It probably still rankles that the Guzzi singles were undoubtedly quicker than the Nortons of the day, and of course that Moto Guzzi are still alive and kicking and Norton are well ah... never mind. Perhaps if they'd made Cali type Commandos, they might still be going strong!

I'd forgotten what it was like to be stared at in amazement by drivers and pedestrians alike. Car drivers wind windows down to get a better look, mouths hang open in disbelief, and gaps are left for you in traffic that would be worthy of a Mack truck. The Cali just takes everyone by storm and they seem

to think it must have leaped out of someone's TV set during an episode of CHIPS. Only people singularly unimpressed are other motorcyclists. To judge the California objectively, I have assumed that they will be bought specifically because of their looks and style, and it is therefore unrealistic to criticise the bike for being the "all American" machine that it is. The United States has a 55 mph speed limit and the Cali is kitted out for effortless cruising in the 50 to 70 mph speed range. The slab screen is unaerodynamic in the extreme, and causes uncomfortable turbulence and noise at anything much above 75 mph, as Coburn & Hughes technical chief Dave Martin warned me when I picked the bike up. After a quick guided tour of the monster, and instructions to bypass the starter cut out on the clutch cable, if it played up, I set off down the M1 towards London.

I felt instantly at home on the California, which despite its size and weight (551 lbs-dry) was easy to handle even at low speed and proved extraordinarily manoeuvrable in London's evening rush hour. The footboards and pedals required some getting used to, though. The large rocking "heel and toe" gear pedal (where my Harley foot clutch used to be) meant that upward changes were best accomplished by kicking down the rear of the pedal with my heel, and downward changes by depressing the front of the pedal with my toe. However because of the distance from footboard to pedal and the travel of the lever, this necessitated lifting my entire foot off the board and resulted in a complete lack of feel for neutral finding. After experimentation, I discovered that the best way to find neutral was to change down to first and give the rear of the pedal a gentle stab with my heel. Success could only be judged by slowly releasing the clutch, and if at first you don't succeed etc. etc. In practice I could get it first time, more often than not, but the green neutral light could never be relied upon. Similarly, for satisfactory operation of the brake pedal (linked brakes) it was necessary to remove the right foot from its board and place it entirely on the pedal, which incorporates a rest directly above its pivot point. Although slightly inconvenient at

times, I quickly learned to live with the footboards and pedals and when I returned the Cali after a month and four and a half thousand miles it had all become second nature.

The screen had been set in the highest position, which meant I had to look through it. This was OK by day in dry weather, but unsatisfactory in the wet and at night, because although the perspex is optically true (unlike my Spada screen), vision is considerably restricted. About six inches of screen adjustment is available and I eventually settled for a midway position which allowed me to look through it under normal circumstances, but enabled me to look over it, by sitting bolt upright, when necessary. Short riders (I am 6' 1") would almost certainly be unable to see over it even in the lowest position. Adjustment was quick and simple, taking less than two minutes to loosen the four clamp bolts, move the screen and retighten them, but there is no question that the screen is unsatisfactory by European standards. Weather protection was excellent at all speeds, but turbulence and noise unacceptably high at speeds over 75 mph, and the problems of vision at night and in the wet potentially dangerous. But on the basis that the screen is part of the concept and American package it must be accepted as an integral part of the bike. Clearly designed for 55 to 66 mph cruising in the States, the screen is very effective at that speed, and it should be possible to modify the fittings to see over it.

The Cali ran like a clock and after some business in London I returned to Cornwall for a few days prior to the grand tour. The sensible 5.5 gallon tank incorporates a reserve of .66 gallons giving a cruising range well in excess of 200 miles and allowing a safe — even for motorways — distance of 30 to 40 miles on reserve. The big buddy seat is not as soft or comfortable as it appears, probably because I had to sit partly on the dividing ridge between rider and pillion in order to give myself sufficient leg room. Bikes no longer seem to be made for "larger" riders, and to put the matter in perspective I have had to move back on the seats of both the Triumph TSS and BMW R65LS that I have

tested since, and the Cali seat is much more comfortable than either of those. However I managed 700 miles in a day once, 600 miles once, and more than 300 miles on at least 5 occasions, without any ill effects, so comfort must be more than acceptable! Obviously it is subjective, but it is difficult to explain how an MCN tester on exactly the same bike-CTM 576 X — found it so uncomfortable he had to buy a rubber ring to sit on, while a French roadtester described the seat as the most comfortable he had ever sat on! My verdict is reasonable comfort for big riders, and good comfort for smaller riders, but room for improvement in what, after all sets out to be an "armchair" tourer.

