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IL FALCONE

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Once again, my old friend Dr. Laurie North was asked to make a translation of a 14-page article by Vittorio Crippa appearing in a summer 2004 edition of “Moto Ciclismo” under the heading *Superstar* with the sub-title of *Guide to the purchase of a Moto Guzzi Falcone Sport 500*.

Laurie has produced another fine piece of work for Guzzi Club members who own, or would like to own, a Falcone. This is another labour of love from Laurie North and the usual disclaimers about the accuracy of the translation apply.

You’ll need to track down June’s “Moto Ciclismo” if you want to see the original article in glorious technicolour and this would be the best way to get the full flavour of the original piece.

Dave Thomas Bristol England (December 2004)

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Guide to the purchase of the Moto Guzzi Falcone Sport 500

SUPERSTAR

For the motorcycling community the Falcone 500 represents the essence of vintage motorcycling with all the virtues and defects which follow. It is the most sought after and yearned for production Guzzi, especially in the Sport version.

It has never been cheap but in the last years it has reached very high figures which are bound to be maintained over time. But beware of fakes !

By VITTORIO CRIPPA,

Photo MOTORCYCLE ARCHIVE and GIANLUCA BUCCI

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• The Pirelli circuit.
Now the sacred place for our tests runs.
The rumble of the Falcone Sport 500 with Guido Fumigalli
In the saddle. The bike
Belongs to the Roberto Radielli collection to whom we extend our thanks

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• Aesthetically, the Falcone is unmistakable. This is an example of the second series introduced in 1952, recognisable by the abandonment of chrome, and the magneto with automatic advance. The Falcone, with its rival the Gilera Saturno, represents the Italian technical school of the 50's in the field of big cylinder machines at its best.

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• In a classical front and rear view, the Mandello motorcycle is very recognisable. Note the sporty handlebar with its valve lifter on the left and the protrusions on the ends of the oil tank, the fixed type kick-start and the silencer.

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Is there another vintage motorcycle in Italy as famous as the Falcone? Probably not. Also because, even today, when vintage motorcycles have improved tremendously compared to some years ago, for many superficial observers a nice red tank with the golden eagle and the classical "Bacon Slicer" flywheel, is sufficient for it to be confused with any classical Moto Guzzi.

But it is Falcone's sisters who gain by this comparison, because, without wishing to criticize this or that model from the glorious house of Mondello, the Falcone is undoubtedly the endpoint of Carlo Guzzi's original idea; an idea born with its prototype designated G.P. of 1920 and followed with determination up to the ultimate development, that is the Falcone.

This motorcycle captures the inheritance of all the experiences carried out on 500 cc engines of the V series, that is, with overhead valves that were born at the end of 1933, and represents the final chapter, as the Nuovo (New) Falcone of 1969 cannot be considered a re-elaboration because of its very many technical differences.

Up to now we have spoken of the Falcone in general terms, but one must immediately make the necessary distinctions as various versions have different performance, different "longings" among the fans and, naturally, different economic evaluations.

Beside the Falcone Sport there are, therefore, the Turismo and the Militare types. Though fundamentally the same, they incorporate significant differences that render the Sport the most longed for and sought after among the others, and with which we concern ourselves in this buying guide that, as always, aims to be a summary of advice based on research, experience and the opinions of authoritative "experienced in the field".

From the 16th to the 26th March 1950 the Falcone was presented at the Geneva Motor Show. At the same time another big success by Moto Guzzi was presented – the likeable and ageless Galletto, which, in Geneva, truly distracted

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many observers from the majestic red Guzzi. On the other hand it is more than natural, since Mandello's innovative mixture of motorcycle and scooter was, for sure, aimed at a certain clientele numerically greater than the 500 class. The Falcone, at present in only one version, is close in performance to the elegant Astore, from which it borrows some technical solutions but is profoundly different in others. It is difficult to call its line beautiful, at least according to the classical schemes of motorcycling aesthetics. A lack of balance, truncated lines, mechanical parts apparently placed a little too casually, tubes and wires that get tangled and twist around the engine and the frame. In general the motorcycle gives the impression of being longer than it really is, an effect also due to the horizontal disposition of the cylinder. If, however, one considers the Falcone according to the needs of practicality and functionality that a machine needs to have, it is difficult to find another motorcycle to compare it with. The entire design has the object of durability and robustness. The engine exposes the hottest part, the head, to the cooling air, and even the oil tank is placed so as to offer a vast surface to the wind during the ride. Lubrication is "*excellent and abundant*", as is traditional in the classic Guzzis, with a double pump of send and return with the capacity of 60 litres per hour in full flow for the 3 litres of oil contained in the tank. The big flywheel, weighing over 8 kilos, immediately distinguishes a Moto Guzzi, and is a source of joy (and pain !), from the proverbial minimum to some riding characteristics not appreciated by all.

