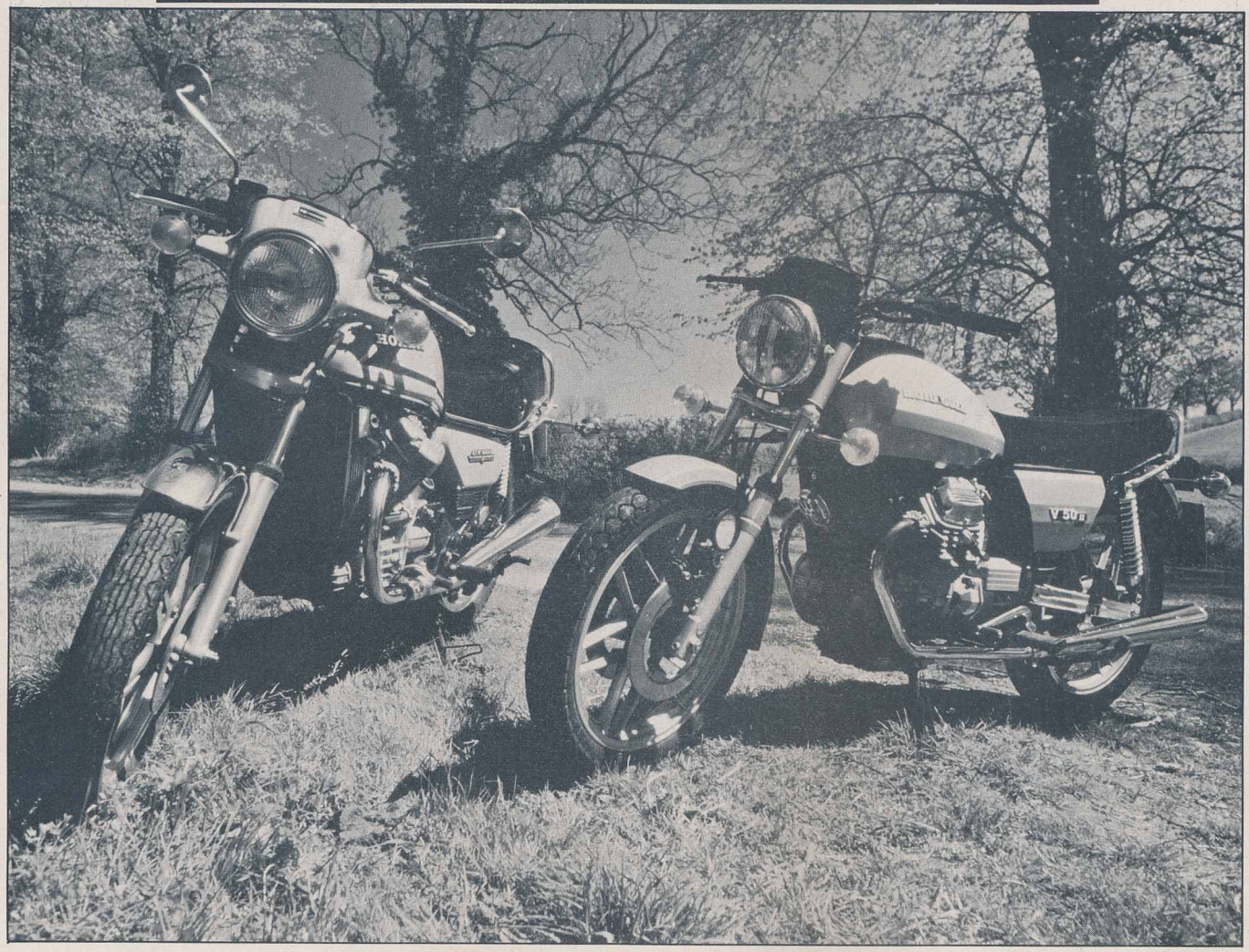
HONDA CX500 vs MOTO-GUZZI V50

LIKE MINDS~ DIFFERENT PATHS

A LONG TERM COMPARISON



Honda's CX500 and Moto-Guzzi's V50 are both 500cc vee-twins but with very different characters. To find out how different we took an example of each and ran it from new and in coming months we will be giving updated reports on the bikes' progress. *Charlie Harris* (CX) and *Eric Silbermann* (V50) give their first impressions of their bikes. *Tim Leighton-Boyce* was the photographer.

If two bikes brought into sharp focus the essential differences in approach to motorcycle design between the Japanese and Italians it's Honda's CX500 and Moto Guzzi's V50.

Both bikes are transverse 500cc vee-twins with shaft drive, and both have electric starting, pointless ignition systems and five-speed gearboxes.

But that's as far as the similarities go. For in almost every other respect no two motorcycles could be as divergent as the CX500 and V50. While the CX500 is heavy and bulky for its capacity, the V50 is light and compact. While the CX500 relies on complexity and innovation to provide the power that gives it such good performance, the V50 remains simple and doesn't need to develop much power to propel its light weight.

It's as if Moto Guzzi decided from the start that they would have a limit of 335lbs dry for the bike's weight whereas Honda accepted that to provide the extra performance they needed, the added weight of for example, water-cooling, was a price they had to pay and then got stuck in a spiral that in turn brought four-valves per cylinder, a high 10 to 1 compression ratio, a massively oversquare bore and stroke of 78 x 52mm and a 9,000 rpm red line. It was almost inevitable that the final weight would be a portly 440lbs.

