

motorcycle MECHANICS

Fiery flat-tracker

TONIGHTLY



**Guzzi California:
Cruiser or bruiser?**

**Flying tonight-
Honda 50 tune-up**

RS25ODX and KE100 check-out

Leathers: How not to get skinned



MOTORWAY BRUISER

Moto Guzzi's California II brings some big differences to the long distance tourer.

Guzzi's California 2 turns heads. As it clatters along, with all the finesse of a Panzer division, even the most disinterested passers-by stop to watch.

That may not be a particularly flattering description of the Guzzi's progress but it is reasonably accurate. The V-twin is quite noisy, both mechanically and from the deep bark of the twin exhausts. From the rider's point of view this is amplified by the screen and by the rather clunky gear change.

The layout also gives the rider the impression that the California, is big, clumsy and heavy — you travel extra carefully when it's wet or when the surface is a bit muddy. This particular impression is not entirely accurate because the Guzzi is stable enough to let the rider put both feet on to the foot boards as soon as the wheels were turning. And high speed handling was surprisingly good — but before I got as far as discovering that, I had to get past the laid-back styling and cumbersome feel of the bike.

Normally we try to make allowances for the type of bike — and the type of rider who is likely to be interested in such a machine — and to shift the test's emphasis in this direction. With bikes built along low-rider lines this isn't always easy. The riding position doesn't lend itself to high speed travel; it's not easy to use the handling or braking to the full; the wind puts a continuous strain on the arms and the seating position prevents the rider supporting himself through the footrests.

None of this applied to the California — largely because there are two differences between it and other, similarly-styled machines: the large screen and the foot boards.

The screen kills top end performance but the bike makes no pretence at being a high flier anyway. Nor is it very good in dense traffic.

The bike, the engine, the gearing and all the machine's characteristics are aimed at open road riding, at anything up to 90 mph cruising.

Comfort is good with a well-shaped seat and handlebars which give a relaxed position, protected from the windstream by the tall, flat screen. There is up-and-down adjustment for the screen height, but the rake angle is fixed. The footboards add to the general comfort because you can position your feet to suit your own size and, on a long run, it's easy to move about and find a slightly different position. The boards also stretch back far enough to let the rider take weight through his legs and avoid getting jolted about over rough road surfaces.

The relaxed ride — the bike encourages you to swan about sedately — is spoiled only by the rather heavy controls and especially the very heavy gearshift. This is a rocking lever, so you only need to tread downwards to shift gears in either direction but it needed a heavy foot and even then the shifter mechanism could be clunky. Oddly enough it was OK when the bike was cold and got rougher and rougher as it warmed up.

Braking is by Guzzi's linked system with the rear disc and one front disc activated by the foot pedal, additional front braking being available from the usual handlebar lever. On other Guzzis I've found that the separate front brake has not been necessary; on the California I often had to use it. The linked brakes also seemed to lose a lot of power in the wet — alternatively it is quite likely that they just needed more pressure. The single front brake worked well enough and as they are all made of the same materials and design it seems likely that the linked brake would also work but I was unwilling to use any more pressure on the awkwardly-placed pedal.

The difficulty seemed to be in the control linkage rather than at the discs because deliberate attempts to lock the wheels on poor surfaces always failed to make the bike slide or skid unpredictably.

Perhaps the most surprising thing about the Guzzi was that it handled and steered so easily. Neither the character nor the styling lend themselves to country-lane scratching yet the California could be flicked through turns like a lightweight. Standing on new Pirelli Gordon tyres, the Guzzi held the road firmly, irrespective of the weather conditions.