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• Considered as Carlo Guzzi's last masterpiece, today the Falcone reaches high figures that can reach, or even exceed. 10,000 euros in perfect condition. Naturally one must be aware of fakes, based on the Militare and Turismo

(Note that this price tag of 10,000 euros in 2004 is now much nearer 20,000 euros in Italy, for 100% examples of the "Sport" 17th Aug. 2010).

Easily available spares, reasonable prices

As mentioned, fortunately there are no problems for 500 Falcone spares. However, the more demanding fans do not content themselves with replica parts. At the cost of a long search and greater expense, they hunt for the original parts, more and more rare, still wrapped in oiled paper and with the Moto Guzzi seals. Some prices (in euros) give one a sort of estimate.

Piston 50, camshaft 170, saddle 110, saddle cover 30, final drive chain 16, crown wheel 32, pinion 10, chrome rim for headlight 18.50, petrol tap 15.40, handlebar grips 15, ignition contacts 3.98, engine gasket set 10.35, exhaust manifold 35, chromed fishtail silencer 90, crankshaft bearings 90, clutch disk set 53, handlebar lever 18 each, headlight ferrule 18.39, rubber footrest 4, battery 49,50, Metzeler tyre Perfect 77 Block 3.25 – 19 68 euro (plus VAT), analogous Michelin 79 (including VAT). As far as the coachwork is concerned, for a complete respray and linings one can spend about 1.500 euros (price very variable), excluding the necessary sandblasting and eventual process of straightening the mudguards or tanks. A cylinder rebore costs circa. 28 euros.

Good points

- Class and glamour
- Technical exclusiveness
- Musicality of the engine at tickover and low revs
- General robustness
- Absence of oil drips
- Value constantly increasing
- Available spares

...and faults

- Frame not very rigid
- Soft suspension
- Slow acceleration
- Gears slow and noisy
- Adjustment of the forks

The main points

Fork (top left)

The upper casings 46 mm in diameter are in steel and bridged by a steel plate. The two stanchions inside the upper tubes, have a diameter of 30mm, are plated in thick chrome and inside are the shafts of the hydraulic double action shock absorbers.

The movement is guided by bronze bushes high up, fixed in correspondence with 2 visible bolts that hold the spring head as well, and by sliding blocks below in the same material that are found in the two sheaths at the end of the covers.

The rear sliding block is mounted on an eccentric cam that is regulated from outside such that it takes up the play which derives from the wear of the bush. It is a good rule to grease the sliding blocks well. If necessary the chrome covers that protect the adjusters and the rubber bellows can be mounted on the external end of the legs as previously.

In this way the trails of oil and grease that dirty the hub and the forks are reduced. The forks must be lubricated every 1.000 km through the six specified nipples using Shell Donax A1 oil.

But checking the fluid level is not very easy, because to raise the wheel from the ground, you need to remove the upper cap, the supplementary spring, the internal cap and the shock absorber. Then you put in a small rod and add oil until you read 26/28 cm from the bottom of the arms on the rod.

Brakes and wheels (bottom left)

Both are 200 mm side drum brakes. Up until January 1957 the edges of the brake dust covers are chromed, later varnished. The rear drum is bolted to the hub, cannot be taken apart and has a fixed sprocket of 36 teeth (the Turismo has 39). The front wheel has rims in light alloy with 36 holes, 18 short and 18 long spokes and 40 holes in the rear wheel with 20 short and 20 long spokes. Ridged front tyre, size 3.25 -19, treaded rear tyre size 3.50 - 19. the rear wheel spindle is removed from the left. Tyre pressures; front 1.4 bar, rear 1.5/2.0 bar.

Handlebar and controls (top right)

Up to the end of 1952 the models had handlebars of 25 mm, later reduced to 22.5 mm. They require a position with elbows tucked in, with the body slightly inclined but not in the least uncomfortable, which with the rear setting of the foot rest compared to the Astore, gives the Falcone the necessary sportiness. So long as the advance and retard is manual a little lever is present; pulling it back retards it to make starting easier. The levers are in clear colours and easily get dirty. The throttle has a long movement and does not return automatically and the cable replacement is a laborious process. The grips are not ergonomic, not used in those days, but are not uncomfortable. On the far left, mounted underneath the brake and clutch levers, is the valve lifter, the correct use of which considerably eases starting. The "instrumentation" of the series is limited to the red light showing insufficient current fitted to the headlamp cover.