Standard equipment includes front and rear crash bars, panniers and a sturdy carrier. Whilst the panniers still fall a little short of Krauser or Sigma spec, they are an enormous improvement on the original California items, and are truly QD, being attached and detached by a hefty spring loaded retaining peg and separate lock. Catches and locks on the cases themselves are fiddly and sometimes awkward, and the recommended load is no more than 10 kgs. My Achilles helmet could just be persuaded to fit into one, with a little flexing of the sides, and they were no more or less waterproof than any others I have used, which is a roundabout way of saying that its advisable to pack things in plastic bags! I was unable to pack all necessary clothes for two weeks in one, and get cameras, maps, documents and odds and sods in the other. The carrier was used to bring back what seemed like half a hundredweight of press releases from the Cologne show, and seemed strong enough to take another 56 lbs! Only problem was that to lift the rear hinged seat, whatever was on the carrier had to be moved. Under the seat was a very modest toolkit — but at least the seat is lockable, if you can bend the mild steel catch to the correct shape!

As I left Redruth around 3.30 pm on the Wednesday afternoon I knew that the next few days would prove a real test of the California's long distance touring qualities. In two and a half days I had to cover about 1400 miles and take in a full day at the Cologne show, in time to reach





the Paul Ricard circuit in the South of France in time for the Bol D'Or on the Saturday.

The 350 mile trip to Dover was incident free and took five and a half hours, with the big vee twin settling to a happy 4,500 revs and an effortlessly lazy 80 mph. In Dover I filled the tank, knowing that I could then go clear through Belgium and fill up in Germany next time around, and there was bags of time for a steak and a couple of pints before catching the 23.30 ferry to Zeebrugge (which always sounds rude when I say it). A 750 Yamaha Seca which followed me onto the boat turned out to be John Simcock, then MCW grass track correspondent and now with MCN, who was on his way to the world long track final in Denmark, and testing the Seca at the same time. We'd met at Meriden a few weeks previously so we compared notes on the Triumph's we'd tested, over a couple of beers. After a few hours of something slightly resembling sleep we arrived in Zeebrugge at the usual unearthly hour, to be greeted by the usual Belgian fog. An hour later the endless Brussels ring road had been successfully negotiated, and after a cursory glance at the number plate on the

Our tester didn't need a rubber ring for long distance comfort on the California

German border, Aachen came and went, and just short of Cologne, even a German breakfast started to seem attractive and the Cali swept into a service area to refuel both driver and machine.

The Guzzi attracted considerable attention in the parking lot and I had an interesting conversation with a young German rider returning from the South of France, on his XZ 550 Yamaha. He was full of enthusiasm for the small vee twin, but a little unhappy about a leak from the cooling system and the dealers lack of interest and knowledge about it. When I finally reached the well signposted "Messe" and located the Press carpark it was almost 18 hours since I had left Redruth and the Cali had nearly 600 miles on the clock. It had run faultlessly and any reservations about it's abilities as a high speed tourer were disappearing fast. After eight concentrated hours of bikes, bratwurst and beer I retired to a modest hotel booked through the accommodation bureau at the show (£10 Bed and Breakfast) and slept for twelve hours. Following a hearty German