But if the complexity of the CX brings performance then it also provides refinement. By using a conventional engine layout, albeit turned through 90 degrees, the transmission was then taken from the front of the engine by gears to the wet clutch and thence to the gearbox aside the crank. The clutch, being contra-rotating, would then counteract the torque reaction of the crank when blipping the throttle. The shortness of the engine allows the use of a longer swing arm, necessary to minimise the characteristic rise and fall of the rear suspension when manipulating the controls.

On the other hand the

Guzzi shines in other ways. Because the V50's motor is small it can be mounted low for a low centre-of-gravity, a feature that helps low speed control and bend swinging. Further improving the frame construction, is the use of the rear of the gearbox as the support for the cast alloy swing arm.

The three disc brakes on the V50 use the company's patented connecting system with a master cylinder for the right front disc and the rear disc, which is mounted on the same side as the drive bevels so that the wheel can be removed without touching the disc.

The other master cylinder, under the tank operated by cable from the hand lever, operates the left front disc. Both master cylinders have a single fluid reservoir, also under the fuel tank.

The Guzzi also has a high compression ratio, 10.8 to 1, but this is possible because the cylinder heads use piston-top Heron combustion chambers with parallel valves. It's a design that makes for good torque and fuel consumption but at the expense of high speed breathing, so the red line is set at 8,000 rpm and the Guzzi develops its maximum power of 45bhp at 7,500rpm compared to the Honda's 50bhp at 9,000 rpm.

So while in principle the Honda and Guzzi are very similar they are poles apart in practice. Which is why we are putting them through extended test periods. This is the first report.

MOTO-GUZZI V50

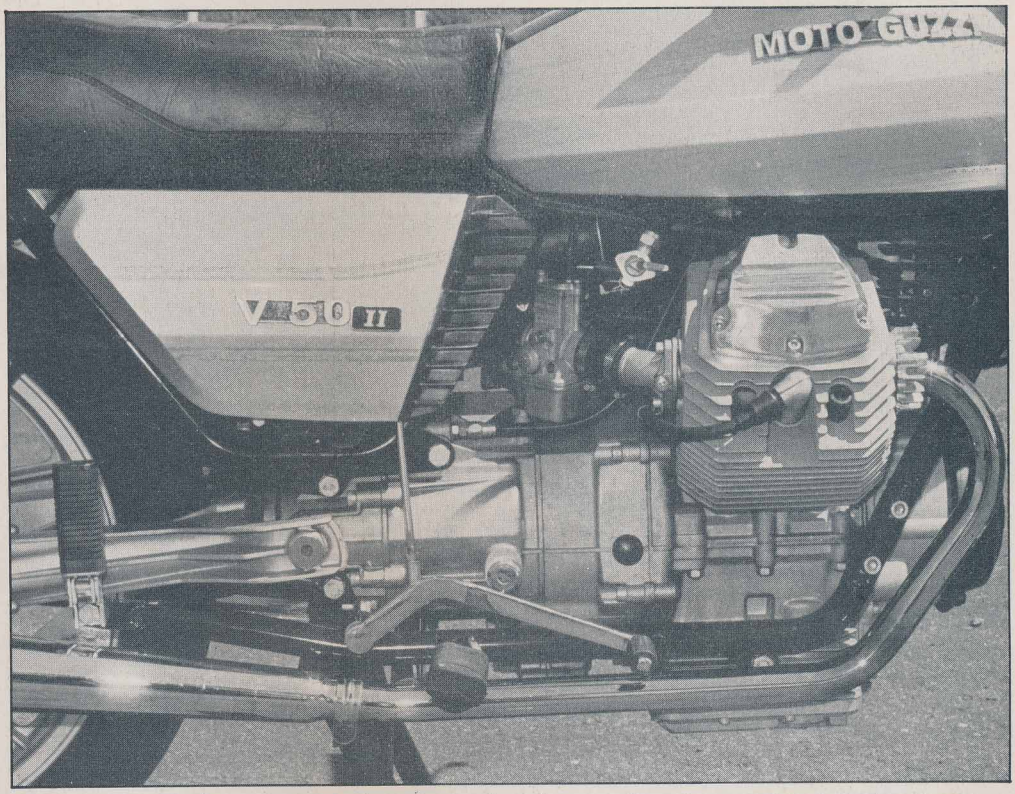
Getting a new Guzzi on the cheap might seem as good a reason as any for buying one. And at £1,299, the V50 was, and still is, a steal. Equivalent Italian machines of a similar size and specification sell for over £250 more. But its virtues lie a good deal deeper than the charismatic tank logo.