Frame

The front part with the double cradle in one piece is bolted at the rear to the plates that hold the engine, the forked suspension, the saddle and the mudguard. The steering head has the adjustable friction damper and has bearing seats for 36 1/4 in. balls. The steering head is inclined at 34.5°.

Coachwork (top left)

According to the year, the tank was painted in red and chromed or painted in red and black. Capacity 17.5 litres of which 2 are reserve. The racing style Bonora or Tebaldi cap is quick opening and holds well. The carburettor is a precious (and costly) Dell'Orto SS. Check, therefore, that it is the correct type. The oil tank has circular domed up to the models built in the first months of 1953, then it has flat sides. The seat on the rear mudguard allows the rider to assume a low position and, as a passenger was not foreseen, the Falcone came out without rear footrests. Other accessories available at the time were the chromed end flanges of the mudguards, the already mentioned covers of the forks and the Veglia-Borletti tachometer with telescopic transmission. The colour has only ever been red with gold and black lines on the mudguards, tanks and tool boxes.

Electricals (bottom)

The dynamo is a Marelli DN 19 G 30/6-2000 D, with a regulator incorporated, turns to the right, has a power of 30 watts and takes its drive from the clutch gear. From 1961 the DN 36 C 30/6-2000 D with external regulator was placed under the saddle and with a power of 60 watts. The battery is a 6V/12 Ah in the special place under the saddle; to get at it is necessary to remove the two bolts from the springs and flip the saddle forwards. The headlamp, 150mm, can be SIEM, CEV, or rarely Carrello and up to 1958 the attachments were horizontal. Later they were turned so that the headlamp is higher. One can find the explanation for the modification in the necessity for installing the Police siren and the horn on the civil examples beneath it. During restoration the attachments are often positioned as before 1958, perhaps to hide the military provenance. Lamp bilux 6V/25-25W, parking light 6V/5W, ignition light 6V/3W, fused at 8Ah. Rear light with 6V/3W lamp. A Marelli T38 horn. With the new road code of 1959 the rear light with stop lamp of 6V/3-15 W and mechanical switch was adopted. From 1961, thanks to the more powerful dynamo, the 35-35W bilux lamp ignition light 1.5W, 2 fuses of 8Ah and the T6 CA/RCN 1 horn were used

Exhaust system (top right)

From 1956 the typical chromed fishtail silencer with a removable end for cleaning was used.

Today it is replaced by a simpler version. But because of the noise, they were forced to abolish it in favour of a non openable cylindrical type that, in effect, silenced more but, at the same time, took away a little of the sound and power of the Mandello monocylinder. The front pipe of the exhaust normally tends to become coloured by the heat.

Rear suspension (right centre)

The fork is dampened with the classic Guzzi system introduced with the GT (Norge) in 1928 in which the double casing under the engine (see design above) holds the 4 springs that work under compression horizontally. The rod inside the fork moves to act at the front ends of the springs, compressing them back when the forks rise following the bumps in the ground. Working on the nuts at the head of the rods, after having removed the cover of the casing, it is possible to adjust the tension of these springs. The return is dampened by the classical adjustable friction shock absorbers with cork discs. To adjust them turn the wing nuts with modest force, then tighten them another half if you intend riding very fast or on rough roads, and the opposite for contrary conditions. Every 1000 kilometres grease the axle of the forks by means of its grease nipple.

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Valve timing (centre left)

Valve adjustment is relatively easy. They have a play of 0.05mm. By removing the round chrome cap it is possible to get to the adjusters. The timing of the engine is correct when, with valve play at 0.02mm, the inlet valve starts to open and the arrow stamped on the flywheel is at 110/115mm (measured on the periphery of the flywheel) from that stamped on the gearbox. With the 2 arrows coinciding the piston is at TDC. The camshaft is an expensive replacement and is different in the two versions of the Falcone. It is in steel, in one piece with gears that engage directly with the pinion of the crankshaft. It is easily reachable by removing the crank case cover on the right which is stamped with the engine number and that also houses the valve lifter. The inlet valve measures 43mm in diameter whilst that of the exhaust is 40mm.

Electrical timing (top right)

Up to the November of 1952, the magneto is a Marelli MLA 53 with a manual advance, then an MCR 4-E with automatic advance. Timing is done fully advanced. The points are easily reachable by moving the round cover of the magneto, they are easily replaced though they last for many kilometres. They should start to open when the arrow on the flywheel is 95 mm from that on the crankcase measured on the periphery of the flywheel and they are set at 0.40mm at maximum opening. Be careful when you wash the bike to cover the magneto carefully. However it is not affected in long runs in the rain. Dampen the felt of the point's cam occasionally with a drop of engine oil. Plug Marelli CW 6 L or analogous.