breakfast of bread, cold meat, boiled eggs, cheese and jam, I gave the Cali a quick check over and left Cologne at 9.30 am for the 800 mile trip to the South of France and the Bol d'Or. I'd planned the route making maximum use of the free German and Swiss motorway systems and minimum use of the expensive French autoroutes. This took me to the German/Swiss border at Basel by way of Bonn, Koblenz, Karlsruhe and Freiburg and right past the scene of the following week's West German Grand Prix at Hockenheim. There are no speed limits on the German autobahns and although the Cali was travelling at a steady 85 to 90, the occasional Merc or Porsche would flash by at a good 50 mph faster. The Cali's limitations as a high speed cruiser were soon discovered. An unnerving weave would start at around 90, or sometimes a little less, depending on road and wind conditions and speeds had to be kept below this critical speed. There are certainly no frame or suspension problems it is simply that the screen and panniers make the machine unstable and it has to be used within it's limitations. Even BMW recommend a maximum speed of 85 mph with panniers, so this is not unreasonable. The Guzzi factory later told me that they make the same recommendation, but there is no mention of it in the Cali's owners manual. Only other limitation was that on upgrades into strong winds it was sometimes impossible to maintain 85-90 cruising in top, because the full frontal screen simply created too much wind resistance to pull the tallish top gear. The claimed top speed is 118, but even on long motorway downgrades I was never able to coax the Cali to more than a speedo 105 in top, although it would run comfortably past the ton in 4th under virtually any circumstances. All of which is slightly academic as practical top speeds are determined by the onset of weave and Le Mans Ills, Spadas and T4s are all available for speed merchants. With fully loaded panniers and a 15½ stone rider the practical top speed (and cruising speed) was between 80 and 90 in top which is 4,500 to 5,000 revs and gives a fuel consumption of 48 miles to the gallon.

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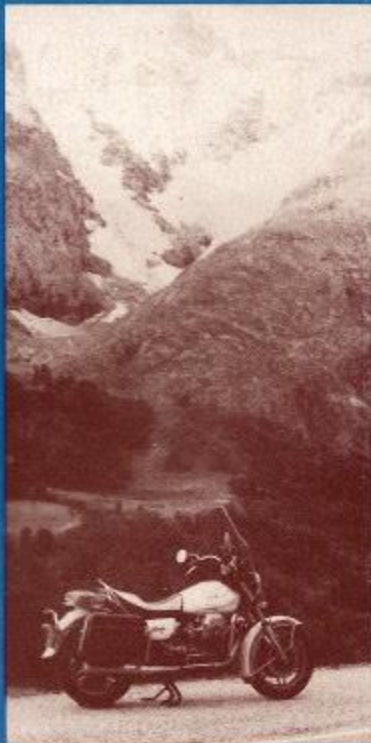
The writer chats to a group of German bikers at Briançon in the Alps near the Franco/Italian border.

Switzerland was traversed on a single tank full of petrol by way of Bern, Montreux, Lausanne and Geneva and the roads were not up to the high German and French motorway standards, with lots of road works and diversions culminating in traffic jams all round the tortuous Geneva ring road. Two miles into France the road opened up and there was an opportunity to pass some slow moving traffic, when out of the blue the Gendarmerie pulled over a Swiss registered Renault 4 and yours truly for a white line infringement. They had obviously chosen their spot, with some care, to trap unwitting drivers who were caught out by a solid white line, strategically placed in an unexpected and unnecessary position, on the first bit of open road outside the city, and it's interminable traffic jams. It's not hard to see why the French as a nation hate and despise their police, but in this particular case their devious ways were rewarded by a haul of two foreigners, who after much gesticulation, consultation and consternation were allowed to continue on their way. In the same way that all foreigners can always understand conversations involving money, they somehow seem to be incapable of understanding anything that a policeman says!

