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 BLACK AND GOLD AND MUDDY TOO | SIMPLY RED. VERY RED



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1972 MOTO GUZZI V700

RADIANT RED

*But not RACING RED. This is an early Guzzi twin
tourist with gentle performance, and brakes...*

WORDS BY JOHN FAIRCLOUGH
PHOTOS BY JOE DICK



Although it's been mentioned countless times, disbelief is still inevitable when the complex Moto Guzzi V8 and the humdrum V700 are cited as the contrasting brainchildren of one brilliant engineer, Giulio Cesare Carcano. However, it's still true. The V700 tag stemmed from its 90° V-twin engine configuration and its initial, somewhat weird, capacity of 703.717cc. The 80 by 70mm ohv motor produced a relaxed 50bhp and was pleasingly simple and accessible. Mated to an agricultural four-speed gearbox and shaft drive all housed in an unbendable loop frame, it embodied everything the Italian government needed in 1965 for military and police duties.

By 1967, the model was available to the public after a minor cosmetic update. For 1968 it acquired 29mm square slide Dell'Orto VHB carbs in place of

the early round items, and a different dual seat with a humped rear. In 1969 the motor grew to 757.5cc, courtesy of a 3mm bore increase while retaining the 70mm stroke, which gave a claimed power lift to 55bhp. The V700 was now dubbed Ambassador in America, and V7 Special in Europe. A further 1969 update included revised cylinder heads, larger valves (41mm inlet / 36mm exhaust), concentric carbs with accelerator pumps, revised crankcase webbing and a left-side gear shift. The V700's plain-case four-speed gearbox remained. Factory claims of a 60bhp output seemed to be losing touch with reality.

For 1970, there were new battery covers which also shrouded the airbox and a new instrument console, now incorporating a rev-counter, replaced the solitary speedometer. By the end of the year Bosch starters and dynamos were featuring. ➤

V700



MOTO GUZZI V700



ABOVE

The Guzzi's V-twin engine in its early guise. Round barrels provide a decent contrast to the later litre lumps. Ignition via a distributor, too

Arty-angled frontal shot reveals how Moto Guzzi fitted functional legshields while still allowing their heads to benefit from the cooling breeze

Diligent parts hunting turned up the forktop assembly and much else

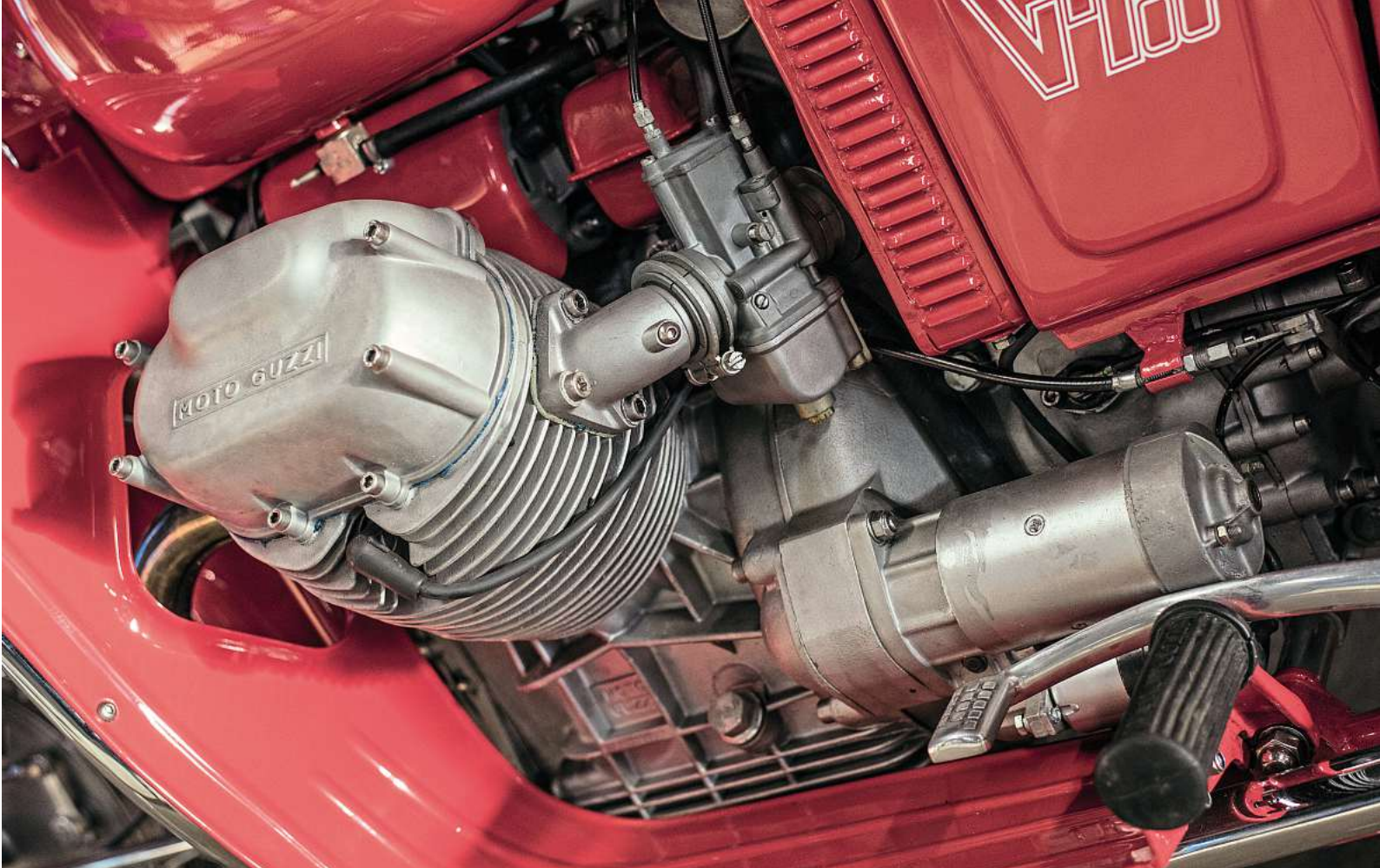
Forks are substantial, mudguarding capacious