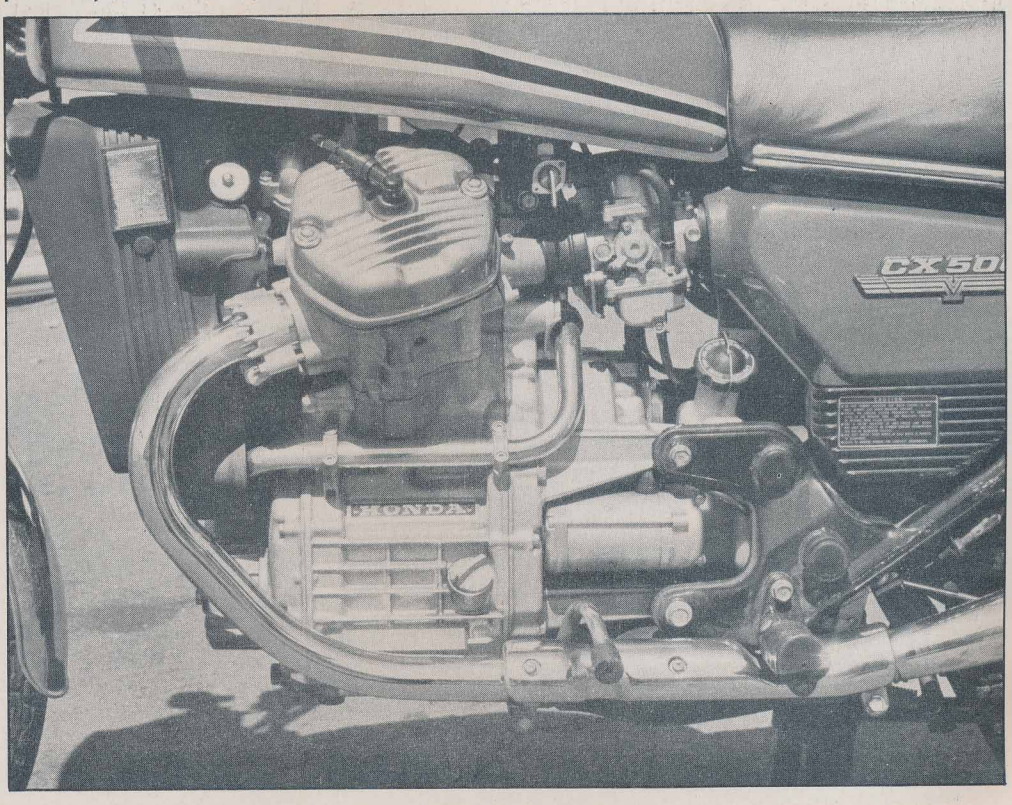
The V50 feels more like a two-fifty than a five hundred and with its claimed power output of 45bhp pushing a bike that weighs just 335lbs dry it's a real delight to ride on twisty and winding roads.

It's forte is definitely in its handling and roadholding rather than straight line performance. And the combination of ultra-low weight, a low centre of gravity and exceptional ground clearance allow the bike to be leant over at remarkable angles without hazard. Front suspension is by Guzzi's own oil-damped forks while at the rear we come to one of the few flies in the ointment. The preload-adjustable shock absorbers, even on the hardest setting would allow the rear wheel to chatter furiously when the bike was being cornered hard.

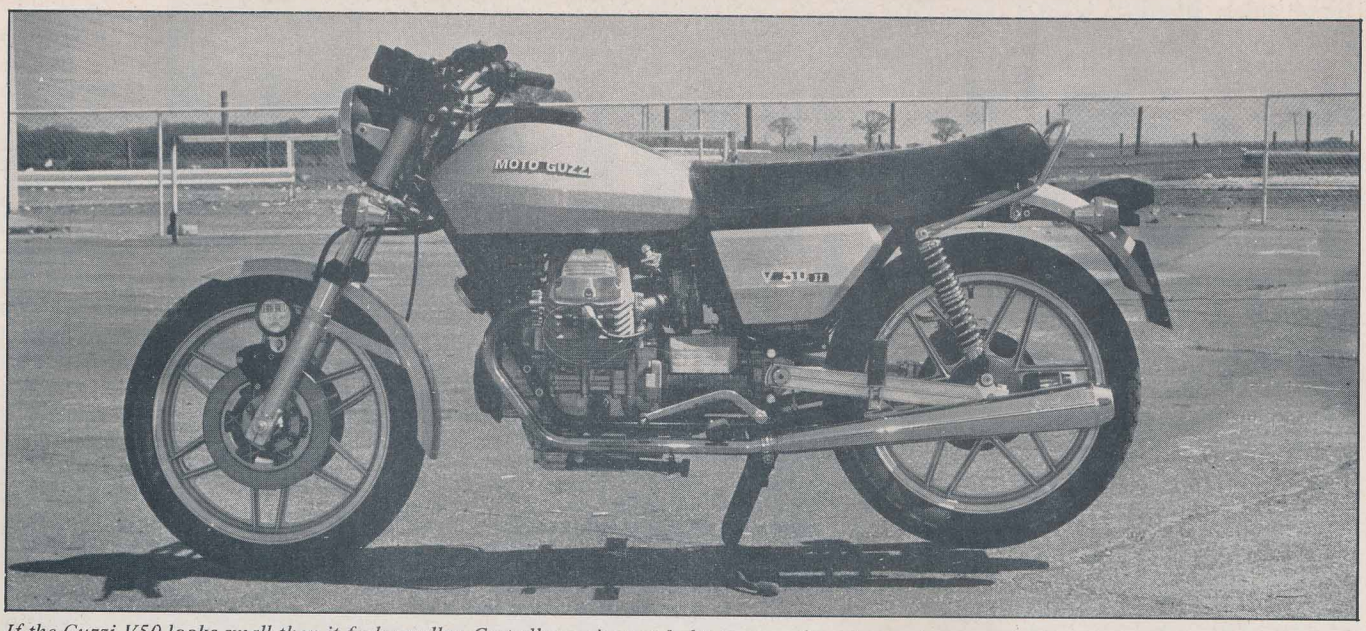
Helping the rear suspension is a very beefy swinging arm which houses the shaft drive. But without the sophistication of transmission dampers, the drive makes its presence felt by locking the rear wheel on hasty downward gearchanges. However, a quick blip on the throttle is all that's required to iron out an otherwise clunky gearchange.

