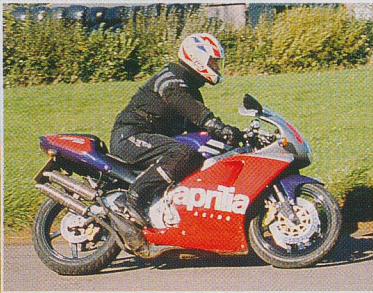


FEBRUARY 1996

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THE QUALITY MONTHLY

Motorcycle SPORT



APRILIA RS250



GUZZI NEVADA

On Test: **MUZ SKORPION**

Single stinger

APRILIA RS250

What a Cracker!

GUZZI NEVADA

Italian Custom

HONDA XR250

Dirt Devil

Cagiva v Citroen

Counting the costs!

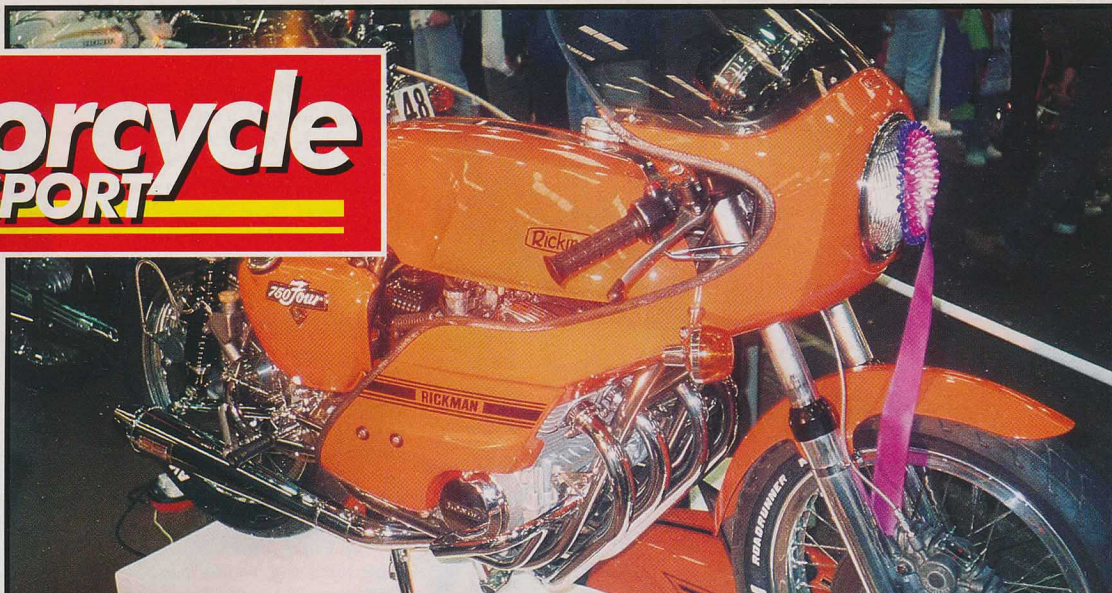
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ISSUE NUMBER: 424

Motorcycle SPORT



Motorcycle shows extend throughout the year these days, culminating of course in the Big One at the NEC in November. Motorcycle Sport is pleased to be associated with several of the 1996 shows, as detailed in the "News" pages in this issue

Investment

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Letters

Advocates of new-age "FF" motorcycles, controlled by supine pilots, ignore loss of the motorcyclist's bonus of a lofty riding stance. Mr Hill writes, mildly, that the conventional bike's riding position helps in overtaking in safety; Mr Thompson says the FF-ers are bonkers. Takes all sorts ... especially among MCS correspondents.

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One Track

OT sheds a tear for all the poor folk out there who don't ride a motorcycle: most to be pitied are the faint-hearted ex-bikers seduced at an impressionable stage into Fiats and Rovers and such .

