

MOTO GUZZI

Two





The new Guzzi is more of the old/Roland Brown

For a moment the paint scheme had me fooled. The curly-haired Guzzi mechanic *duff-duffed* into sight round a factory corner, a tatty leather jacket zipped up over his blue overalls, rode across the cobbles and came to a halt in front of me with a big grin on his face. Then, after a theatrical blip of the throttle, he killed the engine.

The Targa looked small, lean, familiar — its shape almost identical to the distinctively curved form of the latest, Mk5 Le Mans. And it was red. Gleaming bright Italian racing red, from the front of its fairing to the tip of its tailpiece, not forgetting its wheels, its front mudguard and part of its frame. Just for a moment I thought I was about to ride some fast, muscular new sportster.

But the red paint is misleading, for if Moto Guzzi have done their best to dress the new Targa like a Rottweiler it still has the teeth of an ageing Labrador guide-dog. Beneath the Le Mans styling is a chassis — based on that of the old 650 Lario and its development the V75 — that holds nothing more vicious than a traditional old aircooled, pushrod-operated, two-valve 750cc V-twin engine. Mind you, I know which mutt I'd rather trust to fetch my slippers.

The Targa has been a long time coming, and I don't just refer to the final few months' delay that should eventually see bikes loaded onto ships this September. A more sporty version of the eight-valve, pushrod V75 was rumoured as long ago as 1986, and a year later plans were revealed for an eight-valve, overhead-cam 750 motor that would finally do away with Guzzi's antiquated pushrods completely.

But things move slowly behind the faded yellowy-green walls of Moto Guzzi's factory at Mandello, on Lake Como. Time passed and, with the overhead-cam engine still in dim light at the end of a long tunnel (and the eight-valve pushrod engine shelved in the meantime), out has popped the Targa, this mix of Le Mans styling, Lario chassis and the two-valve-per-pot powerplant already used in the horny NTX750 trail bike. (The NTX will not, it seems, now be imported to Blighty due to the stupid legislation outlawing its plastic fuel tank.) If this bike is probably no quicker than the V75, then at least it *looks* like it is.

Even Guzzi themselves are a little vague about the precise spec of the Targa, and even now they are still playing around with the engine and carburation in an effort to find a few more than the modest 50-or-so ▶

horsepower that the NTX puts out. Basically, though, the chassis is the time-honoured combination of steel duplex cradle with twin-shock rear end, the wheels now safely back to 18 inches in diameter after the firm's ludicrous mid-'80s experiments with 16s.

Bodywork is almost identical to that of the Lemon, with the only apparent difference the omission of the plastic mid-section that makes the 1000cc bike's fairing almost a full job while the Targa's is just a top-half and belly-pan. The less plastic obscuring that uniquely clean and charismatic pair of pots, the better, I'd say. And while the current Guzzi's ducktailed curves don't approach the classical elegance of an early Le Mans this is still quite a handsome motorcycle.

My first moments with the 750 should have been memorable because I'd just been told that no other journalist had ridden the bike: a world scoop! They *were* memorable – and all covered on foot, for I pushed the Targa out of the factory gates to find the sky was spitting with rain, then pressed the starter button to discover the battery was flat. Back to reality. And several sweaty, unsuccessful runs-and-bumps later I was back in the workshop while a new battery was being fitted and a junior mechanic was being led away to a dark corner to be reprimanded with a fork stanchion.

Twenty minutes later his colleague returned with grin fixed, engine running and new battery in place. The bike fired up fine now, and on first impressions felt tall and quite narrow, its foam-gripped clip-on handlebars comfortably within reach and the lowish pegs leaving legs not too cramped.

