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Motorcycling

Kawasaki

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Guzzi California II

Cagiva SXT125

Yamaha XT125



Service Kawasaki's 100s/125K

Visors & Crash bars investigated



Photography by Andy Mills

Spaghetti with American sauce

The Moto Guzzi California II disguises its past-a with a tasty American dressing

Words by Tim Rumball

No compromise motorcycles are nice. When a bike makes a statement about its function there's no confusion. The rider knows immediately where the machine is headed and has a fair idea of what it will do. Take the Italian Moto Guzzi California II for instance. Massive styling, 949ccs of loping V-twin fourstroke engine and enough chrome to dazzle a blind man on a sunny day cry out for the highway and hot weather. There is no way this bike will let you be misled by its intent. Leisurely cruising, posing in the high street and gobbling up miles of road.

The distinctive styling with tinted screen, footboards and high curved handlebars has its origin firmly rooted in the States. The layout was conceived for bikes supplied to the California Highway Police department, but does not completely hide the historic charisma of the Moto Guzzi marque.

The heart of the shaft drive California II is Moto Guzzi's pushrod motor with a 90 degree transverse vee configuration. This version pokes out 65bhp at a slumbering 6700rpm. The large, soft motor is new for this bike, the earlier 850 T3 California carrying the 844cc motor of the Guzzi T3 which is still sold in

European guise. Extra capacity has been found by opening out the 850's 83mm bore to 88mm without altering the 78mm stroke. Despite the extra capacity 3.5bhp has been lost to the smaller engine but maximum power is developed 300rpm earlier and torque is a grunting 55.7lb.ft developed at 5200rpm. The 950cc Mk II version was released at the 1982 Milan Show and sells for £2699 including tax.

Lubrication is wet sump and two 30mm carburettors feed the cylinders. A 9.2:1 compression ratio demands the use of four star petrol.

There are two fuel taps, one feeding each carburettor. A small, plastic, spring-loaded choke lever is mounted above the lefthand carb.

A round plastic head is fitted to the ignition key. This needs to be fiddled with every time the ignition is switched on, as the key ring consistently gets in the way. The ring carries keys for the panniers, steering and seat locks. None have a very positive action.

Starting on the Guzzi is electric only. A 0.7kW starter motor spins the engine effortlessly, but both the side stand and clutch lever have safety cutouts and need to be pulled in before the engine will fire. Ignition is by traditional coil and battery with contact breaker points.

Once warm the engine settles into a lumpy, slow, but very reliable tickover. When the

throttle is blipped with the bike stationary torque reaction from the heavy flywheel causes the bike to rock gently from side to side.

An armchair seating position is forced on the rider by the high, raked-back handlebars, bucket shaped seat and forward mounted gearchange and brake pedals. My immediate thought was that this would be horribly uncomfortable. But the high, tinted screen has a very effective wind breaking action. Air is pushed round behind the rider and in wet weather this can give rise to the odd situation of having a dry front and a wet back. The reversed air flow also causes visors on full face helmets to lift and flap about if they are not pinned closed. That can be avoided by wearing an open faced lid, adequate from the point of view of comfort on this machine, and essential for the posing image.

The fixed screen is tall, with a chrome trim, and riders of short stature are forced to look through the tinted perspex. It's rather like watching tele, and not conducive to precise road observation. For taller riders it is possible to look over the top but the chrome trim obstructs vision. Being quite lanky I overcame the problem by sitting on the pillion seat. This gave enough height to look over the top without pushing me into the air flow, but made the front end of the bike feel light and the steering skittish. It did offer an

alternative to the hard and uncomfortable driver's seat which traps the rider in its deep, scalloped well.

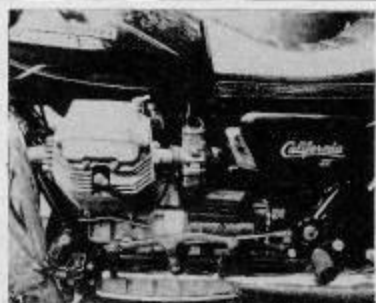
Pillion passengers fared little better. There's less room than there looks on that King and Queen seat and it proved to be cramped two up. The seat slope also pitches the pillion forward, so keeping a tight hold of the ample grab rail is essential. Pity we can't have the American G5 version with a flatter seat profile, although this is quite a different machine. It is based on the semi-automatic Guzzi G5 Convert with a manual gearbox conversion.