Engine (bottom right)

The fins of the cylinder are radially arranged at 10°. When cold the distributor and piston are a little noisy, but on warming, if everything is in order, the mechanical noise drops to normal level. You should not hear sounds of the bearings, a sign of wear and of need for replacement, nor should you find oil behind the flywheel, a sign that the felt washers must be changed as they no longer hold it. A good indication of the state of the bearings (at the top of the drawing), the right is a ball race and the left a roller bearing, is assessed by pulling the flywheel either radially or axially. The movements must be minimal. A radial play of 0.03/0.05 mm is the maximum allowed and an axial play of 0.1 mm. If you notice play in the first case you must replace the roller bearing, while in the second case the ball race must be changed. The cylinder has a return tube in cast iron which is available as a spare part.

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Carburettor top left)

The Sport adopted the beautiful Dell'Orto SS A carburettor with a diameter of 29 mm. Its adjustment is not very simple, and it is important that the throttle valve slides perfectly without, however, any play that allows air to pass. If the carburettor is not right, the engine takes its revenge by difficulty in starting, by kickback on the pedal and violent jets of petrol that spray over your left leg, and backfiring above all on starting. Besides one needs to frequently verify the correct tightness of the nut that fixes the brass tube to the float chamber, being careful not to tighten it too much so as not to break the tube or ruin the threads on the carburettor. Some seepage and petrol staining is normal on the SS carburettors.

Transmission and gears (bottom)

First is composed of a helicoidal gear coupling of broad section the larger of which engages with the clutch disks. Because of a leakage of oil through the oil seal or by an excessive flow of oil vapours that lubricate the first gear you must check the soiling of the clutch disks with consequent slipping. However, it is easy to remedy this because it is enough to pour a glassful of parafine / solvent via the screw hole put there specially and found on the crank case immediately behind the flywheel. Start the engine, repeatedly engaging the clutch, stop the engine and remove the lower screw to empty the petrol. The gearbox is different from that of the Astore and on GTV, and is more like that of the Dondolino. It is lubricated with engine oil that arrives via an internal canal. A common problem is the breakage of the external pre-selector spring, a clock spring type to which is attached the the pedal return mechanism. Its replacement is easy. The design shows the differences between the gear levers of the Turismo (on the left) and those of the Sport.

Lubrication (top right)

The oil tank functions also as a radiator because its largest part is exposed to the air. In the tank there is a mesh filter and on the right side the delivery tube to the pump with a rubber anti-vibration part which, if the circulation functions well, in a short time must become hot to the touch. The pump body is in bronze and attached to the timing cover and driven by gears for delivery and by blades for recovery. After having circulated in the engine the oil returns to the tank through a second filter (crankcase) and a copper tube. Other copper tubes carry an oil bleed to the rockers and to the valve springs, then back into the crank case in a copper tube, and from here to the tank. Via an internal canal the oil vapours also reach the first gear guaranteeing a minimum of lubrication. Every 3 to 5000 km change the 3 litres of oil, and when doing so it is important to clean the big filter in the tank and also that of the stud bolt on the return from the engine. The circuit is provided with a ball valve and spring that prevents the passage of oil when the engine is stopped. In time, however, the valve does not hold well and lets a little oil into the crankcase. Because of this you can fit the Falcone with an oil tap like that on the previous GTV.

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Sergio Malguzzi: 200,000 kilometres on the Falcone

The lovers of vintage motorcycles can be divided into three large categories. The first are those who, when not at home, keep their motorcycles in the garage hermetically protected from dust, contenting themselves with the idea of possession and with the occasional Sunday “dusting” or beauty treatment with the latest discovery for polishing coachwork. Often they don’t even start it so as not to see those little seepages of oil from the gasket or the inevitable coloration of the chrome of the exhaust pipe.

Next, the most numerous group, uses the vintage motorcycle mainly in the warm weather when the tarmac is absolutely dry. They usually go to meetings (so long as they are not too far from home !), and like the first group, they show an almost maniacal care of the paintwork and the bright metalwork.

Finally there is the third group of “fanatics“. They are in a small group and they stand out because their “ancient” machine will never be completely shining and resplendent. On the contrary, it will bear signs of intense, almost daily use. These are people who, with a Gilera, a Guzzi or a Triumph, have done so many kilometres that they cannot remember how many.