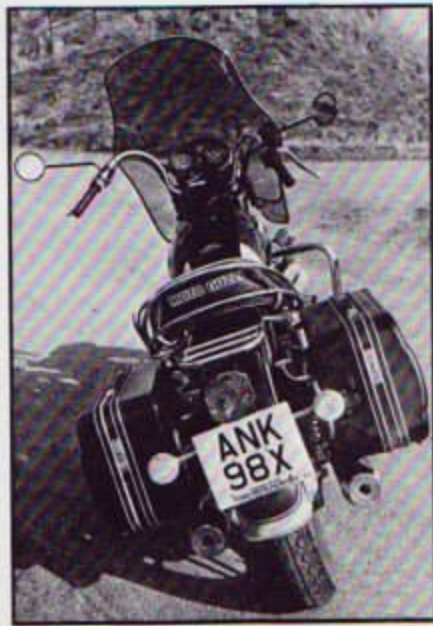
When we first picked up the bike there was a trace of high-speed weaving which set in around 80mph. The rear suspension — linked gas shocks — had also been set at the highest pressure which was much too hard for solo riding. Reducing the pressure gave a much better ride and also removed the slight instability.

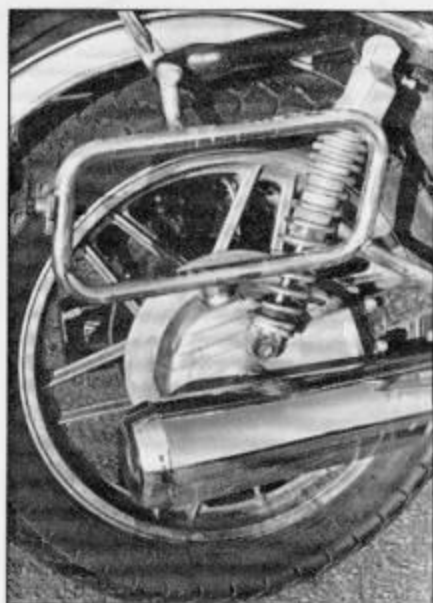
The bike is at its happiest on lengthy, open-road journeys — especially if there's no hurry. The screen does a reasonable job of keeping off the weather and airborne insects but it won't keep you warm or dry. However, there's plenty of room in the large, detachable panniers or rear carrier to keep waterproof suits and boots and whenever it wasn't actually raining, it made a pleasant change not to have to climb into an overcoat.

The luggage-carrying ability also proved very useful in numerous other ways and usually made up for the bike's lack of all-out performance, which is a total lack. At MIRA the Guzzi put in times which are not far removed from most 250s.

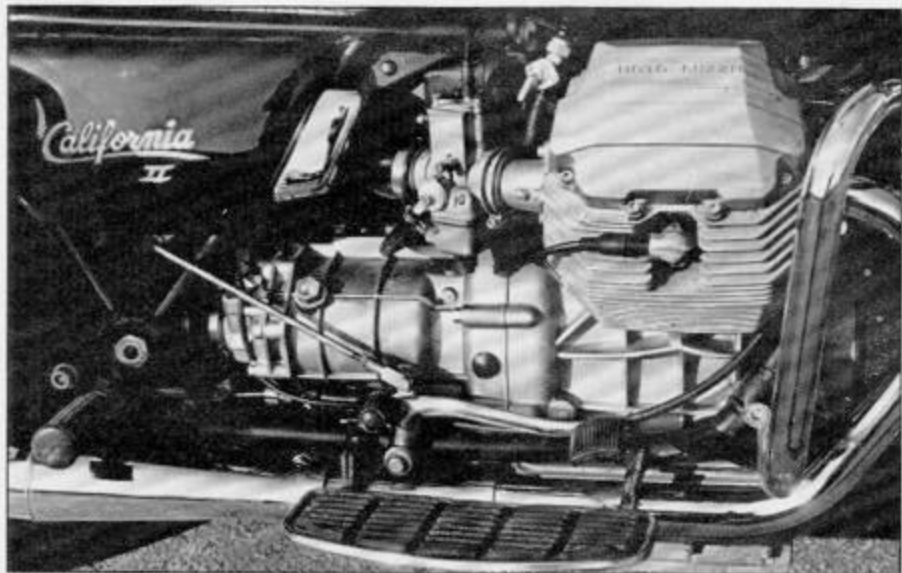
It is grossly overgeared — which gives a long, lazy stride for touring but limits top speed in fifth gear to around 100mph and that is with the wind behind the bike. In fourth gear it was marginally quicker, scoring a best run at 103.9mph and managing 96mph into the wind. Of course, all of the figures were taken with the rider virtually upright as there was no point in trying to crouch behind such a large screen.