The footboards deserve a special credit. They offer lots of room to move your feet about and do not hinder operation of the foot brake or rocking gearchange pedal. Since the aura of the bike does not encourage fast cornering, the limits they and the broad reaching crashbars place on cornering clearance are not noticeable. For some riders the lefthand cylinder was too close to knees and shins for comfort but I found enough room on the footboard to keep my leg out of the way.

Gearchanging is clunky and can be extremely difficult if only the toe is used. Once the technique is mastered of kicking the back of the shifter for up changes and the front for down it's not so bad. However when the engine gets hot the dry, double disc clutch, which is heavy to operate at best, seems to swell and changing gear can degenerate into a frenzied stomping, particularly when the bike is stationary. Fortunately the motor is very flexible. Top (fifth) gear is quite high but fourth will pull almost from tickover.

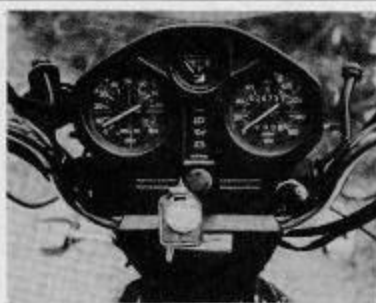
Real punch from the long stroke motor comes in at 4000rpm. The bike can be cruised at its maximum speed of just over 100mph, but the engine sounds strained. Eighty is better. At this speed engine noise is not so harsh, and less is reflected at the driver from the screen. It's a measure of the manufacturer's inability to disguise an excellent Guzzi motorcycle beneath all the flash and chrome that the bike willed the rider to travel quickly. This is no Harley to the heart, it's a racer with a ball and chain.

Final drive is by cardan shaft with bevel gears. It transmits power in such a direct



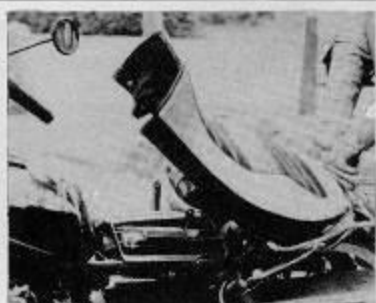
90 degree V

Engine is a twin cylinder, fourstroke, pushrod design displacing 948.8cc. Two 30mm Dell'Orto carbs feed the cylinders. Gearchange with extensive linkage and massive rocking pedal is cumbersome. Footboards with rubber slip mats are excellent allowing the left leg to be repositioned away from protruding cylinder. Massive side stand has an engine cut out, and rubber covered peg half way up its shaft for folding out. Substantial crash bars front and rear offer good protection. Starter motor is mounted in line behind the crankcase. . . . Fuse box and paper air filter element housed beneath lefthand side cover. Carburetors must be removed to gain access to filter. Flowing tank and seat lines give a good ride position.



Instrument console

Rev counter (left) is red lined at 9000rpm but engine power fades above 7000rpm. Voltmeter (top) keeps an eye on the 12V, 24Ah battery charge. Indicator warning lights mounted either side. Speedometer (right) is fairly accurate at 100mph and houses odometer and trip. Trip reset button mounted on righthand side of console. Warning lights for high beam, lights, oil pressure, battery charge and neutral work but have vague illumination. Ignition key has a plastic head with key ring through the side. Ring made complete insertion of key difficult. The same key opens the locking fuel tank flap. Strong mounting arms for the tinted screen easily stood up to 100mph cruising, but are not adjustable.