In common with the rest of the Guzzi family of vee-twins the V50 is fitted with the unique Brembo balanced braking system. The front right-hand disc and the rear disc, which is covered by a plastic shield and mounted on the shaft side of the wheel, are both operated by the foot pedal. With so little weight to control stopping never presents a problem at any speed. The brake fluid





The Moto Guzzi's 490cc engine (above) is the simple and uncomplicated approach to designing a transverse vee-twin; engine in front of dry clutch and five-speed gearbox. The Honda CX500 (below) needs water-cooling and four-valves per cylinder to realise its high power output. Unfortunately it also needs the power to pull its extra weight too.



If the Guzzi V50 looks small then it feels smaller. Cast alloy swingarm bolts to rear of gearbox and saves weight.

reservoir is mounted behind the steering head under a flip-up lid which also exposes the petrol filler cap.

The Guzzi is certainly not quick by today's standards, but unlike many of its Japanese rivals, all its power is usable. The V50 has plenty of torque and will happily pull away on top from 2,000 rpm and spins smoothly to 8,000rpm. The exhaust pipes emit a rorty burble up to six grand when the note changes to a high pitched shriek.

Instrumentation and switchgear are typically Italian. The finger buttons despite their garish colours, all the hues of the rainbow, are easy to use and the Veglia speedo proved surprisingly accurate, much more so than the Honda's. The V50 is an attractive bike with all the beauty of mechanical simplicity. Quality of the paintwork is excellent though I didn't like the coloured stick-on stripes on the tank and side panels. Not being sealed they were easy to remove.

After 2,000 miles the chrome looks as though it's going to last. One of the exhaust pipes went blue in the first 100 miles due to weak mixture on one pot though the importers say they'll replace that under warranty.

Only real fault has been the failure of a rear wheel bearing and oilseal on the way back from the BMF Rally. This allowed oil onto the rear disc and fouled the pads. This too was replaced under warranty. Otherwise the bike hasn't needed any attention apart from an oil change and the topping up with half a pint of oil in 1,000 miles.

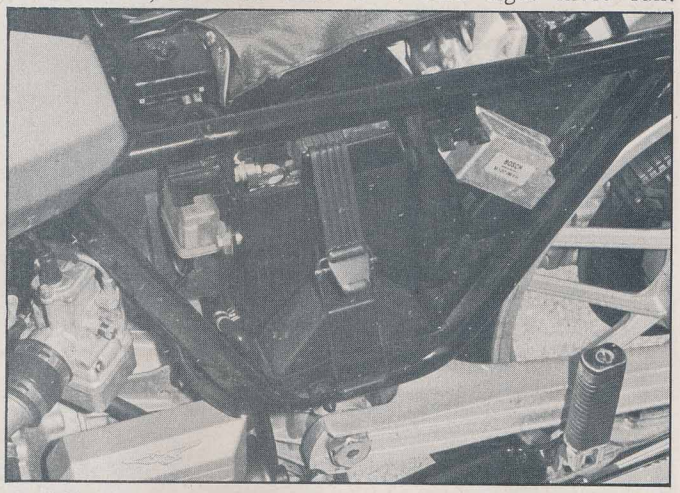
For the first 500 miles the revs were kept down to 4,500rpm on top and this lowered the fuel consumption to 65mpg. With almost 2,000 miles clocked one or two oil weeps are starting to show on the crankcases.

Fuel consumption has averaged out over the first 2,000 miles at 55mpg. This gives nearly 200 miles on the 3.6 gallon tank but that's more than anyone would want to tackle because of the sparsely padded seat. The riding position though is a pleasant compromise between sitting bolt upright and being on the tank.

