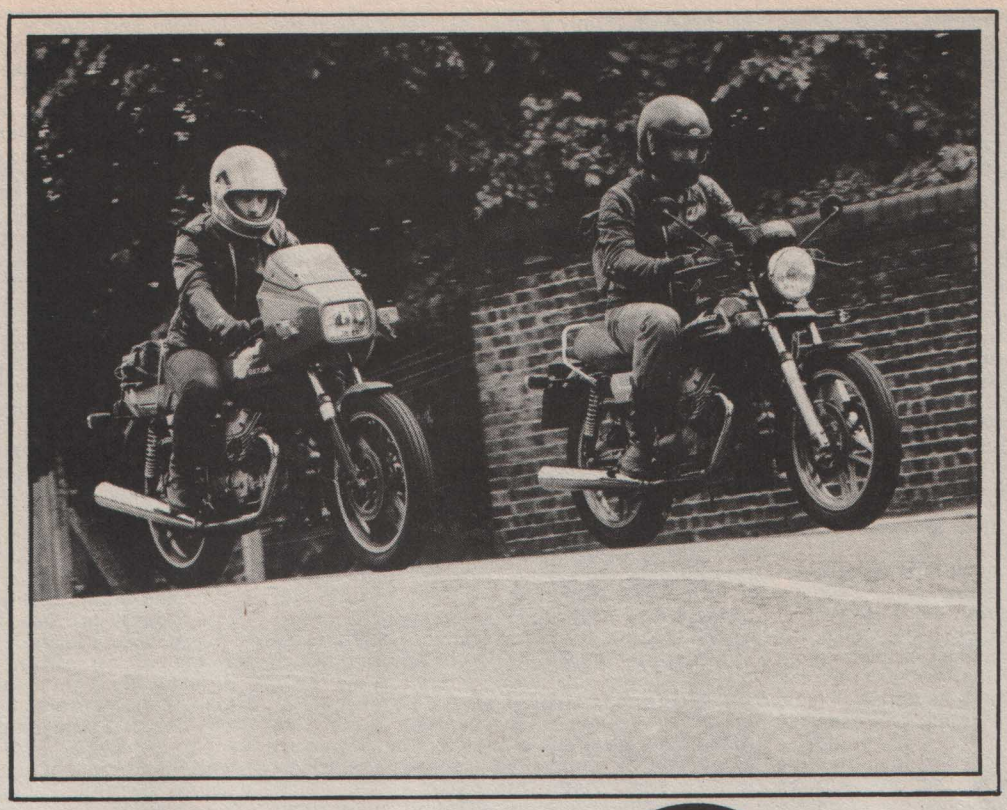


Justa One Duetto

John Cutts meets Monza, Son of Le Mans, and its duller brother

Smallfry success comes in small packages.

In the two years that it's been available the V50 has proved a popular mount among buyers looking for a decent middleweight alternative to the hordes of Jap multi hardware. Small, light and exceptionally nimble, it has always been a good call for bikers who rated handling and premium performance more than horsepower. Agility and all-round ability counting for more than an excess of poke.

I remember riding that first UK model and being impressed. I took it on a short touring holiday of Normandy along with a party of high-powered hacks who had double the Guzzi's capacity and power. On the motorways and long straights they left me way behind, but on the slow, local coastline roads, the baby Guzzi excelled. In the tight turns and the scratch-happy sweeps with the engine screaming and the pegs grounding, the V50 led the way while the big UJMs tied knots and unhinged their rider's confidence.

The same sort of rich handling could be found around town and any place where speed wasn't the only criterion. People who bought V50s were happy with them. They liked the quickness of steering, the light weight, the low centre of gravity – characteristics that allowed the machine to be flicked effortlessly from angle to angle. When the going was tough and tight, and while others pondered the bulky unresponsiveness of their big motor chassis, the V50 was invariably long gone.

The lack of real horsepower was a problem. Two years ago, there was no XJ or GP550 to blow the V50 into the hinterland weed patch of progress. But even then, the top end whack was considerably below the most obvious candidate of Jap opposition, Honda's Vee-twin CX. Surprisingly, this didn't prove a deterrent. The V50 had a sedate top end of 103mph, but around realistic and only vaguely illegal speeds it was supreme. It could be wound up and driven right to its maximum levels of performance – flat-out, giving its own balanced and sporting sort of exhilaration. A rare and refreshing treat. If you wanted a 500cc bike that handled and weren't too bothered about being consistently blown out of the fast lane, the V50 was an interesting and attractive soft option.