A year later, the Ambassador / V7 Special engine had morphed into a nominal 850 unit (actual capacity 844.06cc) displayed at the Milan Show in November to power two new versions of the ageing heavyweight: the V850GT (Eldorado in America) and the California. The 750's 83mm bore continued but the new motor was stroked to 78mm. The most obvious external differences were the ribbed-case five-speed gearboxes, and the four-leading-shoe front brake instead of the previous twin-leader. Both models were essentially the same, but the California was dressed in tasteless accessories for stateside West Coast appeal.

1972 was the first year the Guzzi V-twins officially appeared in the UK. Rivetts (North London) sold small numbers of both the Tonti-frame V7 Sport and the 850GT. Barretts of Redhill took over for 1973. 1974 was the final year for the loop frame GT and California, both models bowing out with a purposeful-looking single Brembo disc in place of the four leading-shoe drum brake. Thereafter, all models used the Tonti frames, which brought the loop frame V700 series to an end.

Although the 1969 Ambassador / V7 Special replaced the V700 on the civilian market, the latter continued in production as a relatively inexpensive police and military motorcycle until circa 1978. Though sold around the world, most went to third-world countries in Africa, Asia and South America. Surprisingly perhaps, as the civilian range received updates some of the improvements found their way to the military/ police bikes. These included larger fuel tanks, four leading-shoe front brakes, 850-type crankcases with waffle-pattern reinforcing ribs, and 'sump plate' final drive cases in place of the earlier 'sunburst' items. The motor stayed steadfastly at 703cc though, mated with the plain-case four-speed gearbox throughout production. The factory supplied fairings, legshields, panniers, single or dual seats, and special lights to forces' requirements.

My V700 was bought about eight years ago in Edinburgh through an *Old Bike Mart* ad. Reputed to have seen police work in Ghana prior to somehow fetching up in Scotland, it was in typical 'unfinished project' guise, i.e. incomplete but in



large lumps. Luckily, the large lumps included a motor that was still together, which is always preferable to one that's been dismantled with a hammer and chisel. Also included were the Borrani rims, four leading-shoe front brake, complete final drive assembly and rear brake, gearbox, frame, dual seat and rear suspension units, plus the rather neat footboards and panniers. Fork legs were present, but whatever had been fitted up top of them was missing, including the headlamp and handlebars. Presumably the police equipment that lived there had simply been ripped off when the Guzzi was sold. A box of bits with the large lumps included the original handlebar levers and clamps, plus the 'whiffle tree' compensator for the two front brake cables. Nice to have.

I spent a couple of years faffing about with the Guzzi, pretending I was going to restore it myself. At least during this time I managed to acquire some of the missing bits and pieces, or rather good friend and Moto Guzzi GB Club member Joe Caruso did. His amazing ability to obtain the unobtainable produced an alloy top shroud, speedometer, headlamp and fork ears, a more lightly used four-speed gearbox than the one that came with the bike, CEV switches (for originality and unreliability!) and a pair of very early V-twin rocker covers, incorrect for this model, but big on looks. Joe sourced many of the engine components too, plus the exhaust system. The fact that the V700 wasn't a UK import made part-searching both difficult and expensive.