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Books Reviewed

"Jim likes to preach" - Jim being Jim Rogers who has written a book on investment opportunities ... presumably for bikers ... capitalising meantime on other opportunities while riding with a beautiful companion, Tabitha. They're both on BMWs, though that is possibly not significant, and cover many boring miles together. "Investment Biker" (£12.99 to you, guv) is a world away from Bacon's feel-the-width efforts reviewed in this issue.

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What a Cracker!

And it's an Aprilia - the RS250. Mr Kerr rides the road version of "Mad Max" Biaggi's world-championship-winning bike and thinks it's, well, pretty fair. (He quoted somebody else saying it was a cracker and drop-dead gorgeous, and that sort of thing; Mr K keeps a tight rein on his own adjectives.)

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Company Cars

Odd sort of title for an MCS article? Perhaps. The Spy examines the surprising proposition that a company man might not be better off financially in opting for a motorcycle instead of a car over a 15-20,000-mile year. A diesel engine and low-cost servicing make quite a difference

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Titch Allen recalls Ixion, masterly commentator on the world of motorcycling for over half a century.

All manuscripts, illustrations and photographs submitted to *Motorcycle Sport*, whether at our request or otherwise, are submitted entirely at the supplier's risk. While every possible care is taken, in the event of loss or damage to material, etc, the company cannot hold itself in any way responsible.

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 GU21 1LY Telephone 01483 733873 Fax 01483 776573

MOTORCYCLE SPORT
 PO Box 2, St Columb, Cornwall TR9 6SP.
 Tel 01637 881201 Fax 01637 881203
 E: Mail :mcs@easynet.co.uk
 Internet Ref:
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VEE-TWINNS of the 90s

Moto Guzzi Nevada 750

Inauspicious early acquaintance blossoms into heartfelt appreciation by MCS test rider of the £4,995 Nevada's many qualities

NEW CLOTHES FOR AN OLD WORKHORSE

THE Moto Guzzi Nevada and I never had a good start and it says much for its character that, by the time it was returned, my feelings towards it were quite friendly. Through no fault of Three Cross, who are the importers and supplied the test machine, the bike booked for me suddenly became unavailable and they called to ask if I would mind a new one, which they would specially register for me. From the road-testing point of view, it can be a bit inconvenient, for it means that the machine needs treating with a gentle touch. On the other hand, I always enjoy riding a brand new bike for it gives a good idea what the new owner of such a bike would be feeling.

So, on one of the few wet days in September, I squelched my way down to Dorset and exchanged the faithful old R80 for a gleaming new Guzzi with just 40 miles on the odometer.

Made in the mould of the long-lived California, it comes with a lower price tag and specification and, like the same-capacity Strada (the California is now 1100cc), has a carburettor-fed engine – both producing a modest but perfectly acceptable 48bhp. Not much, I'll agree, but these are thundering European horses, not squeaky Oriental PSs, and were more than capable, or would be when the bike was fully run in, of dragging the Nevada up to 100mph or



Nevada 750: in the mould of the long-lived California

more. The difference between the Strada and the Nevada is that the former is designated an "all-rounder" and the latter a "cruiser" (which is why we chose it for this series). In reality this means our test bike had, at 1.482 metres (58.34 inches), a slightly longer, but far from outrageous, wheelbase and a seat height of 0.785 metres (a much more easily understood 30.9 inches).

What it also had was styling and looks in the Italian fashion, sweeping lines and eye-catching black and yellow paintwork. Naturally the traditional across-the-frame 90 degree vee-twin engine is where it has always been and, as with all in its stable, the Nevada has shaft drive. As a bonus our test bike came with a factory-supplied windscreen (£99.95), rear carrier and pad assembly (£74.95), engine protection bars (£74.95) and leather panniers

(a whopping £359.95); hard panniers are also available for £10 less, as is a top box kit, for £239.95. I was especially appreciative of the screen as the rain was still coming vertically off the New Forest. To be honest, I'd prefer the quickly detachable hard luggage but the thick, really thick, leather panniers supplied would put up fierce resistance to any attempt by the rain to enter and, I had to admit, they did suit the style of the bike.