Moto Guzzi's traditionally docile, progressive power characteristics are well-suited to wet roads, and the Targa proved no different. As always the transverse V-twin rocked and juddered just above tickover, then it smoothed magically and pulled cleanly as the revs rose. The redline ►

MOTO GUZZI

Targa



The Targa provides good, stable, cornering in the style of previous Guzzis



Cockpit type fairing is effective, with white-faced clocks and optimistic speedo – 150mph



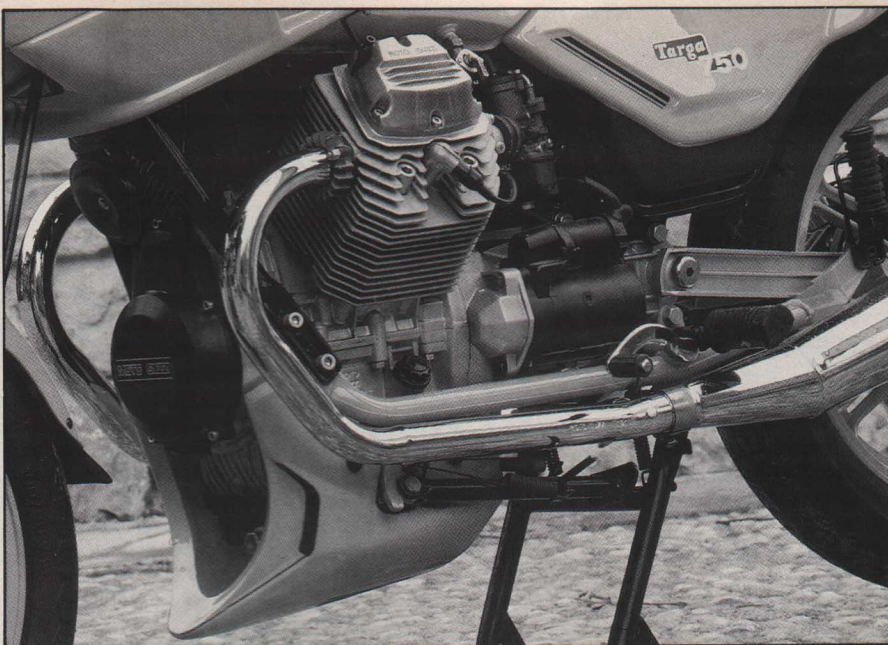
is at 7400rpm and the Guzzi took some time getting there (no fear of tendinitis from holding onto these bars) but there was torque available wherever the tach needle was pointing – albeit not in Le Mans-sized megabites.

When I turned off the lakeside road and headed into the hills the Targa rounded a series of shiny, near walking-pace hairpins without so much as a splutter, the Pirelli Phantoms backing it up with generous grip. And the handling, while not quick, was neutral and predictable – so much so that for several miles I wasn't even aware of it, which is something that couldn't have been said of a Guzzi a few years ago. At a touch under 400lb dry it's a reasonably light bike, weighing almost 80lb less than the Le Mans, and guiding it round the tight bends was no problem.

The chassis, of course, is old-fashioned and crude by modern standards, its twin shocks, simple forks and relatively narrow tyres no match for fat modern rubber suspended by rising rate and a bookfull of adjustability. But the Targa's linked air forks were remarkably good, giving a firm ride that wasn't too harsh on the wrists despite those low bars, and the surprisingly supple Marzocchi shocks kept the back end under control as long as corners were navigated with respect for the drive shaft.

Change down early then power it round in the approved manner, and the Targa would corner fast and hard – at least until the roads dried out and the centrestand dug in deep on one downhill left-hander, after which I tipped the bike into bends with a little more caution. If I'd fuffed about with gearlever or throttle (pleasantly light after the Le Man's wrist-buster) in mid-bend, though, I'd soon have been admiring the lovely Lombardy scenery from several hundred feet further down the mountain. Like all Guzzis, the bike doesn't suffer fools gladly.

At least a panic-stricken grab at the



The true displacement of the 750 is 744cc, with an output of around 50hp. It likes slow climbs to power

handlebars wouldn't immediately have locked the front wheel and tipped me over, thanks to Guzzi's long-standing linked-brake system that works one front disc off the foot pedal. Harder to lock in error, true; but both levers felt spongy, and needed plenty of travel to work hard. (Other limbs got an easier-than-expected time: the clutch was quite light, the five-speed gearbox slow but precise if you didn't hurry it.)

Later, on the autostrada, I discovered that the frame-mounted fairing gives plenty of protection with none of the trade-off in stability that some of its handlebar-mounted forebears have supplied. Hands are still in the breeze but the wind is channelled over the rider's head most efficiently. And the Le Mans-replica mirrors, switches and instrument console are all equally useful,

although the latter is far too big and ugly for its allotted space in the cockpit, and the testbike's speedometer didn't work.