For 1981 Moto Guzzi are offering two improved variants on the theme. First, there's a MkIII revision incorporating over 260 minor changes – the most notable of which are bigger carbs and air assisted suspension. Then there's the new cutie pie Monza, essentially the same, but a bit quicker with lots of sharp looks and street style. They had a neat engine and chassis anyway, but add a bikini fairing, some clip-ons, rear sets and slabs of colour (fire engine red, natch) and you've got a very pretty cafe racer.

Since the old V50 was in many ways detuned, the uprating in carb sizes from 24 to 28mm is a logical and overdue revision. They're still Dell-Ortos but with round bodies instead of square ones. To make it more tractable they've reduced the compression ratio to 10.4:1 (from 10.8) while to deal with the increased intake, both inlet and exhaust valves are up 2mm in size. Valve timing is as before with quite radical figures – 248 degrees of duration and 33 degrees of overlap. The flat Heron type cylinder head has the valves sitting flush allowing hot timing. Advantages of the flat head include cheapness of manufacture, mechanical simplicity (valves are parallel, worked off a single rocker shaft) and fuel efficiency. Disadvantages are bad gas flow, the need to run a high

compression ratio and a distinct lack of tuning possibilities.

In practice, the pros and cons even out. The combustion chamber has to be cut into the pistons which gives a good gas seal and flame shape, but intake problems limit rev possibilities and running a max of 47bhp (2hp up on the MkII) at 7600rpm hardly qualifies the V50 for the high rev wonderland of modern tuning. Bore and stroke dimensions of 74×57mm are the same but the aluminium cylinders now carry very efficient Nikasil plated bores.

The cam chain is still up front but is now a double roller affair with an all new automatic slipper type tensioner. Down below, the single throw crank has a bigger main plain bearing (up 2mm) at the cam chain end (to cope with the double roller) while the small ends have also been increased by 3mm to allow for "standardisation of engines" (a factory phrase meaning they'll probably build bigger engines out of the unit, like a 650).

Everything else is much as before – the cases are horizontally split, the transmission is still separate, there's a dry clutch and shaft power for final drive.

The only essential engine difference between the MkIII and the Monza is the use of a slightly different primary drive ratio and a less restrictive exhaust system. Together they give the Monza 48bhp at 7600rpm and a top speed 5mph higher (though much of that comes from the riding position). All other engine details like the transmission ratios, valve timing and even the silencers are identical.

Something very curious has happened to the ignition. It used to be fully electronic with an electronically controlled advance based on engine speed. That advance curve gave one hell of a step at 2000rpm and on a few MkIIs used to actually create a flat spot. Bad sparks can be expensive. Rather than ask Bosch to redesign their advance curve, Moto Guzzi decided it would be cheaper to go back to a mechanical points ignition and thereupon borrowed one from Benelli (I don't know which model). It may well be true that electronic ignition doesn't suit a low revving mill that pulls away at low revs *because* such an ignition advances in steps.

Whatever, the result is that at the front of the engine there now sit a pair of contact breaker points.

Both the engines we had on test needed a lot of warming up before they'd idle contentedly. The MkIII's motor suffered an irregular starting complaint, always needing full choke and very fast idling. We thought there was water in the carbs and lo and behold, upon removing the float chambers, there was rainwater sitting in the gas. That did nothing for the inconsistent starting though. Nor did it cure some irregular carburation and throttle response in mid-range, which was very woolly when really winding it on and often took ages to clear itself and pull full throttle. It even happened on the Monza a bit, though that was crisp in comparison.

Both engines were fine in the last third of the tach from about 6000 to 8500rpm where there's a rush of power as the engine finally accepts full bore throttle against the stop. Top whack figures for both engines are modest. The MkIII runs 3mph faster than its predecessor while the Monza pulls a fairly respectable 110mph.

Two years ago the engine wasn't *that* uncompetitive since it pulled an honest ton and accelerated briskly enough without any hint of high-rev superthrust. In '81 it faces Jap 550/4s with astonishing engine performance and can no longer seriously compete. People who own V50s know that anyway and remain impressed. Sure it's a small and primitive engine – but it's also simple, traditional and a Vee-twin. The bobby dazzler of cylinder configurations – the irresistible 90 degrees aesthetic. As long as motorcycles are anything like we know them to be, there will always be Vee-twins. Ask Yamaha.