Time to hit the road. Thankfully, the rain had stopped but it was still blowing a gale, something I was going to sample at closer quarters before long. It was explained to me that the bike didn't have a reserve; although there were two fuel taps they worked simultaneously. A

warning light would come on when nominal reserve was being used. This

amounted to four litres. So off we set with plans to stop and refuel man and



Carburettor-fed, Digiplex-ignition engine develops 48bhp

bike on the M27, just up the road. After nine miles, travelling along the A31; the Nevada gave a little cough, followed

Leather panniers come at £359.95; hard panniers will save you £10 on that figure

rapidly by a few more, then ... silence. Fortunately I was approaching a parking place and we drifted, powerless, into the large area. No warning lights were blinking at me so there should be enough fuel. I twiddled with the two taps in case one was inadvertently switched off.

When all else failed, I found the handbook which told me what I already knew...that the taps were both on. All I had to show for it was a wet handbook for it was raining again. Hmmm, now what?

I rocked the bike in the hope of hearing fuel sloshing around inside. A pointless exercise for the noise of A31 traffic was so loud that Concorde could have landed on me and I would not have noticed. Well, not 'till it actually landed. I looked around helplessly. There was no telephone in the large parking area, nor were there any other customers. I had meant to borrow my wife's telephone before I left home but it slipped my mind (I'd bought it for her for just such an occasion but this was not quite what I had in mind). Oh heck, now what do I do?

I peered into the gloom in both directions; but no sign of a house or anything else. Eventually a van pulled in that looked as though it should have a telephone. He didn't but said that there was a Happy Eater a quarter of a mile back up the road. "Funny, I don't remember that", I thought. I thanked him and trudged off. My helmet wouldn't fit in the panniers but in any case, although it had stopped raining, it was blowing straight into my face and I thought I might need it.

A quarter of a mile came and went, and no Happy Eater, just an Unhappy would-be Eater. We, me and the helmet, kept walking. Have you ever walked along the A31? No, but why should you?





Factory-supplied windscreen – appreciated during wet-weather riding. Rear carrier and pad assembly costs £74.95

There is no hard shoulder, just a narrow hard path that passing trucks seemed determined to share with you. Isn't this fun? Eventually, after 2.4 miles (I know, I checked later), a very hot, very sticky and very fed up motorcyclist staggered into the Happy Eater that I thought by then must be a mirage. You can get very warm walking in motorcycle gear but, although you might not have walked along the A31, I bet you know that already.

I called Three Cross and said that, light notwithstanding, I was sure I was out of fuel. They said they would send a truck and I fell upon the Happy Eater special lunch and to hell with my cholesterol.

Sure enough, it was out of fuel and I later discovered that the light didn't warn me because of a faulty sensor, a one-off problem. I tell you this, it was not given another chance, I always filled up long before spluttering time.

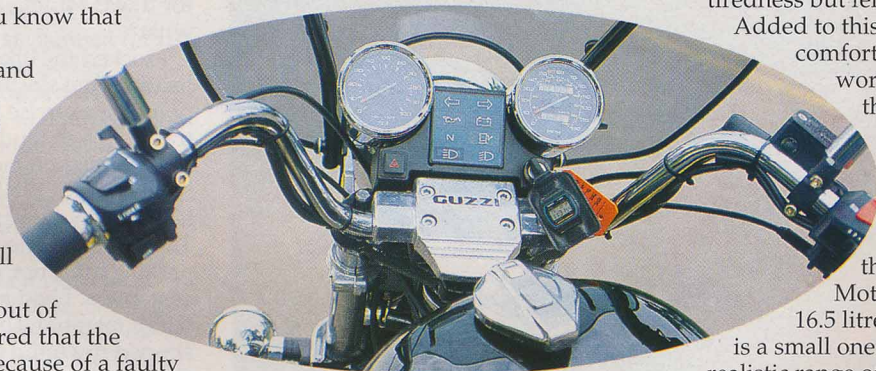
DIGIPLEX IGNITION

ALL for the sake of one little light expiring! So you can see that our beginning together was not auspicious and a little fence mending was needed. It took about five miles when all was forgiven and we were speaking to each other. I suppose I get to ride a Moto Guzzi once every few years and, every time, it is a happy reunion.