Quarter-mile times were in the 14-second bracket and the top-gear roll-on test, the proof of flexibility, didn't show the Guzzi up too well either. From 30mph in top it wouldn't even





Above: *Pirelli Gordons* gave the Guzzi firm roadholding. Top right: *linked air shocks* give a good ride. The panniers can be locked on to the subframe. Below: a lazy cruiser, the V-twin is spoilt by poor fuel economy.



pull full throttle — the power had to be fed gently to prevent the engine from coughing and stalling. Top gear acceleration through the full rev range was about the same as most 400cc machines.

The obvious lack of power coupled with the high gearing suggested that the big motor would probably be very easy on fuel. Sadly it proved to be the opposite and this is really the California's biggest failing. Juddering along below 50mph in top gear only gave us 54mpg — barely an improvement on "normal" riding. Hard riding got the Guzzi down into the 40s.

One saving grace was the big tank; with a fuel tap and reserve on each side you get three warnings before running the tank dry! The first tap runs on to reserve after 4 gallons have been used and normally this would take the bike about 200 miles — which is an adequate enough range.

The California 2 has a few improvements over earlier Guzzis, which should be appreciated by anyone who has had to live with one for any length of time. The prop stand has been revised so that it is much easier to use and more stable in use. Those who do their

own servicing will be pleased to learn that the air box has been changed to make access to the air cleaner much easier.

The remaining details can be seen on the bike: deep mudguards look a little antiquated but they keep the dirt off the bike and rider; a large grab rail plus a usefully-sized rear carrier round off the load-carrying ability and also give the passenger a good hand-hold. The seat, although nicely contoured for the rider, does not leave a lot of room for a passenger.

Large, locking panniers can carry a good amount of luggage and can be locked on to the bike or removed and carried with suit-case handles. These proved to be extremely useful and were easily fitted or removed but the clasps on the pannier lids were very stiff and difficult to undo.

From my point of view these extras — plus the screen — made all the difference to the Moto Guzzi. They turned it into a convenient and useful machine which is completely different from virtually all other bikes. This difference and the usefulness more than compensated for the poor top-end performance. □

SPECIFICATIONS



REPORT BY JOHN ROBINSON

Recommended retail price	£2,899
Warranty	12 months, unlimited mileage
Availability	Reasonable
Service intervals	1,860 miles

PERFORMANCE

Top speed	103.9mph
Standing start ¼ mile	14.3sec/88.4mph
30mph top gear roll on ¼ mile	16.4sec/73.1mph
Fuel consumption	Best 54mpg Worst 45mpg Average 52mpg

ENGINE

Type	OHV, 90-degree V-twin
Bore and stroke	88 x 78mm
Piston displacement	948.8cc
Compression ratio	9.2:1
Fuel system	Two 30mm Del Orto, slide type, gravity fed

TRANSMISSION

Gears	5-speed
Clutch	Tri-type multi-plate, flywheel driven lever controlled from handlebar
Primary drive	Gear
Final drive	Shaft
Primary reduction	1.235:1
Gear ratios	1st — 2.000, 2nd — 1.388, 3rd — 1.047, 4th — 0.869, 5th — 0.750

CHASSIS

Type	Tubular construction, double cradle
Suspension	Front — Marzocchi telescopic Gear — Marzocchi dual units
Front tyre	120/90 H 18 Pirelli
Rear tyre	120/90 H 18 Pirelli
Front brake	300mm diameter — Brembo linked system
Rear brake	242mm diameter — Brembo

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	1470mm
Length	2199mm
Seat height	1060mm
Dry weight	555lb
Fuel capacity	25 litres

INSTRUMENTS

Includes: Speedometer, odometer, tachometer, warning lights, flashing indicators

IMPORTER:

Coburn & Hughes,
53/61 Park Street, Luton, Beds.