Anyway chaps, jet-like performance isn't what this bike's all about (and I know cos I took it to the Island). But . . . let's see whether the cycle parts can redeem the Guzzi's reputation.

In fact, almost everything is exactly the same as before bar the suspension. The change is to Paioli air assisted units. Forkwise these differ from Jap type units in that not the whole fork carries air but only a small sac/reservoir at the top. It looks like a junior Durex, about one inch in diameter and 2.5inches long, and its function is just a touch obtuse.

Modern Guzzis (unusually) use sealed damper units in the front forks. These cannot be adjusted, nor can their damping fluid be changed. If they wear out, you throw them away and replace the entire unit. Thus any oil added to the front forks in servicing does not affect the damping, but merely lubricates the fork.

The air-forks have added this air sac to the sealed damper unit, where it serves to stiffen or soften the damping depending on more or less air pressure. Thus changing the air pressure affects *only* the damping, and not the springs.

Then again, air is elastic and compressible. Therefore, its effect on the damping is, for want of a better word, springy. It imparts a paradoxical measure of elasticity to the hydraulics of the damping. So, in another way, adjusting air pressure *does* affect the springing. Strange, isn't it.

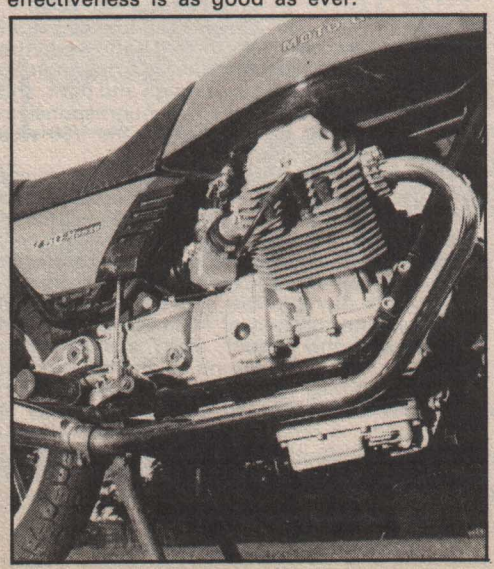
They operate at very high pressures (30–60psi front), have no balance pipe, obscure air valves and give an exceptionally harsh ride. The single rate springs are strong enough but even running low pressures has the front end running ultra-hard over small irregularities and bumps. Travel is rated at 125mm and you'd be unlikely to bottom them even under maximum braking. It's the same cry tough story at the back (45–75psi). The semi-square cast swing-arm pivots at the rear of the gearbox but has its movement severely disciplined by a pair of single rate, air sprung Paiolis that give reluctantly their small 70mm movement.

Running low pressures all round and position one on the preload was just about acceptable for the MkIII while covering the big bumps of the Island. On the motorway and on good roads, the suspension was adequate. Same on the Monza – very hard, but OK on smooth roads and unrideable on the rough ones.

Which is a shame cos it's on the slow, really tight, bumpy roads that the V50 really used to score. A small passenger helps to dampen some of the springing's enthusiasm but then it loses more speed because of the weight. The pillion has to be small since two grown Men of Iron look and feel ridiculous.

The lightest shaft-driven bike currently available carries excellent integral brakes. These were originally patented by a man at Brembo and sold to Guzzi. Together, they designed the system, though Brembo make all the hardware. Innovation this time round includes the resiting of the front master cylinder to a conventional handlebar position instead of under the tank like a Bee Em. The brake calipers now sit behind the forks and feature double pistons, the discs are drilled and chrome plated.

The all-important foot pedal feed goes to a cylinder under the right hand cover and operates both the rear disc and the front left brake. The rear stopper sits on the same side as the shaft which makes wheel removal a cinch. Brake effectiveness is as good as ever.



Coburn and Hughes offer a choice of either Pirelli Phantoms or Michelin tyres. We had Phantoms on both bikes and they performed impeccably – excellent grip and fine for maximum banking angles to where the long pegs grind away and the otherwise useless sidestand comes mighty close to whacking the pavement.

The rolling chassis' main advantages come from the keen weight (380lb wet) and the very quick steering response. Both bikes handled impeccably almost right up to their maximum speeds where a steady weave sets in just above 100mph. The MkIII comes with slight riser bars, the Monza has clip-ons and rear sets. Both bikes weave flat out in a straight line and it's something I don't remember the old MkII doing. Steering dampers and/or bar/clamp adjustment should help overcome this.