Toolkit access

Lockable seat lifts from the front exposing the toolkit. Kit is substantial but does not include a pressure gauge for the air adjustable front and rear suspension. Battery is housed beneath tray. Substantial quick release panniers are plastic with flush fitting carrying handles. Lids are key locked with press release catches either side. They have a good capacity but will not take a helmet. Grab rail behind the seat is thin but well placed. Pillion footrests are well positioned, but passengers are thrown forward by the steeply angled seat, and there is not a lot of room. Twistgrip action is heavy, but has a friction damper which acts as a cruise control. Mirrors are too small and their images blurry.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE

Type: Transverse, 90 degree, V twin fourstroke. Bore x stroke: 89 x 78mm. Displacement: 649cc. Compression ratio: 9.2:1. Carburettor: Two Dell'Orto 30mm slide type. Max. bhp: 65 @ 6700rpm. Max torque: 55.7lb.ft @ 5200rpm.

TRANSMISSION

Overall gear ratios: 1st 11.64, 2nd 8.08, 3rd 6.10, 4th 5.06, 5th (top) 4.37:1. Clutch: Dry, multiple. Final drive: Shaft.

FRAME and FORKS

Frame: Tubular steel double cradle. Front suspension: Telescopic fork with balanced, air-assisted coil springs and oil damping. Rear suspension: Swinging fork with two balanced, air-assisted coil springs and oil damped units. Five pre-load positions. Front travel: 5.8in. Rear travel: 3.1in. Castor angle: 62 degrees.

WHEELS and BRAKES

Front tyre size: 120/90 H18. Rear tyre size: 120/90H18. Front brake: Twin 11.8in. discs. Rear brake: Single 9.5in. disc. Rear disc and one front disc operated by foot pedal. Remaining front disc operated by bar lever.

ELECTRICS

Ignition: Battery/coil with contact breakers. Battery: 12V, 24Ah. Alternator: 280W max. Headlight: 60/55W H4. Tail/stop lamp: 5/21W. Indicators: 21W. Warning lights: Turn, oil pressure, generator, neutral, lights on, high beam, 1.2W.

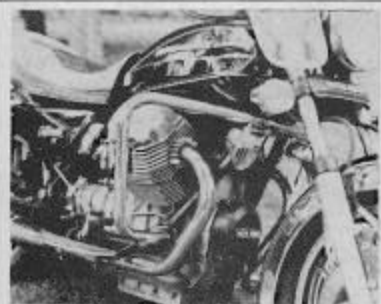
DIMENSIONS

Length: 93.3in. Width: 35.0in. Height: 61.8in. Wheelbase: 61.5in. Ground clearance: 6.9in. Dry weight: 551lb. Fuel tank: 5.5gal (inc. reserve).



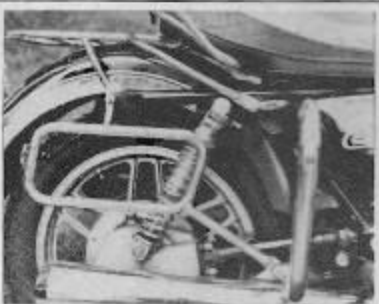
COMPARISONS

Make	Speed prone	SS 1/4 mile prone	Dry weight	Claimed bhp	mpg	Price inc. Tax
Guzzi California II	102mph	n/a	551lb	65 @ 6700rpm	41	£2899
Harley FLT 1340	100mph	15.95sec/81mph	725lb	60 @ 5200rpm	48	£5999
Kawasaki Z1000LTD	129mph	11.55sec/113mph	512lb	95 @ 8500rpm	44	£1999
Yamaha XV750SE	104mph	13.83sec/94mph	467lb	61 @ 7000rpm	46	£1945
BMW R100RS	121mph	13.44sec/100mph	483lb	70 @ 7000rpm	48	£3879
Yamaha TR1 1000	116mph	13.44sec/100mph	485lb	70 @ 6500rpm	48	£2025



Linked brakes

Footbrake pedal operates single 9.5in rear disc and the righthand front 11.8in disc. The system gives powerful, controlled braking. There is a rod linkage from the pedal to the master cylinder and reservoir beneath the righthand side cover. Access is good. Alternator is mounted at the forward end of the crankshaft. Output is 280W. Finned sump holds 5.5 pints of oil, and the gearbox 1.25 pints. Deeply valenced mudguard protects engine well, but takes a lot of cleaning. Front fork has balanced air assistance working at a pressure of 42.5psi. A garage air line will fit but it's easy to overload the seals. Twin Flamm air horns are bright chromed, and powerful. Headlight is 60/55W halogen.