A Moto Guzzi has a feel all of its own. Having ridden a succession of vee-twins in the past year, all of them Japanese, the European feel of the Nevada was clear. Even the vibration, typically vee-twin as it was, was different, it vibrated across the frame and not from back to front!

Daft, I know, but that is how a Guzzi always feels to me.

I suppose it must be 25 years since I first tested a Guzzi, a 750cc V7, if I remember rightly, and in all the years they have all had the same feel. In truth, in all that time the engines, at least until the arrival of fuel-injection on the California and others, haven't changed much from the engine that first saw life as the power unit of a small army truck. I like long-lived engines, their pedigree



Wide handlebars proved comfortable

is well established and, whilst there is no doubt merit in yet another new from the drawing-board engine, I appreciate slow refinement. In the case of the Nevada this comes in the form of digital ignition, which is described as a three-dimensional map in a Digiplex unit. A ceramic disc tells a chip in the unit of throttle position; this also meters current to the coil. If the bike is accelerating or cruising a pick-up monitors engine speed and firing position of the camshaft and relays this to the chip, altering the ignition time to suit the needs of the engine so that, theoretically, the ignition timing for any given load will be perfect. In practice it means that the engine is more efficient

and has a smoother pick-up. In reality it is hard to discern this when riding the bike.

Well, put it another way, had I not been told of the Digiplex arrangement I am not entirely sure that I would have been riding along thinking "Ah, this bike has a Digiplex unit".

Fuel consumption during the test worked out to 48mpg, which is exactly as prescribed by the sales brochure. Running-in wasn't much of a chore for the book said it was perfectly OK to run in at 4,000rpm, which gave 80mph. I went a little slower than that for the first few hundred miles and, ultimately, limited myself to 80mph or so for the test as I never quite completed the running in. Even had the bike been fully run-in, I wouldn't have ridden much faster for it was relaxing and comfortable at a steady 80 with the rider comfortably behind the handlebar screen. This was a well worthwhile addition for it had no ill-effect on the handling and made life so much easier on the rider.

A little bonus was that the indicator warning lights reflected upwards onto the screen, giving a kind of head-up display and more effectively reminding me to cancel them. Neat, that; I have often wondered why motorcycle manufacturers have not pursued the notion of a head-up instrument panel.

Vibration was, as mentioned, typically "vee-twin", a kind of thumping feel, one that didn't cause discomfort and tiredness but felt like a real motorcycle.

Added to this was a seat that was as comfortable as it looked. It worked pretty hard during the week or so I had the Nevada but the perfect accolade for any seat is that the rider never thinks of it. I never did until making notes at the end of the test. By Moto Guzzi standards the

16.5 litre (3.63 gallons) fuel tank is a small one and the bike had a realistic range of little more than 120 miles (rather less in my case!). A pity really, for the machine is so relaxing and comfortable that I always found myself having to stop for fuel before I was really ready. Calling it the Nevada conjures up images of wide open spaces and roads with limited fuel stops. Could be interesting on this Nevada.

Much of the test, well, most, actually, was on wet roads and, with the windscreen doing an excellent job, I wasn't too bothered. A real bonus were Michelin tyres, A48 at the rear, A49 at the front, which really did feel happy in the wet, perhaps because I have the same tyres on my own bike. I liked this bike in the wet.

A DECENT GEARBOX

STATE-of-the-art motorcycles have monoshock suspension – the Nevada



"Bosch now provide the lights, and they are excellent ..."

settles for good old-fashioned twin shocks and is none the worse for it. At least it is possible to adjust them without grovelling underneath. Front forks are by Marzocchi and are air assisted, although I never found the need to play with this. Tradition survives with the frame which is a proper twin down-tube type with the engine cradled comfortably inside. I daresay I would be left gasping in the wake of a hot 250; but I wouldn't mind betting that on this bike at the end of a 600-mile day the Guzzi would leave me less stressed and tired than the aforementioned 250 or even a pretend racer of equal size.