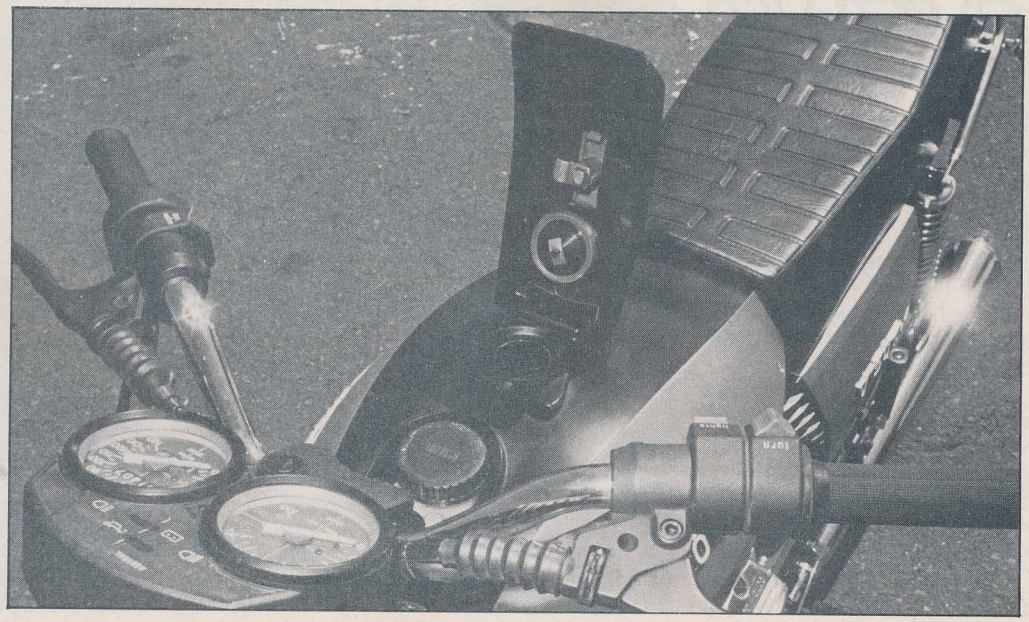
I had the opportunity to make some interesting comparisons with the other 500cc vee-twin when I borrowed the CX Honda for a week. Clambering aboard the much larger CX I discovered a much more comfortable seat, a smoother gearchange and no torque reaction from the engine. It was much quicker from 60mph upwards too.

On the other hand the Honda feels more like a ship than a bike, its front fork nose dives whenever the brakes are applied and a great deal more effort was needed to get it through bends than the Guzzi.

In short, I found the Honda is faster and more sophisticated, but the Guzzi is a darn sight more fun.



Fuel filler cap and brake fluid reservoir (above) are safe under a lockable lid atop the tank. Guzzi's battery (below) is more than adequate in size.



HONDA CX500

Seeing as how I lived farthest from the office it was decreed that I would be the lucky recipient of the CX500 Honda for long term test.

I wasn't complaining – a 60-mile round trip each day by public transport into London is no fun at all.

Even so, I was more nervous than I can recall when we went to collect the bike from Honda's base at Chiswick. After all, I'd never had a brand new road bike for my exclusive use before. But despite the miserable rain, the journey home that night was uneventful. With only 22 miles on the clock I was in no position to push the engine hard.

During the running-in period, rattling up and down the same route I would get envious looks from executives in their company cars. Back home too I was becoming more popular. Mates I hadn't seen for years would drop in for coffee and beg for a go on the bike. Despite all being ex-Rockers, they loved the CX.

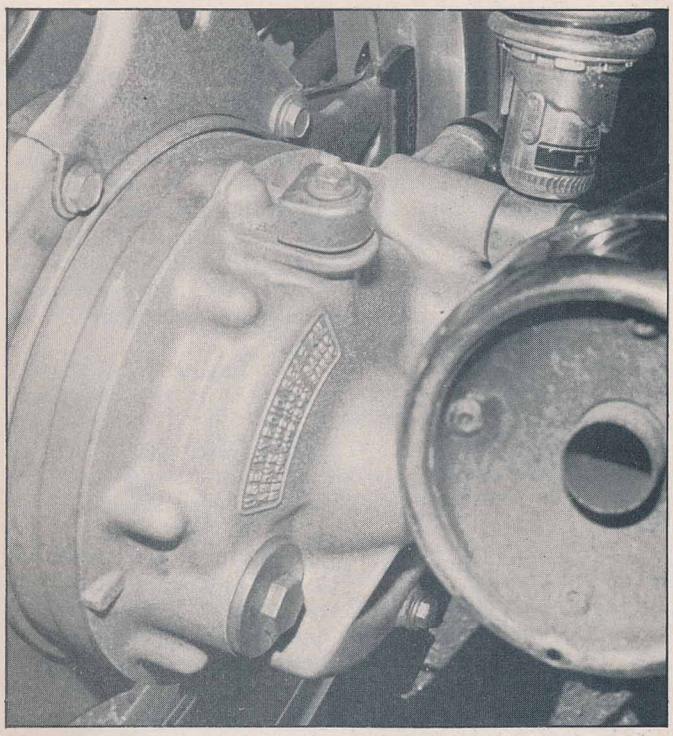
As the 500-mile mark crept up on the clock I was feeling more and more confident and keeping the speed down to 50mph I was getting 64mpg. Ideally the first service should have come up then, two weeks after we collected the bike, but with one thing and another, there were over 1,000 miles logged before Elite Motors gave it their attention.

Apart from the usual servicing, the bike just needed the headlight adjusting. Otherwise, it hadn't used any oil. In fact I'd been getting bored with looking at the dipstick and seeing the same level each time. It got to the point where I was looking for faults.

The CX always started on the button, just as well because there's no kick start lever. Full choke, with the button on the dashboard, was needed in cold weather and had to be held on for the first few miles. But when warm the engine didn't need any choke at all.