Sergio Malguzzi belongs to this last “herd” of dedicated riders. To understand the personality, let’s say that he is the president of the Moto Club Ticinese of Milan, is an athletic sixty year old and, something of special interest to us, has been riding a Falcone for 23 years. Malguzzi boasts a past as a rider in the Audax and Regularità competitions of the 50s, as a military courier with a Falcone, and as a motorcyclist in the truest sense of the word. A member of the M.C. Ticinese for years, he has for the past year held the post of president, but has always been an active member, founding the vintage motorcycle section over 20 years ago with the intense “fanaticism” that marks it.

Why the Falcone?

“When young everybody has a dream, or perhaps even more than one. I had many motorcycles in my youth, but I could only dream about the Guzzi 500. The Condor was the ultimate and - inaccessible. The Falcone was seen around, some friends had one and that was more tangible. At a certain point in my life I asked myself why not. I knew Galanti well; he worked in Milan, in that unique motor-clinic on the romantic Navigli [canals in Milan]. I went to see him in 1981 and immediately bought a Falcone, an ex-police Turismo. I remember having paid, newly restored, 1,850,000 lire (a V35 cost 2,462,000 lire Ed) and ... we never left each other. Why the Turismo? Because, for what I wanted to do, it was and still is the perfect bike.”

The Saturno is very beautiful, but I’m sorry for all my friends who have a Gilera, because it cannot have the same reliability as the Guzzi. The Astore is also splendid, very elegant, but for me it is too big. The Falcone Sport has a difficult character which would never have suited me.”

Are the two bikes so different?

“The Sport is a great motorcycle, fast, powerful but difficult compared to the Turismo. You are lower and less relaxed in the saddle. The starting is more difficult; the high-g geared Sport “kicks” a lot more, has different ratios and is more difficult in every situation. Besides the SS carburettor is a source of many problems with “blips”, “refusals” and difficulties in its adjustment.”

You use the Falcone as if it were a modern machine. But does it really go so well?

"I believe that every motorist has "his" motorcycle. I am not referring to the mechanical object, but to what it represents for him. For the Guzzi owner it is a question of the throb of the engine, of starting, of defects only to those who do not know the old Guzzis. I believe the vintage bike must be used. I respect the collectors who keep them in a museum, but I could never do that. I have been to the North Cape, to Scotland, to the Isle of Man, to the Eastern countries, to Spain and to Sicily. I have difficulty in finding a European country where the Falcone has not taken me in the last 23 years. And I have converted a group of indomitable enthusiasts to this passion of mine and with whom I have covered thousands of kilometres a year."

As a great expert of the Falcone, then, you are in the best position to tell us the problems of this motorbike.

"It is difficult for a Guzzi owner to admit that his bike has any defects. I have often read about a certain flexibility of the frame on fast curves, but I know it isn't true that it does not hold the road, it simply behaves like that; it's a characteristic. The same with the brakes: they are those of a motorcycle of 50 years ago. In the rain they lose power, it is true, but it's enough to dab them now and then for the lining to dry out, and when necessary it is ready for braking. I often hear criticisms about the gears. He who speaks badly of them does not know how to use them. One must follow through with the pedal in its travel and hold it down just a moment. If one does that, the change is very sweet and not really noisy. A defect at birth, perhaps, is the known problem of the clutch plate that breaks, but that can be solved replacing it with Ercole's parts as I have done."

But in all these years of "cohabitation" there must have been some little "disappointments".

"I have substituted the original carburettor with that from the New Falcone. To be precise: in normal use there are no problems; the odd refusal, some petrol leakage, a wet plug, are things that are part of the game. But in my case, with luggage and panniers, perhaps very far from home and tired from the many kilometres done and more to do, I preferred to make this choice that maybe not everyone will share. But I no longer had problems of carburetion, of tick over and with starting."

If you had to write a "log book" of your 200,000 km what would be written in it?

"After the first 70,000 km a valve cracked and damaged the piston. Therapy: replacement of the piston, the valve and a honing of the cylinder. At the beginning I often had punctures. Then I noticed that the problem did not come from outside, but from inside the wheel: the end of the spoke punctured the inner tube. I fitted a thicker rim tape over the nipples and I ground the end of the offending spokes after having tightened them well. Moreover I inserted an anti puncture product in the inner tube that proved to be effective. I emphasize that I replace the tyres and the inner tubes every 20/25,000 km. At around 120,000 km, on the motorway near Hockenheim the big-end bearing broke and maybe, besides the kilometres, I was to blame because on that journey because I had been particularly ruthless with the throttle. New piston and valves again and a clutch after a further 60,000km, and recently I have changed the springs of the forks that had weakened and the bronze bushes."

What advice for the maintenance?