Gleaming behind

Shaft drive makes up the righthand arm of the swinging fork. There is a cush drive in the rear hub but action of the shaft is still fierce. Air assisted shock absorbers have five pre-load settings and three inches of travel. They cope well with road bumps and the bike's weight. Pannier frames are substantial and give a rigid mounting for the boxes. The back end of the bike would look less of a plumber's nightmare if these were painted black. Cast 18 inch wheels front and rear carry 120/90H18 tubed Pirelli Gordons which have good grip and straight line stability. Same-size tyres give the bike an Electraglide look. Carrying rack is long and slim with reasonable capacity. Silencers are big but not quiet.

fashion despite the cush drives in the gearbox and rear hub that mistakes in the direction of gear shifting are to be avoided like the plague.

Stability is excellent on the original Pirelli Gordon tyres, 120/90H18 front and rear. The bike could be chuffed around in circles on full lock with complete confidence. There is a twistgrip damper on the throttle which acts as a cruise control. One crazy lunatic on the staff tightened this down and rode two up, hands off the bars at 60mph. He's alive to report that the bike held its line unflinchingly and leaned predictably through bends. Throttle action is heavy and the thick grips accentuate the long reach to the levers. On long runs it caused thumb cramp.

During the course of the MIRA testing session the California twice threw a tantrum on full throttle runs, once spewing oil up the track, the second time dropping a carburettor needle, thus defying our attempts to obtain performance figures. On its first trip back to the importers, Coburn and Hughes, where a blocked oil breather was found to be the problem, they decided to try some different tyres on the bike. Despite the excellent performance of Dunlop Red Arrows on other machines the California objected strongly. Try as I did to override the problem the bike refused to oblige, feeling edgy and unstable at low speed. At higher speed the problem disappeared.

A duplex cradle frame holds the motor with balanced, air-assistance front and rear, the upside-down mounted rear units also having five pre-load adjustments. Ridden within the dictates of its styling the bike is very

comfortable – apart from that unforgiving seat. Road bumps are not transmitted to the rider and the bike can be flicked through bends with great gusto. Yes, the word flicked is appropriate. Most of the bike's 551lb dry weight is low in the frame making directional changes quick. Even the screen does little to upset stability although gusty cross winds can push the bike off line.

The California has a 5.5 gallon petrol tank with a locked flap over the filter cap. It is opened with the ignition key and often jammed. The tank gives a range of about 230 miles including 0.75gal reserve. Average consumption worked out at 42 mpg during the test and varied little. A worst figure of 39mpg and a best of 43mpg reflect use varying from 90mph thrashes up to London and gentle country road pottering. When the test bike ran on to reserve the engine simply cut dead, giving no warning and could prove to be embarrassing with two taps to switch over.

Massive engine braking from the 9.2:1 compression motor supplements twin 11.8in hydraulic discs at the front of the bike and a single 9.5in disc at the rear. The foot brake operates the rear and one of the front discs, while the handlebar lever works the other. Used alone the lever brake is poor and it takes time to get used to the foot brake being more effective.

A narrow chromed rack and capacious panniers enhance the California's touring image. The panniers are quick release affairs locked onto a framework either side of the rear wheel. Each has a locking lid and carrying handle. They are very good, but won't take a helmet.

Handlebar switches are low profile and pyramid shaped. They are confusing, small and vague in operation. The lights switch on the left console looks like it's on when it's off, and the indicator switch is mounted too high.



The bike is equipped with side and centre stands, but only the massive side stand was ever used. It can be quite a stretch to retract, but is simple and less of a heave than rolling the back wheel off the ground.

Night riding is rendered almost impossible for shorter rides by the tinted screen. The 60/55W halogen headlight beam produced a good spread of light.

For all its faults the bike has charm. I had never realised how many Californias there

are on the road until I rode the Mk II. Owners would pull alongside, nod and motor on, and that's a lot of what it's all about. Flashy chrome stripes down the mudguard, a white and black King and Queen seat, tinted screen and high bars. They're all show, a nightmare to clean in winter, but a step away from the average bland Jap offering. If you fancy a cool, relaxed image for the summer, grab a California II and head for the highway. ■