A mile or two further on, the

French autoroute started, and continued through the startlingly beautiful scenery of the Savoie Alps past Annecy and Chambéry to Grenoble. More traffic and a stop to put on rain gear slowed things up a little but the run from Grenoble to Sisteron was beautiful. The N 75 winds its way through the low alps towards Provence providing a combination of spectacular scenery and demanding roads, which made a perfect road test route. Although the Cali was willing, the rider was getting weary after 600 miles with no stops except for refuelling. A couple of XT 500 Yamahas blasted past, at extraordinary angles of lean, for knobby tyres on wet roads. Not to be outdone I set after them and discovered that American packaging does nothing to impair traditional Guzzi handling and roadholding. The bike could be thrown into bends with absolute confidence, never deviating from its line, and being restricted ultimately only by scraping footboards! It could be flicked through esses like a lightweight and was the match of anything on the N 75 that evening, BMW's, and the new breed of Japanese middleweights included. But although roadholding and handling were superb, another

limitation of the American styling was shown up. Having to move your feet from footboards to pedals, was incompatible with scratching in the Alps! Braking was the major problem because the full power of the linked brakes was required and moving my right foot, when riding to the limit, upset balance and feel, and increased braking time. The linked brakes however were superb and



would bring the Cali to a straight line stop from 100 mph, with tyres just squealing and hands off the bars! In the alps they gave absolute confidence and were never found lacking, although the front brake on it's own was a slow you down job rather than a stopper, but used in conjunction with the linked system provided even more greater stopping power. Linked systems are an acquired taste, but in my opinion offer safer and more effective braking under all circumstances. They eliminate diving, are safer on slippery surfaces, and achieve perfect balance between front and back. Many people argue that they prefer independently operated brakes, and can control their use better than a mechanical system. I disagree entirely, and always feel safer when I return to a Guzzi after riding other machines.

Just after Sisteron, 700 miles in the day was clocked up, and as dusk fell, the welcome sight of a little country Hotel appeared, and drew me to it like a bee to a honey pot. It was just ten and a half hours since I'd left Cologne, the California had run like a clock, and the only ill effects were a sore bum and extreme weariness, due more to wind noise and turbulence from the screen, than anything else. An average speed of almost 67 mph including three stops for petrol and two border crossings — not to mention the Gendarmerie — is pretty good going and proved conclusively that the California is an excellent high speed long distance tourer if required. The last 100 miles to Paul Ricard were covered early on the Saturday morning and provided some of the most satisfying riding of the whole trip, with dawn breaking and the sun light slowly bringing the warm red, yellow and brown colours of the Provencal countryside to life. The big Guzzi burbled contentedly along at an unhurried 4,000 revs startling one or two farmers in their 2CVs and causing the odd lazy dog to open one eye. There is something extraordinarily satisfying about riding on almost empty roads at dawn, there is a oneness with nature and a feeling that the bike has become a part of you, and that your not riding over roads, or through the countryside, but that you have become part of them. It can be one of those rare



A small harbour on the banks of Lake Como

glimpses of life as it should be — not as it is. Blink and it's gone, or in this case start to meet the traffic as you get closer to Aix-en-Provence and the dream just slowly fades away. A short stretch of autoroute and the Paul Ricard circuit is supposed to be within spitting distance. Signs are poor but eventually it appears, in the middle of nowhere built on barren ground between Marseille and Toulon.

It's difficult to understand or rationalise the French mania for endurance racing, but they are fanatical about it. The Le Mans 24 hour race and the Bol d'Or are to the French what the TT is to us, and they cram every conceivable type of motorcycle event into the two weekends. The Bol d'Or is an "event" on all sorts of levels, with an ambience and atmosphere found nowhere else in the world. Six thousand Brits are said to have made the trek down there for this years event, which is several times more than the entire crowd at the Donington round of the world endurance championship. Guzzi were well represented at the Bol with 6 starters and four finishers, and the only other non Japanese machine to complete the distance was a lone Ducati.

After covering 1,400 miles in 20 hours time, to reach the Bol, I decided to take the rest of the trip in a slightly more leisurely manner, and give the Cali an opportunity to prove itself as the west coast luxury tourer it's designed to be. Giving the

fleshpots and topless beaches of the Cote D'Azur a miss (regretfully), I marvelled at the quality of life in the South of France. Porsches, Rolls Royces, Ferraris and convertible VW beetles jam the narrow coastal roads and the aromas of eucalyptus and the grape harvest waft fragrantly in the breeze., while the blue sky and omni present sun toast the natives to a darker shade of brown. Then just as a dip in the Med is planned, the pungent smell of French drains becomes completely overpowering, and thoughts of raw sewage being pumped out to sea destroy the sun, sky, and sea, illusion completely.