"I change the oil every 3,000 kilometres, cleaning the filters of both the tank and the engine properly. Perhaps I could do it less frequently but I use any normal oil. I grease the clutch bearing, I use a cool plug and when I fill up I always use an additive. In my opinion it is important, especially since the valve seats are not in stainless steel. I have mounted the Astore handlebar grips as they are bigger and more comfortable, I have added a small rack, a saddle bag and a tank bag. I have fitted more rigid springs to the saddle which made it much more comfortable on long distances. Before, the saddle gave way behind and I had to hang on to the handlebar which was much more tiring. However, I also worked on the suspension using parts from a more rigid three wheeler. [a three wheeler van with motorcycle engine and handlebars] On my journeys, as well as the usual 'quick' spares, I always carry electrical wires and elastic bands as in heroic times!"

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The forks from the Astore are still used, but not the rear hydraulic dampers which proved to be an unnecessary complication. Besides the type of clutch is used at present also on the racing Guzzis with excellent results and with possibility of fine adjustment. It appears, therefore, the best choice for a bike that is the most sportive amongst the production of the House of the Eagle. Shorter springs, placed under the engine as usual, give a greater rigidity to the rear, always compared to the Astore, and they are certainly in character with its sportiness. And, in order to enhance this aspect, the footrest is placed a little further back and the handlebar is narrower. The brakes, which are still single-sided drum, even though of good size are a little disappointing.

The petrol tank follows the dictates of the moment: less tapering than before and very capacious. It offers a good support to the knees, thus definitively doing away with the rubber knee pads of the 20's and later. The finishing touches are brilliant: ample use of chrome in different strategic points: from the tank that, in practice, has only one red logo painted on the chrome, on the edges of the brakes, to the long fishtail silencer, and the elegant black and gold lines on the mudguards and the oil tank. With a declared power of 23 HP at 4,500 revs the Falcone touches 135 km/h, which is in line with the performance of the competition. The first deliveries had already started in 1950 at the price of 482,000 lire, 20,000 lire more than the Astore and a little less than the Gilera Saturno Sport that became its eternal rival. Quite a high price since the average monthly salary of a good workman was about 50,000 lire, and even with hire purchase, which is so much in vogue, it is a high price.

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- In order to ride the Falcone Sport with ease a period of apprenticeship is necessary, even for an experienced motorcyclist. When judged by modern standards, the power appears low (23 HP at 4,500 revs), the Falcone, however, reaches 135Km/h and one needs to get used to a certain flexibility of the frame which produces some oscillations, mainly on wide and fast curves. However, thanks to the distribution of the weight and to the limited height of the saddle from the ground, the centre of gravity is low thus improving handling and road holding. Motorcyclists of old knew well the little tricks for starting the single with relative ease; tickle the carburettor, retard the ignition, little or no gas, and set the piston at start of compression. At this point "play" with the kick-start giving it a decisive push when you feel the pedal resistance diminish. Rarely does the Falcone fail to start with the first kick.

Production, frame and engine numbers (bottom left)

Up to and including 1953, when the Falcone had already been in production for four years, all the frames that carried a 500cc engine had a unique numbering system that went from 51 to 33864. From 1954 a new system was adopted with two letters followed by two numbers followed by another two letters. The first Falcone Sport with such a numbering system was FS 00 AA up to FS 88 AB. The engine number is found on the cover of the valve gears and repeated on the right low down on the base; the frame number is on the tube under the saddle. Giving Moto Guzzi the frame numbers of your Falcone it is possible to get the exact date of manufacture. In all between 1950 and 1967 12,405 Falcone motorbikes were made including the Sport, the Turismo and the Militare.

(under the picture)

The frame numbers are stamped on the tube underneath the saddle while those of the engine are visible on the timing cover and on the right crankcase. The frame and engine numbers are not identical.

(page 84 continuation) The Falcone takes off

Once sales commenced the Falcone revealed itself as practically faultless and didn't need much modification from the original version. In 1952, due to the difficulty in finding the necessary chromium, some parts were polished or painted. This happened to the borders of brake plates, now red, to the tank, that lost the chrome panels in favour of black paint, to the brake levers and to the valve lifter which were polished. The following year the oil tank shape was altered to give it a more modern form losing the chromed circular protuberances of old. In that same year the Falcone which had been in production was designated the "Sport" and a new "Turismo" version introduced to replace the Astore, which offered a less powerful but more flexible engine than the Sport.

