

A LINK HOUSE PUBLICATION NOVEMBER '82 75p

SUPER BIKE

**This Month:
Bruce Penhall:
A Pictorial Profile
Type Approval:
You And The Law
Earls Court Bike '82**

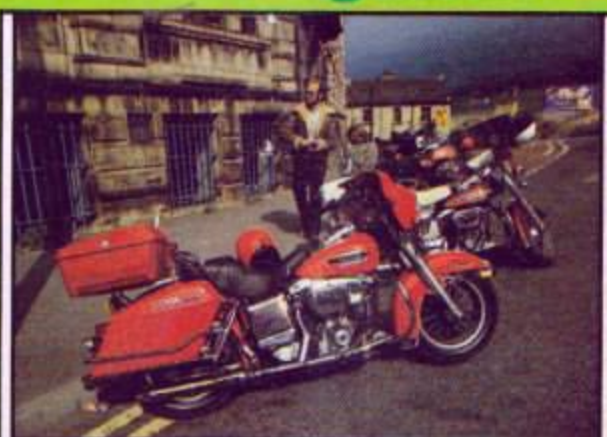


THE INCREDIBLE HUNK

Z1000: Turning Green And Getting Mean



Guzzi Down South



Harleys Up North

20 PAGE TECHNICAL SPECIAL: FRAMES

GUZZI-CALLI BLUES

Tony Middlehurst rounds up the Spaghetti Western

It sounds terribly egocentric, but one of my favourite pastimes outside of tying strands of fuse wire across the local Fizzyway is reading ancient copies of this very magazine.

It's a funny thing, but magazines seem to mature like old cheese. The longer you leave them between re-reads, the better they seem; even stuff you were embarrassed about at the time of genesis acquires a mellow tinge after a couple of years.

This effect is particularly noticeable on your own stumbling efforts, but there's a similar oddness about the contemporary concoctions of one's colleagues. Look here, for example, at Mike Maxwell's write-up on the 1980 Moto Guzzi California. Regard the stirring prose! Chuckle at the turn of phrase! It seems so fresh now, almost as if one hadn't ever read it in the first place... ah. Ahem. Sorry Max. One hadn't actually read it in the first place.

But here one is now, reading same, and agreeing with much of same two years later on having sampled Guzzi's 1982 version of this likeable tug. And what with unconfirmed rumours flying around concerning the fate of M-G's 500/650 model range, the big-bore twins now warrant even closer scrutiny.

The large capacity Guzzis have ridden high and handsome on a wave of folklore and fanaticism for many a long year, especially in this country. Although Spada 1000s are few and far between on British roads, the T3/T4 and Le Mans 850s have carved a useful niche for themselves in spite of frighteningly high-priced spare parts (thankfully reduced in recent times) and the usual fears associated with Italian merchandise (rust, poor finish, unreliability etc).

In fact, the new California is an impressive scout both to ride and to look at, so long as you don't mind looking a bit like a Harlem pimp that is. There aren't many white bikes on the market these days, but that's a colour option on the California (and the Le Mans III) so it's get your shades and shorty helmet out boys and less go for a putt. Non-discerning motorists can easily mistake you for a bobby, which can be quite handy in heavy traffic, but the dirt don't half show up on the tank and sidepanels, so duster diligence is the order of the day.

But what about under the skin? Well, the big difference is in the engine department. A 5mm overbore brings engine capacity up to 948.8cc (from 844cc), a nifty move in that it occasions a quite massive increase in the bike's published horsepower and torque figures compared to the 1980 ancestor.

Somehow, the Guzzi engineers have contrived an extra 15.3bhp and no less than 20.7lb/ft, simply by going over to the Spada engine. Hmmm... who are we, to disbelieve? Especially as the new California actually feels pokier than other Guzzis we've ridden.

Picking up the bike at Coburn & Hughes' Luton HQ was a saddening experience, however. Twirling the throttle on the run-up to a long incline half a mile away from C&H produced about as much response as a fly-swatter on a rhino's rump; labouring up the hill revealed a distinct lack of power anywhere over about 4000rpm.



Quick as a flash, my finely-tuned brain diagnosed the fact that there was summat wrong wi't bike. Something behind my throbbing forehead was saying "ignition"; horrible memories of a grotesquely backfiring Electra-Glide materialised through the mists on my visor... lights coming on in suburban bedroom windows as shotgun explosions issued forth from the accursed Harley pipes at 12.30 am... aaarrgh. Then, it was down to a faulty transistor module; the Guzzi wasn't half as bad, but it was backfiring on the overrun and it felt as flat as a cowpat in a wet field.

Returning the machine revealed a seized shaft in the advance/retard mechanism, which meant that the ignition was stuck in the retard mode. Very boring. One new unit later (thanks for staying behind after school, Eddie) and we were back in business. The bike gave no more trouble after that.

The Spada engine is without doubt the nicest of the Guzzi powerplants. With 62 and a bit pounds/foot of torque, the California at long last possesses the kind of grunt it always looked like it should have (but never really did). It's possible to surprise many a sneering Jap multi owner on one of these babies, thanks to the happy marriage of a tight transmission and a bottom-weighted power band. Considering the colossal size and weight of the flywheel, unchanged in the face of lightening "improvement" exercises by other manufacturers, the California feels at least as fast as (say) Honda's Gold Wing, until 70-80mph anyway when other factors come into play. More of that later.

One slightly irritating fault on our tester was the gearbox's reluctance to remain in first gear. The cog would be selected alright, judging by the steelyard clunk accompanying depression of the neatly effective heel-and-toe lever, but then, with a perverse silence, the box would slip back into neutral, leaving the rider eating dust in a decidedly unhip posture. Worn selector forks, maybe.

As with all shaft-drive bikes, the California will pump itself up on its suspension on up-changes and chirp the rear tyre on down-changes unless the revs are perfectly synchronised. Luckily, though, synchronisation

is easy thanks to that huge flywheel; but anyone wanting to try out the usual shaft trick (letting out the clutch in first gear with the bike against the brake) will have to watch it here, because the single disc operation of the front brake lever isn't really up to the job of keeping the machine stationary.

The air-assisted suspension from the Le Mans III has been incorporated on the new California, running at mean pressures of around 48psi (front) and 64psi (rear), give or take 16psi or so depending on load. Both ends are equalised, not that we were about to tamper with the setting following the Le Mans experience earlier in the year.

Regular readers may remember that bike; the air containers all failed, allowing hydraulic fluid to squirt from the valves whenever an air gauge was offered up to them. The system appears to be very susceptible to rupture, thanks to the very high pressures required. Only the Suzuki type of gauge can be used with any degree of success, all other types allowing every last bit of air out of the airbags. No gauge is provided with the Guzzi.

Preload on the rear shocks can be altered in the usual way, with a C-spanner (which is provided). Unfortunately, however, you need to remove the rear wheel to be able to turn the collars owing to their awful design. The spanner itself has all the integrity of a stick of liquorice. It's a source of constant amazement, this Italian insistence on spoiling what is a quality product for the sake of a few lire.

Actually, the California ride is adequate enough for the rider to ignore these shortcomings, although it's a fair guess that potential owners will want to do a bit of two-up touring. In this mode it isn't too difficult to bottom out both ends, so it really is important for Guzzi to look at and sort out the suspension before much more damage is done to their reputation.

Considering Guzzi's unknowing efforts to botch up its suspension, and despite its chubby appearance, the California remains one of the best-handling superbikes on B-roads. Maybe it fools the rider a little into being over-impressed; after all, it does seem strange sitting behind a large screen and