The A 10 skirting Cannes, Nice, Monaco and San Remo. Towering high above the ocean, and red tiled roofs, must be one of the most beautiful stretches of road in the world. The Guzzi burbled along devouring the road with nonchalant ease, allowing me to soak in the picture post card views, in between the endless tunnels. At Genoa I turned north for Milan and the miles flew past. Around Milan and north again to Lake Como, and the Cali followed it's nose back to it's birth place in Mandello del Lario.

The Guzzi factory gave the bike a quick check over while I was there and pronounced it to be in A1 condition. It had used no oil in over 2,000 miles and required no adjustments or attention whatsoever. The trip home took me back to Grenoble by way of Turin, and the Alps, and then right across central France to Brittany for the week-end, before going to Paris for the motor show and

returning to England on the superior P&O crossing from Le Havre to Southampton. The Cali was completely in its element on A and B roads in both France and England, where its superb handling characteristics could be used to advantage, and between three and four hundred miles could be covered in a day in comfort, with ample time for meal stops and a bit of sight seeing. French country roads are demanding on suspension and Guzzi's own air assisted forks were well up to the job, as were the similarly air assisted rear shocks, which have five positions of spring preload. The ride was pleasantly firm — without being hard — and the bike never wallowed in fast bumpy bends as many heavyweights do. Tyres are normally Pirelli Gordons, 120/90 H18 front and rear. The test bike however had been fitted with a new Phantom rear, before I collected it. What difference this made (if any) is impossible to know, but the tyres never gave a moments concern, and in combination with the suspension gave excellent feedback from the road and precision and handling qualities seldom found in such a large and heavy machine. After 4,400 miles there was at least another 3,000 miles in the rear tyre, and the original front cover, with almost 10,000 miles up, looked good for a similar mileage.

Gearbox and clutch were typically Guzzi, with a relatively clunky gear change and heavy clutch action, although I didn't miss gears, suffer from any clutch hand fatigue, or object to the clunks. Big vee twins are so torquey and forgiving that almost all main road miles are covered in top. Bags of urge is always available from the 948cc motor if required, and there is no discernable power band with smooth power delivery from tickover right up to the 7,000 rpm red line. The Cali II has the new square barrel motor, with nigosil lined cylinders, new rocker oil feed, and breather system, and used no oil whatsoever in 4,400 miles. Instrumentation is neat and simple with Veglia tachometer, speedometer, and voltmeter and five idiot lights. Guzzi switchgear does not have a good reputation, but proved reliable and easy to use during the test period. The throttle was heavy in operation, probably

because the return springs on the two Dellorto VHB carbs are heavier duty than before. Two good mirrors give excellent rear vision, and remained free of vibration, and a 55/60 quartz halogen headlamp is at last fitted as standard. The big motor produces 70 bhp at 6,700 rpm and the rider is always aware of being astride the big vee twin. Vibration is always evident at low revs and although always noticeable throughout the rev range does not intrude on riding pleasure or comfort.

When returned to Coburn and Hughes CTM 576X had covered 9,568 miles from new. There were no oil leaks (even on the forks), the chrome was in excellent shape, all frame and cycle parts were immaculate and all fixtures and fittings, — bar one — were in good working order. The only criticisms on finish were that the unplated lever pivot bolts and screen adjustment screws were rusty, and the front of the seat was rubbing paint off the tank (although this could only be seen with the seat raised). The exhaust pipes had blued over the first 6 inches or so and there was a small leak on the balance pipe. The carbs seemed to weep a little fuel where they joined the air cleaner box and the whole area

Back to its birthplace. The Cali outside the Guzzi factory at Mandello del Lario.



was dirty. My only problem in 4,400 miles was a clutch cable adjuster that worked loose and had to be readjusted, and the notorious starter cut out on the clutch cable. This got full of water, during a torrential storm between Paris and Le Havre, and cut the starter permanently. I simply snipped the wires and bypassed the switch, and everything worked again.