I polished the alloy rims, had the drums vapour-blasted, and got the wheels spoked up locally. Time and the hours rolled by, plus a lot of tyre-kicking. Well, rim-kicking actually since I hadn't

ABOVE

Visible here are the starter motor, the clutch lever, the left-hand carb and much else, including the unusual combined legshields and footboards, and the 'waffle' pattern cast-in bracing on the engine

Author Fairclough describes the front brake as 'unimpressive'. Beauty is often less important than effectiveness

Despite being two 2ls drums back-to-back, the brake requires the rider to maintain a decent distance from the vehicle in front

The front brake is operated by a pair of cables, balanced at the handlebar by this neat arrangement. The lever itself is an object of delight





ABOVE

A great example of one very together motorcycle. Intended for touring, long legs and comfort and practicality allowed the big red Guzzi to gather its own following. Braking and gearchanging were less appealing, however, certainly to the sporting rider

got around to fitting tyres. In fact, I hadn't got around to doing much at all, so an encounter at one of the Stafford shows with Brackley-based Guzzi expert Bruce Rawsthorne resulted in my passing everything over to him to prevent the restoration stalling for several more years. A complete engine strip revealed the need for a crank refurb, new barrels and pistons (capacity went up to 757cc, since 703cc parts were virtually unobtainable) and refreshment of the cylinder heads. The latter included revival of the worn exhaust port threads which take the screw-in exhaust pipe retaining rings.

A decent four-speed box was born of two tired ones. The rear drive unit needed no work. The carburettors had succumbed to serious corrosion, but a pair of 29mm square slide Dell'Ortos that came in a box when I bought my Guzzi 750S in another life finally found a purpose. Bruce tidied the cycle parts as necessary which included a good deal of work on the dented legshields and panniers.

Initially the plan was to replicate the colour scheme of the early V700s: black frame, red fuel tank with chrome panels, and silver-grey battery covers, toolboxes and mudguards. The more I looked at photographs of bikes wearing this livery, the less I liked it. So I decided to risk a non-standard single colour finish in Ford radiant red, the nearest shade to the 'Guzzi Red' used on so many of the factory's other models. Whether it's worked, or whether there's just too much red on show is a matter of opinion. The white fuel tank decals are non-standard too, but complement the battery cover logos copied from the originals. Thankfully there was little to re-chrome, but Derby Chrome Platers did an excellent job on what there was.

Bruce did a top job on the restoration, so now I had a beautiful loop-frame Guzzi to keep my two Tonti-frame bikes company. Unfortunately, the V700 riding experience came nowhere near its looks. The V700's main problem is its weight. Whichever figures you believe, its mass is still the wrong side of 500lb. The poundage feels further

away from the road than on a Tonti-frame bike too, and whereas the latter seems to shrink to become a wonderfully small motorcycle once on the move, the loop-frame bike retains all the barge-like qualities it has when you're shoving it around the garage. Nor is such bulk easily stopped. The imposing-looking four-leader is reminiscent of your average British bike front brake, i.e. unimpressive. The shoes have been relined twice to try to improve stopping power, but the Guzzi continues to need long stretches of Tarmac before coming to a halt.

Compounding the problem is the gearbox. Whereas the five-speeder can be cogged down easily to aid retardation with a bit of judicious throttle-blipping, the V700's four-speeder is reluctant to drop a cog until revs and road speed have dropped so low as to render any available engine braking of minimal use. The quaint rocking gearchange pedal doesn't help things. The last bike I owned with this set-up (a Laverda 750SFC) allowed me to ignore the clumsy heel-actuated appendage in favour of a toe under the forward section for down-changing. Unfortunately, the Guzzi's legshields demand usage of the heel portion all the time because there is no room for a booted toe twist pedal and legshield. Not ideal for me.

All this means that the V700 has to be ridden very sedately, and with a good deal of forethought to create some safe space between it and other road users. This really isn't much fun on today's roads, where motorists will happily steal that space so their kids can get a good look at the funny old motorbike burbling along. So, sadly, the V700 has spent a lot of time in the garage while I've ridden my quicker, better braked, and therefore (for me) safer classic motorcycles.

Putting the V700 on the Mid-Lincs VMCC stand at January's CBG Newark Show offered a chance to sell the bike. A 'collector' bought it. He must have taken an early dislike to it, because days later it was back on the market for significantly more than he paid for it. Still, all's fair in love, war and classic bike dealing... **CBG**