The Monza's riding position is more suited for sports riding, but the limited size of the bike means that anyone nearing six foot is going to tower above the bikini fairing. It's not a miniature Le Mans (how could it be?), though it scores high in the old poser/colour matched leathers/macho aggression syndrome.

To conclude. It would be all too simple to summarise that both of these V50s are overpriced and underpowered. The price war state of things isn't too bad, the MkIII is around the same price as a new CX, the Monza some £80 dearer than an XJ550.

Change for change's sake? No probably not. Small change for small change? Yes, certainly. Most people could happily live with the suspension outside of somewhere like the Isle of Man. The carb changes though just further an existing dilemma. It needs bigger carbs yet it doesn't respond to them that well.

If you're looking for a 500, for the love of De Tomaso, at least demand a demo ride on one of these. They remain different enough from the stable Jap fare to attract and win over a lot of punters. Especially among those who've recently graduated from L-plated 250s and their 'orrible ilk. This is a good and traditional place to start. Viva Vee-twin fever. **JC**

Moto Guzzi V50 Mk III and V50 Monza

£1499 £1649 (including VAT)

PERFORMANCE

Maximum Speed – 104.5mph (Monza 109mph)
Standing Quarter Mile – 15.1secs (Monza 14.9 secs)
Fuel Consumption – Hard Riding – 43mpg
Cruising – 49mpg
Best Full-Tank Range – 165 miles

ENGINE

Type – air-cooled pushrod 90 degree Vee-twin
Displacement – 490cc
Power – 47bhp at 7600rpm (Monza 48bhp at 7600rpm)
Torque – 32.5lb/ft at 5500rpm approx
Bore and Stroke – 74×57mm
Compression Ratio – 10.4:1
Induction – two 28mm Dell'Ortos
Exhaust – two into two with balance pipe
Oil System – wet sump
Ignition – coil/battery – contact breakers

TRANSMISSION

Clutch – single plate dry
Primary Drive – gear
Final Drive – shaft with crown-wheel and pinion
Gears – five speed

CHASSIS

Frame – duplex cradle
Front Suspension – air-assisted, telehydraulic forks
Rear Suspension – swing-arm and and air assisted shox (3 position preload)
Wheelbase – 55in
Ground Clearance – 6.9in
Weight (wet) – 380lbs (Monza 373lbs)
Fuel Capacity – 3.8gall
Tyres – Phantoms 100/90 V18 (front), 110/90 V18 (rear). (See text)
Brakes – Moto Guzzi Integral-linked triple Brembo discs

INSTRUMENTS

140mph speedo, tach redlined at 8000rpm, warning lights for neutral, turn signals, headlights, high beam, oil pressure, battery charge

EQUIPMENT

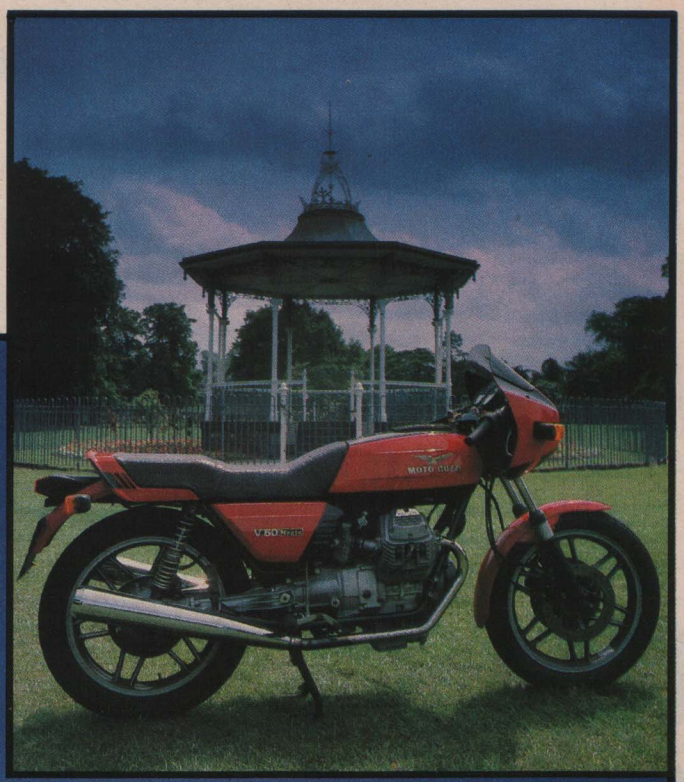
Electrical – 12v 20A/h
Lighting – 45/40w headlamp