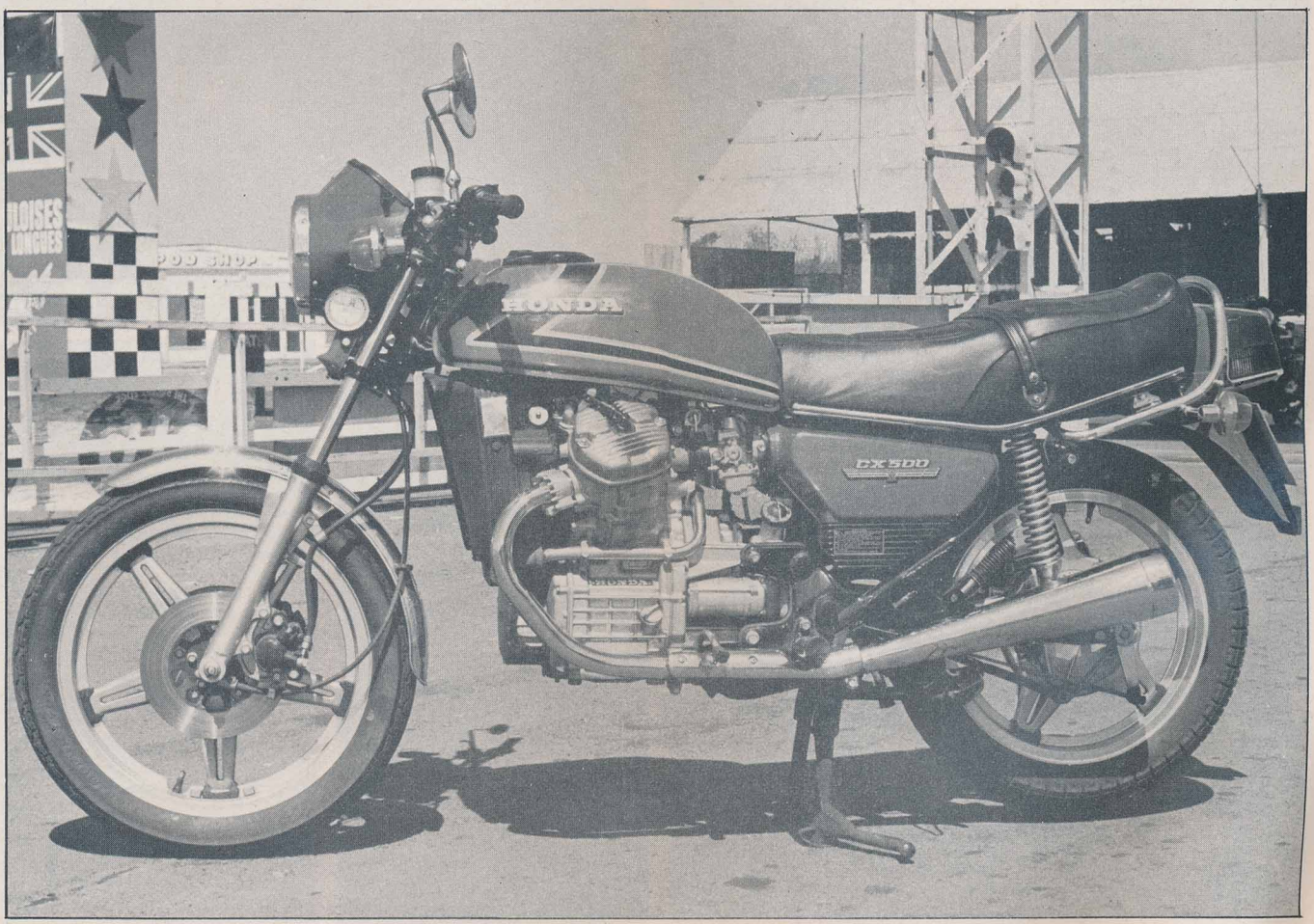
Under way, the bike feels surprisingly light and manoeuvrable which belies its rather heavy and ponderous looks. It's almost a car on two wheels the way it runs without fuss. The extraordinary power unit, a water-cooled vee-twin with shaft drive, will pull smoothly from 30mph in top in traffic without snatch. Combine this with a 100mph top speed and it adds up to the most outstanding unit that I think Honda has offered in the last decade.

There were two main criticisms. Firstly, I didn't like the riding position. Being only 5ft 8in, I had to reach over the tank to the handlebar. It wasn't too bad on motorways but toing and



Shaft drive unit of CX500 Honda. So far the bike hasn't required any attention apart from normal servicing. Wheel bearing on Guzzi failed and drenched disc in oil.

Honda's CX500 is a tall bike for its capacity with a high centre of gravity. Water-cooled engine forms bottom part of frame. Apart from some top hamper at low speed, handling and roadholding are very good.



froing to work each day I could have used a handlebar that was an inch farther back and two inches higher. The American spec handlebar would have been perfect.

Up front in the braking department the twin discs only require the pressure of two fingers to bring the bike to a halt progressively. The rear drum brake, at 7½ inches diameter, seems almost too modest by comparison, but it is powerful enough. Trouble is it's affected by suspension movement, preventing an even pressure on the brake lever when you're braking hard.