I had disliked having to pull the clutch in to start the bike anyway, and consider it quite unnecessary. There is also a cut out operated by the prop stand, which I didn't like either but is acceptable on safety grounds, and both stands were solid, easy to use, and stable.

Overall fuel consumption worked out at 48.93 mpg, and whilst not being as good as my Spada at 55 mpg (ridden in a similar manner) is excellent by today's standards for "superbikes".

The California II is a unique motorcycle, born of mixed American and Italian parentage and designed specifically for North American markets. It is very easy to dismiss it as the bastard offspring of the pure bred Guzzi family, in the wrongful assumption, that it's unsuitable for European roads and tastes. The Cali is in fact a very practical motorcycle, equally happy doing 700 miles in the day, touring round Europe, or going to do the shopping. It's styling is superb, and is undoubtedly it's major attraction, and despite its size and weight, traditional Guzzi handling qualities remain. The Cali has been called many things, amongst them "Poor man's Harley" and "Spagetti Western". At £2,899 it's not a poor man's anything, although I would accept that it gives Harley type appearance at a lower cost. Harleys have an incomparable mystique all of their own, which no one else (other than Indian) have ever, or are every likely, to come close to. The California II combines the American image with Italian handling to give a tireless, mechanically simple, shaft driven thoroughbred, that suits the tastes of an increasingly large number of motorcycle buyers in many countries.

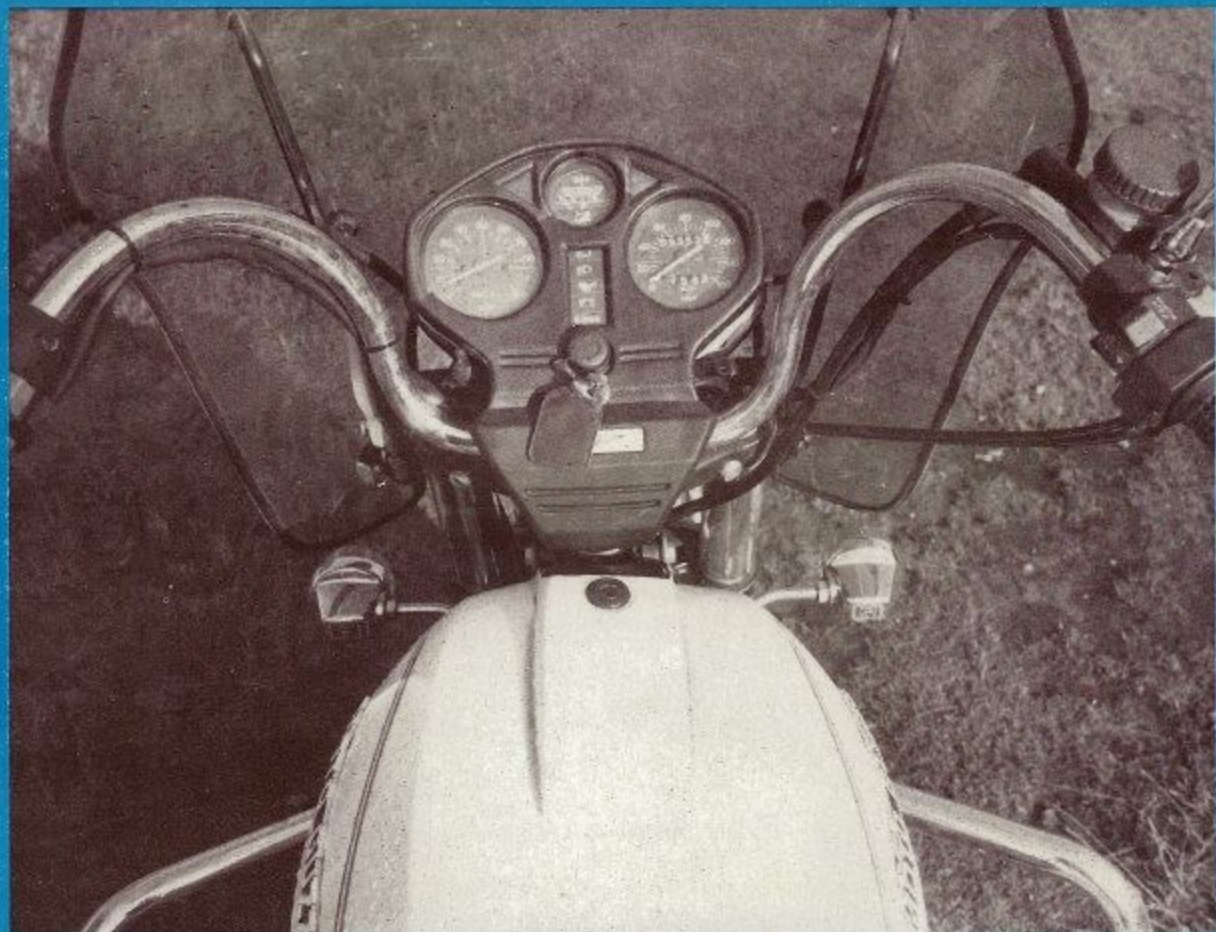
I particularly disliked the screen, having to sit on the ridge in the seat, and the need to pull in the clutch to start it and thought there