The two models are immediately distinguishable by the absence of leg shields and by the tank that is, once more, chromed on the Sport. In 1956 the fishtail silencer, a 30's design (continued on page 85)

Italo Galli “Like a thoroughbred”

Heir to a dynasty of Guzzi concessionaires from the earliest days, Italo Galli of Desio, near Milan, has for some years renounced the sale of Mandello motorbikes to dedicate himself to his grand passion of off-road racing, participating either personally or as a mechanic to skilful riders. It is not unusual to find him outside Italy in one of his races, but when he is at home he can be found in his workshop, a mixture of modern environment but with old fittings and tools. He has, in fact, all the tools necessary for the restoration of an old bike, be it a Guzzi or not.

Of the two versions, Sport and Turismo, which is the better Falcone?

“They are very different. The list of interchangeable parts is longer than you might think because they were bikes born for different jobs. The Sport represents speed, the prestige of the Guzzi as an elite machine, also because one needs to know how to ride it in order to enjoy it. The Turismo is more affordable and more forgiving. I would say that it has retained that good character of the old Guzzis that preceded it. For those who want to buy a Falcone, one must bear in mind these characteristics.”

Does the Sport have mechanical problems?

“The big SS carburettor causes some difficulty in starting and some ‘hiccoughs’. Above all, if the engine is not well set up it can give violent kickbacks at starting. First gear is very high but, using a bit of clutch, it seems to take off in seconds and then it goes on strongly.

On curves the rear bounces, the effect is, however, controllable and in time you get used to it, but it seems a little unstable at the start. To say that its braking is poor, is meaningless; it brakes like all the other motorbikes of that era and that simply needs to be borne in mind.”

When your father was a concessionaire did he sell more Sport or Turismo?

“The Sport sold more. Let’s be clear, first came the Galletto and the Airone, which gave us a living, then the Falcone. Before the Falcone there were a number of 500s, above all the Astore that, although older, were workhorses. Glaziers, bakers, butchers, the milkman, almost all of them had a motorbike with a box sidecar in which they carried everything. When the three-wheeler vans arrived and then the light vans the 500 became the sports motorcycle par excellence, and for this reason most people who bought a Falcone chose the Sport.”

What are its weak points?

“Really very few and none of them serious ! The clutch bearing is the only one. In time, the screw through which the lever pushes the clutch shaft pierces the plate that protects the little ball bearings, ruining it. The definitive modification consists in changing the screw with that from the three-wheeler that has a nut and lock nut for adjustment, and substitute the plate with that from the valve stem that is tempered and thicker. Then it won’t be pierced any more. The springs of the gear pre-selector and of the clutch lever are perhaps a little fragile. Then, as I said, there is a certain difficulty in getting away; you need to check everything well; the advance, if manual, the carburation, the valve lifter, press the pedal and keep the choke closed. If all is right the engine starts immediately and ticks over. With regard to the riding it is the forks that require some attention checking carefully the sliding via the eccentric cam and greasing it every so often, otherwise the bike will weave as if there was play on the steering. Unfortunately the trousers tend to get dirty with grease dripping from the forks.”

Would a client that bought the Sport ask for an improvement in the performance or was he satisfied?

“The discontented have always existed, but for the Falcone Sport they were few. For these we lightened the flywheel, turning it down on the inside and grinding down the cylinder head a little. The modification of the camshaft, by substituting it with that of the Dondolino, cost a lot because, to do a good job, it was better to change the piston and valves at the same time. Some did away with the Guzzi springing to replace it with the Gilera type shock absorbers. So the Falcone became more rigid in the rear but at that time nobody worried about originality.”

Looking at the Falcone with the aim of buying it, what do you look out for?

“First the play on the flywheel, axially and radially, must be little or nothing. Then listen to the engine when it’s hot – it should not be noisy, if the piston and cylinder have the correct tolerance and if the bike has not done thousands and thousands of kilometres. If you can open up the gearbox, note the play on the meshing of first gears which are prone to wear. Don’t worry if the clutch slips a bit because it can be easily remedied by purging it with a petrol or paraffin wash.”

It used to be said that replica spares were not as valid as the authentic ones of the period, nowadays rare. Is that true?

"I too have noted it in certain cases. For example the replica Sport type camshaft that is fitted to increase the performance of the Turismo tends to wear out much more rapidly than the original, I believe this is because the metal is not sufficiently hard. Other cases I don't know. I normally use replicas in my restorations and they go well. Certainly the chrome finishing produced in the Guzzi manufacturing period lasted tens of years while those of today sometimes don't have the same quality."

How does the Falcone sell nowadays?

"I would say that the selling and buying of them has become rare, because their value is constantly rising and those that own a Falcone hold on to it unless they need money. Today in 2004 for a genuine Sport we are talking about €12,000 and more. There is also the problem of fakes because many Turismo and Polizia (Police) were transformed into Sports and this is because the Falcone Sport has today reached expensive jewellery prices."