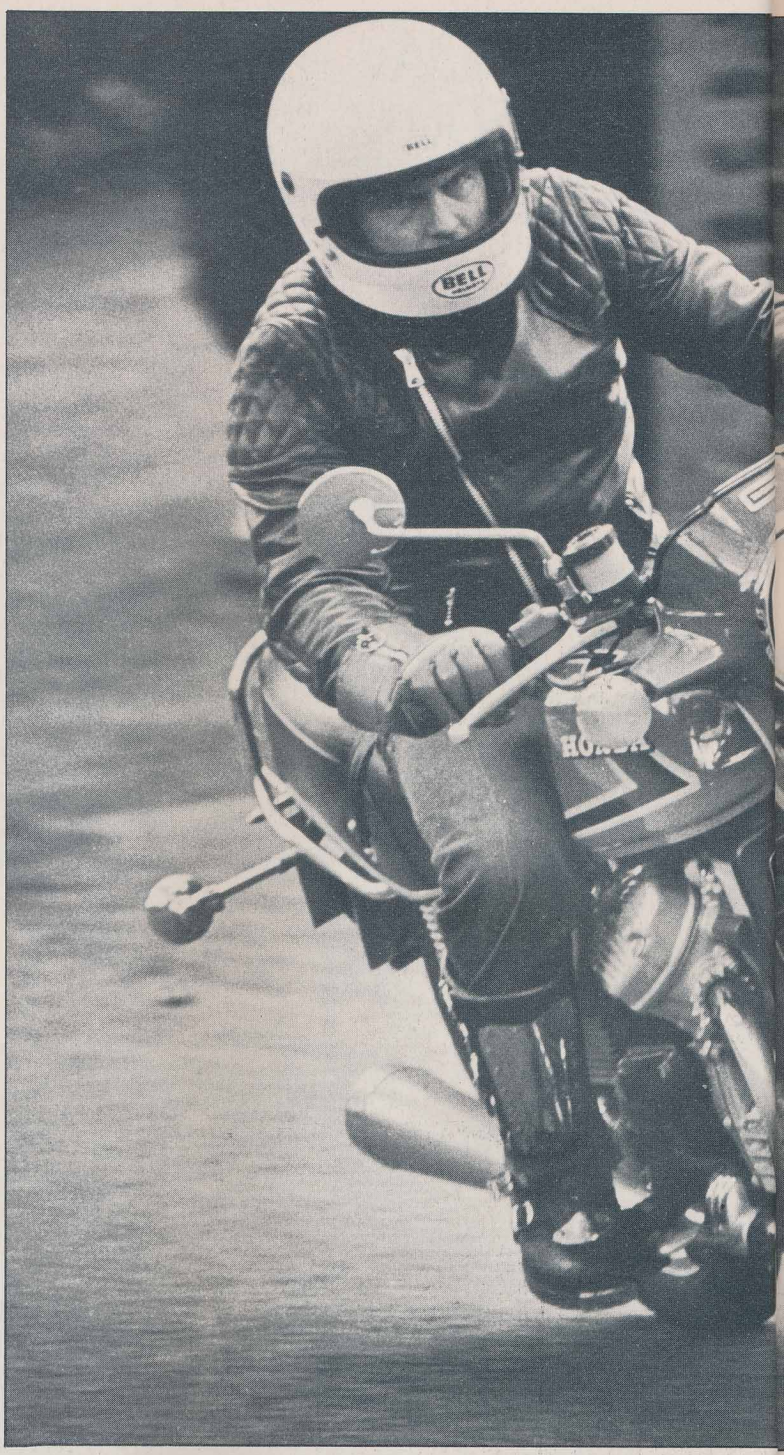
The roadholding was the second main gripe. The front fork is too soft and would bottom out too easily, a fault that has been corrected by pressurising the legs on Dick Pountain's machine.

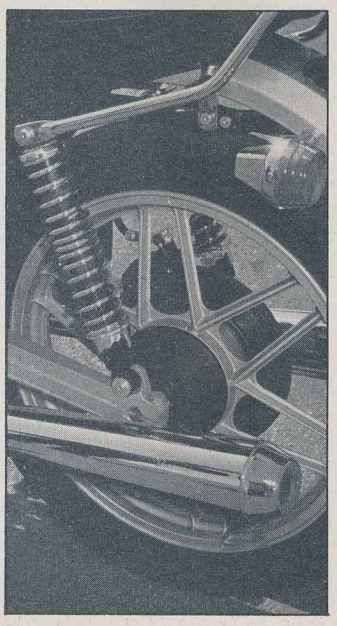
The rear shocks were just as bad, but winding up the spring preload made some difference and the overall handling in the dry was quite acceptable. In the wet, I'm not brave enough to chance my arm, but I would have liked better tyres.

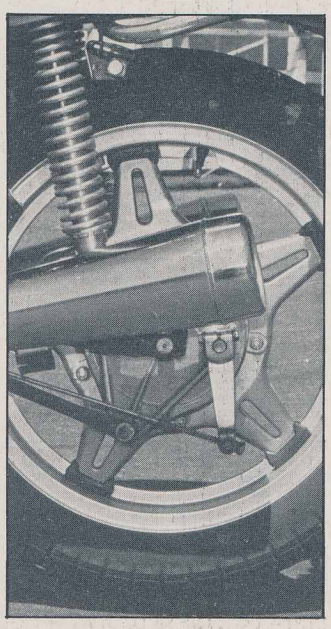
Over the first 3,000 miles the CX used no oil and needed no attention to timing or transmission. It has the best lights you could ask for. Overall the consumption of fuel has averaged out at 51½ mpg.