Perhaps there was a reason for that, because the speedo needle had as much chance of reaching its 240kph (150mph) max mark as the Targa has of winning the Grand National. With little more than 50hp to drive it, the bike would be struggling to get to much over 110mph even when fully run-in, I'd guess; even the factory claim only 'over 116mph'.

If the untypically Guzzi-like patches of vibration between 5000 and 6000rpm were anything to go by, this bike would have loosened and got a little faster with a few more miles under its wheels. But speed is not really what this Moto Guzzi is about. This is a lazy, laid-back machine that would cruise at a long-legged 90mph all day, and ▶



Somehow, Moto Guzzi still manage to turn out good looking bikes. The Targa's bright red bodywork is only skin deep though



Le Mans style mirrors, and modern switchgear make the Targa a further, but still slow, step forward for Guzzi



Twin 270mm discs are effective, and still part of Guzzi's linked system



Vibration from the engine and reaction from the shaft are soon lost once under way

enjoy doing it, but would be hopelessly outprinted by any Japanese 600 and many 250s.

Guzzi's speedster will come next year, with a replica of the famous Dr John Wittner-built Twins racer. The factory are planning to build 500 or so replicas for sale as road bikes, Export Manager Guido Ranalli said, plus a handful of higher-spec, ultra-pricey racing specials along the lines of the Ducati 888. The good Doctor himself has for some time been based at De Tomaso's factory in Modena, and the eight-valve, dohc roadster is apparently still on course to debut at November's Milan Show.

But the Targa is from a different Moto Guzzi era, and in its own way just as

interesting for all that. While motorcycle fashions come and go, bikes like this will doubtless keep Guzzi plodding on for ever, noise regs permitting. Priced competitively – possibly held to just below four grand – it should be a success, and importers Three Cross report their dealers to be 'screaming for it'.

From one angle the Targa is a helpless anachronism attempting to disguise its sloth behind sleek styling; from another it is a sturdy, well-equipped bike that is fast enough to be fun and has an appeal all its own. If you know what to expect, you won't be disappointed by the 750 Targa. But perhaps Guzzi shouldn't have painted it red.



TECH·SPEAK



MOTO GUZZI 750 TARGA

Price	£4000 approx
Motor	Aircooled ohv V-twin, 2 valves per cylinder
Displacement	744cc
Bore & stroke	80x74mm
Compression ratio	9.7:1
Maximum power @ rpm	N/A
Maximum torque @ rpm	N/A
Carburettors	2x30mm
Transmission	Primary drive gear, final drive shaft, 5-speed gearbox
Frame	Tubular cradle
Rake	N/A
Trail	N/A
Front fork	Telescopic, linked air assistance
Rear suspension	Marzocchi shocks, 5-way preload adjust
Brakes front	Twin 270mm discs
rear	235mm disc
Tyres front	Pirelli Phantom 100/90 v 18
rear	120/80 V 18
Weight (claimed)	180kg (396lb) dry
Fuel capacity	3.9 gallons (18 litres)

RATINGS

ENGINE

	Poor	Indifferent	Average	Good	Excellent
Responsiveness				●	
Vibration			●		
Bottom end power				●	
Mid range power		●			
Top end power	●				
Fuel economy				●	
Starting		●			
Ease of maintenance				●	
Quietness			●		

TRANSMISSION

Clutch operation				●	
Gearbox operation			●		

HANDLING

Steering			●		
Cornering clearance	●				
High speed cornering			●		
Medium speed cornering			●		
Bumpy bends			●		
Flickability		●			
Manoeuvrability			●		
Top speed stability					●

SUSPENSION

Front				●	
Rear		●			
Front/rear match			●		

BRAKES

Stopping power		●			
Braking stability				●	
Feel at controls			●		

GENERAL

Quality of finish			●		
Fairing efficiency				●	
Seat comfort			●		
Riding position				●	
Pillion comfort				●	
Touring range				●	
Headlight			●		
Stands			●		
Mirrors				●	
Horn			●		

VALUE FOR MONEY

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