should have been more thought given to matters of the seat lock, having to move luggage to lift the seat, and details of finish like the unplated bolts and scuffed paint on the tank. On the other hand I particularly liked the styling, handling and engine; the panniers and crashbars as standard equipment, the long leggedness of the bike, and the fact that it's European.

At £2,899 the California is expensive by Japanese standards and good value by European standards. If you buy one for its looks you will not be disappointed by anything else. I thoroughly enjoyed riding the Cali and consider it an excellent all round motorcycle, despite its faults. On paper it's no match for a whole variety of very much more sophisticated and less costly

Japanese multis, but in practice it's unique blend of individuality, styling and character make it a thoroughly enjoyable and practical motorcycle which stands an excellent chance of defying the logic of buying high tech one litre mounts from the Orient for a lot less.



### BRIEF SPECIFICATIONS

<b>Engine:</b>	<i>90 V twin cylinder four-stroke.</i>	<b>Brakes:</b>	<i>Twin 300mm front discs. Single 242mm rear disc. Integral system.</i>
<b>Displacement:</b>	<i>948.8cc.</i>	<b>Fuel tank capacity:</b>	<i>5.5 Imp. gallons including 0.66 gallon reserve.</i>
<b>Bore X stroke:</b>	<i>88mm x 78mm.</i>	<b>Weight:</b>	<i>551lbs dry.</i>
<b>Compression ratio:</b>	<i>9.2 to 1.</i>	<b>Dimensions:</b>	<i>Wheelbase (loaded) 61". Length 93". Width 35" Height 61". Ground clearance 6.9".</i>
<b>Valve gear:</b>	<i>OHV pushrod operated.</i>	<b>Equipment:</b>	<i>Screen, crash bars, panniers, carrier, two mirrors, speedo, tach, voltmeter and neutral, high beam, generator, oil and indicator lights.</i>
<b>Carburation:</b>	<i>2 Dell Orto VHB30.</i>	<b>Max. torque:</b>	<i>7.7kgm at 5,200</i>
<b>Transmission:</b>	<i>Gear primary drive, five speed constant mesh gearbox. Shaft final drive.</i>	<b>Max. power:</b>	<i>70bhp at 6,700.</i>
<b>Ignition:</b>	<i>Coil, battery and contact breaker.</i>	<b>Max. speed:</b>	<i>118mph (claimed)</i>
<b>Alternator:</b>	<i>14V - 20A.</i>	<b>Standing ¼ mile:</b>	<i>13.7 (estimated)</i>
<b>Starting:</b>	<i>Electric starter.</i>	<b>Fuel consumption:</b>	<i>48.9mpg (overall)</i>
<b>Wheels:</b>	<i>Light alloy castings WM3/2.15-18" CP2 rims front and back.</i>		
<b>Tyres:</b>	<i>120/90 H18 front and back.</i>		