For me the handling was fine, predictable and solid, never wavering from its line yet soft enough on the straight for irregularities in the road surface to be ignored. Engine and exhaust noise can add to the fatigue when riding long distances and, considering the absence of liquid to cool, and silence, the engine it doesn't suffer too badly but it is probably the mechanically noisiest of all the vee-twins we have tried so far. Stationary, the Nevada sounds quite loud on the exhaust, too, but whilst on the move the rider is largely unaware of it, and it is far from being offensive.

This bike won't creep up unheard on elderly people crossing the road but that, for me, is a bonus. I liked the exhaust note.

Initially the handlebars looked huge and, maybe, just too wide even for my taste. Not so; all my joints remained unstressed and, relaxing in the reasonably low seat, I was very much at home with the Nevada. Particularly appreciated were the excellent mirrors, the wider bars ensuring that the whole

mirror was doing its job.

Instrumentation was conventional with warning lights for oil, generator, main beam and fuel which indicates that reserve is now being used. The ignition key is on the centre console, as are hazard warning lights, but the steering lock is still on the side, one tradition I wouldn't have minded seeing the back of. As has been the case on Moto Guzzis for many years, the Grimeca brakes, twin disc at the front and single rear, are linked. As always, I was riding the bike for some time before I realised this, my riding style being seemingly in harmony with linked brakes. My only complaint with the brakes was that the drilled discs tended to squeak in the wet. At least they worked! A single crankshaft-speed clutch carries power from engine to gearbox; it is robust and a little on the heavy side but the gearbox is lovely, smooth and light. Maybe starter motors don't very often go on the blink but it was comforting to know that, if the one on this bike went, it was a simple matter to remove it for it was mounted low to the rear of the engine, just where it has always been.

Bosch now provide the lights, and they are excellent and the headlight is easily adjustable for height by a control on the forks. Not only that, but the horn was good; modern technology might be making rocket ships possible but seems sadly remiss in making their approach audible. Plenty of other things please on the Nevada: the centre stand was a doddle to use, which, coupled with the low seat, makes the bike an attractive proposition for the less well built rider. I liked the side stand being usable before the rider dismounted from the bike, an ignition cut out preventing the engine being started with the stand down. No trace of oil was to be seen on the bike after a week's hard use, and the cruiser

style means that, with polished heads and chrome plated carburettor and cable covers, the Nevada really is a pretty little bike. I particularly liked the crankcase being finished in matt alloy without lacquer and also the casting for the pillion rests, but couldn't see why the pillion riders backrest needed to be a folding one. Not that the backrest wasn't appreciated. Another nice touch was spoked wheels: they might be harder to clean but they do look nice and certainly suited the "cruiser" image of the Nevada.

ONLY TWO VALVES PER CYLINDER!

MOTO GUZZI must be one of the few manufacturers continuing to make an air-cooled motorcycle with just two valves per cylinder and operated by pushrods. Modern technology is undoubtedly leaving the Nevada in its wake but this is still a very enjoyable and relaxing motorcycle. Maybe the just-over-100mph top speed will leave the Nevada floundering behind hot Japanese but it is a different story when it comes to usable, practical power. If you fancy blazing a trail of glory before they take your licence away, then perhaps the Nevada isn't for you; if motorcycling for motorcycling sake is your style then the Moto Guzzi Nevada is definitely one for the short list. Not only that but it comes with a price tag, £4,995, that seems positively cheap by today's standards. Yes, in spite of our stuttering beginning, I enjoyed the Nevada. Incidentally, should all of this raw power be too much for you then maybe something more gentle in the form of a 350cc version would suit you better? Hard luck – that one is no longer imported! B.P.

Chrome and light-alloy, plus vivid yellow, make for eye-catching finish