OPTIONS

Yer pays yer money and takes yer choice

Test bike supplied by: Coburn and Hughes, 53–61 Park Street, Luton, Bedfordshire


MOTO GUZZI
V 50III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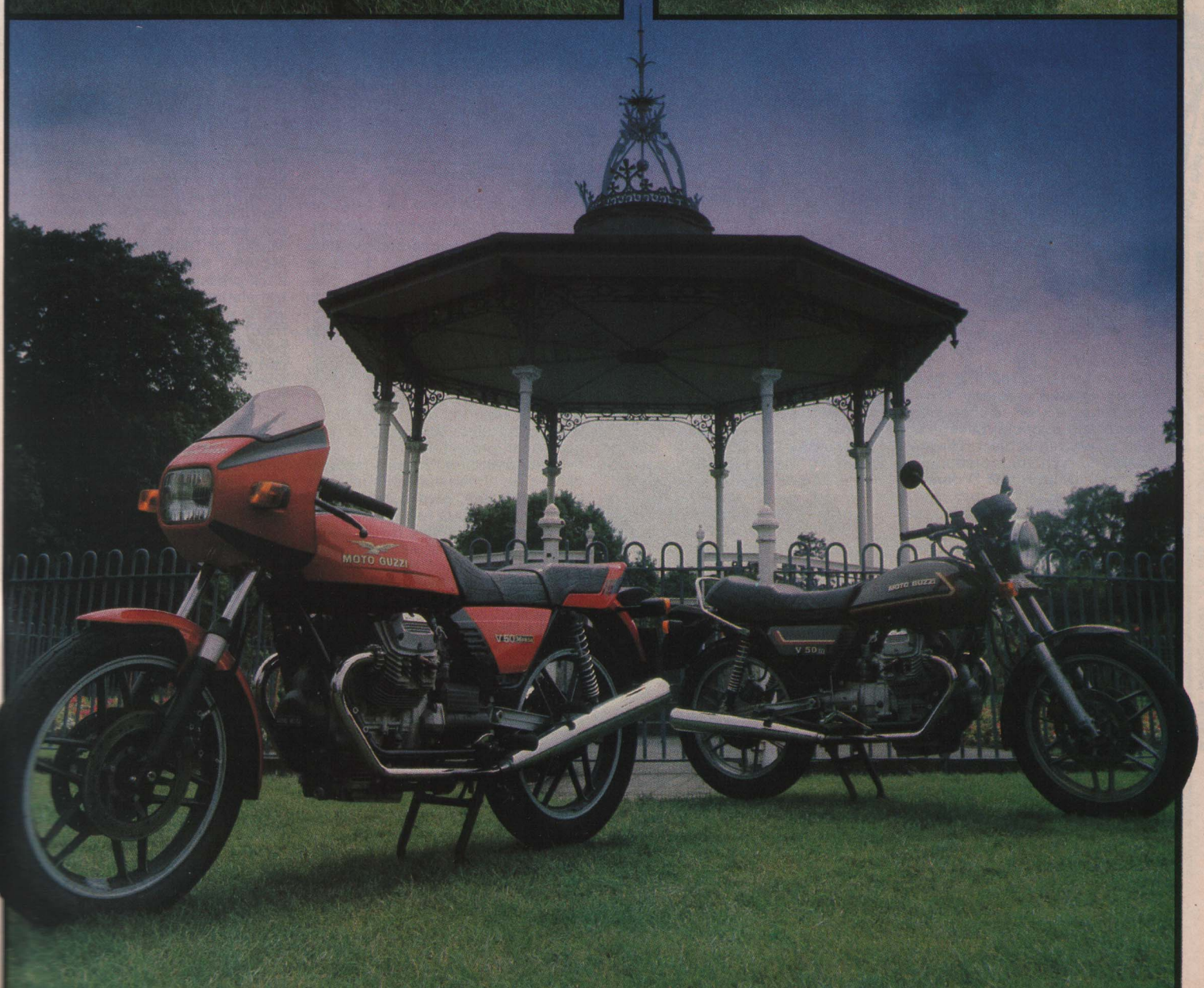
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