My impression of the CX compared to the V50 Guzzi is that it is much more nimble when overtaking and can more easily maintain higher cruising speeds.

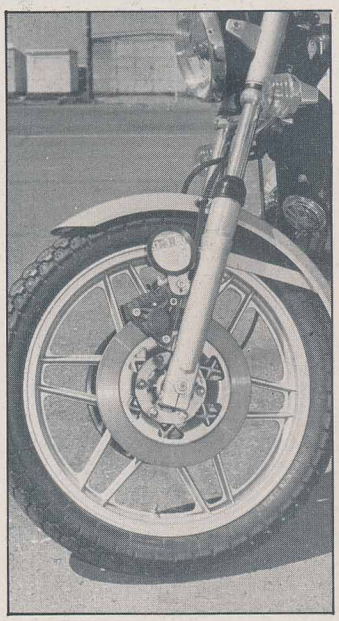
I thought the Guzzi looked more old fashioned but was much prettier. On the road its lack of performance was overcome by much better roadholding but I wasn't happy with the rear diff whine, the hard ride and the poor lights. For day to day use the CX was much more practical.

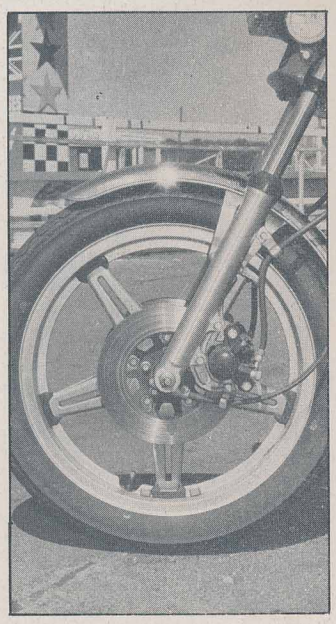






	Moto-Guzzi V50	Honda CX500
Price:	£1,383 inc VAT	£1,330 inc VAT
Warranty:	6 months/6,000 miles	12 months/unlimited
Engine:	Ohv 90-deg vee-twin	Ohv eight-valve 80-deg vee-twin
Capacity:	490cc (74x57mm)	497cc (78x52mm)
Lubrication:	Wet sump	Wet sump
Comp Ratio:	10.8 to 1	10 to 1
Ignition:	Electronic	Capacitor discharge
Carburetion:	Two 24mm Dellortos	Two 35mm CV Keihins
Max Power:	45bhp at 7,500rpm	50bhp at 9,000rpm
Max Torque:	n/a	30lb-ft at 7,00rpm
Primary Drive:	Gear	Gear
Clutch:	Dry, single plate	Wet multiplate
Gearbox:	Five-speed	Five-speed
Final Drive:	Shaft	Shaft
Mph/1,000rpm:	12.8 in top	11.2 in top
Electrics:	12v 20ah battery, 240w alternator, 45/40w headlamp	12v 14ah battery, 170w alternator, 60/55w headlamp
Fuel Capacity:	3.6 gallons with 3½ pint res.	3.76 gal incl 6 pint res.
Frame:	Duplex spine type	Spine type
Suspension:	Telescopic fork (f) Swing arm with 5-pos preload adj (r)	Telescopic fork (f) Swing arm with 5-pos preload adj (r)
Brakes:	Brembo dual 11.8in disc (f) 9¼in disc (r) connected.	Dual 9½in disc (f) 7in drum (r)
Tyres:	Pirelli Mandrake, 3.25S18 (f) 100/90S18 (r)	Dunlop tubeless, 3.25S19 (f) 3.75S18 (r)
DIMENSIONS		
Wheelbase:	55inches	57¼inches
Seat Height:	30inches	32inches
Ground Clearance:	n/a	5.9inches
Handlebar Width:	n/a	29inches
Rake/trail:	n/a	n/a
Dry Weight:	335lbs	440lbs
EQUIPMENT:	Electric starter, rev counter, trafficators, mirrors, headlamp flasher, steering lock, seat lock, fuel cap lock, trip meter.	Electric starter, trafficators, rev counter, mirrors, headlamp flasher, steering lock, seat and helmet lock, trip meter, temperature gauge.
PERFORMANCE		
Top Speed:	100mph	105mph
Calculated Top:	95mph	104mph
speeds at 4th:	83mph	85mph
max power 3rd:	68mph	69mph
revs 2nd:	50mph	53mph
1st:	32mph	36mph
St ¼-mile:	15.97secs/82.03mph	15secs/87.03mph
0-60mph time:	8.5secs	8 secs
Actual speed at ind. 60mph:	55.6mph	53.9mph
Av. Fuel Consumption:	55mpg	51.5mpg
Tank Range:	200 miles	196miles
Importer/ Manufactuer:	Moto-Guzzi Concessionaires Ltd., 53-61 Park Street, Luton, Beds	Honda UK Ltd 4 Power Road, Chiswick, London W4





Rear brakes (far left) on both the Guzzi and the Honda show elements of common sense; the Guzzi has a protected disc on the shaft drive side of the wheel which can be removed without moving the disc; Honda has a drum rear brake for security in wet weather. Twin front brakes (near left) are outwardly similar but the Guzzi uses their patented connected system with the left disc hydraulics connected to the rear disc and operated by the foot pedal. Honda front discs have really good bite but soft fork allows diving under braking.