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Restorers and spares suppliers :

Libero Galanti, via Trieste 34,
27011 Belgioiso (PV)
tel. 0382/970091(BG),

Italo Galli, via Borghetto 33,
20033 Desio (MI),
tel. 0362/630295

Bruno Scola, via Milano 14,
20048 Carate Brianza (MI)
tel. 0362/901655

Marco Ferrari, corso della
Vittoria 65, 28100 Novara,
Tel. 0321/472995

Angelo Tadini, corso Europa
79, 24020 Scanzorosciate
tel. 035/661232

Paolo Calestani, via E. Toti,
25024 Porzano di Leno (BS),
tel. 030/906504

Napoleone Bianchini,
Via Virgiliansa 24, 44010
Burana (FE) tel. 0532/880748

Gualtiero Bucci, via Paradigma
83, 43100 Parma
tel. 0521/270811

Icilio Caciorgna, via Bilaqua 2,
62027 San severino Marche
(MC), tel. 0733/633160

Teodoro Carpinelli, via Roma
125, 71038 Pietra Montecorvino
(FG), tel. 0881/959042

Marco Mattei, vis A.Casella 1,
59100 Prato,
tel. 0574/463607

Pellegrini Snc, via S. di Cosi-
mato 7/9/10, 00100 Roma
tel. 06/581785-5817185

Giovanni Tola,
Reg. Logu Lentu, CP9,
07100 Sassari,
tel. 079/243414

Motofornitura Valassi, via
Parodi 29, 22054 Mandello
Lario (LC),
Tel. 0341/731223

Stucchi Luigi Srl,
via per Maggiana 24/b
22054 Mandello Lario (LC)
tel. 0341/731334

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was discontinued in favour of the cylindrical type that noticeably improved the silencing, but diminished both the performance and also the characteristic bark of the big single cylinder. Meanwhile the Falcone started to show its age; it had been built for more than 6 years without substantial modifications that if on the one hand it holds its value on the market renders it less desirable than before. Also because bikes with engines smaller by half than the Mandello 500 cc performed equally well. It is now the era of fast and light single cylinder machines that became very popular due to their success in the long distance races like the Motogiro and the Milan-Taranto. However, the Falcone Sport continued to be produced in fair quantities to accommodate the requirements of the State Police, particularly the Road and Custom and Excise forces. Not by chance, the limited modifications introduced in the last years of the 50s were aimed at the military police use of the motorbike. In 1958 the headlight was raised so as to mount a powerful siren below it, and the dynamo was substituted by another of twice the power to better cope with some of the electrical accessories installed; radio, flashing lights and siren. The history of the civil Falcone Sport stopped at the beginning of the 60s when it even disappeared from the price list of the House of Mandello, and the very few samples that were ordered at the request of concessionaire were still the models supplied to the Army and to the Police basically deprived of the accessories fitted for those uses. The last Falcone bikes, by now a unique mixture of Sport-Turismo, a version officially called NT (Nuovo Turismo), reserved only for the Police left the Mandello factory during 1967. The Military also now demand something a bit more modern to satisfy the changed requirements of traffic and public order, so the new V7 was born.

In the bookshop

To gather information is a pre-requisite of those who wish to acquire a vintage motorbike, from the humble Motom to the precious Falcone. In our case there is a rich bibliography that allows one to acquire a vast knowledge of the most desirable Mandello half litre. You start from the, by now, well known "Moto Guzzi, 80 anni di storia" [M G, 80 years of history] by Mario Colombo in it's fourth edition (€51) to the more specific "Moto Guzzi Falcone" by the same author (€16.5) to the "Libretto uso e manutenzione" [Use and maintenance manual] (€10.33), to end with "Catalogo parte di ricambio" [Spares Catalogue] (€23.24) and "Manuale Officina" [Workshop Manual] (€25.82). All these books are obtainable from the Libreria dell'Automobile, Corso Venezia 43, Milano. Tel./fax 02-76006624. A rich bibliography in English, German and even Japanese also exists.

Picture rubric

- At the time, the Falcone 500 was appreciated for its excellent durability thanks to the slow engine revs and excellent cooling. For this reason many riders tweaked it to ride it successfully above all in the Milano-Taranto, the most classic long distance race of the 50s. the gear changes were characteristically a bit slow, particularly in top gear, and looking for neutral was easier if you changed down before stopping, with the engine still turning. One of the features why the Falcone was taken to heart by the old motorcyclists is known by all, and on which bets at the "Bar of the Sport" were concentrated.

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The Falcone in the mirror: the differences between the Sport and the Turismo

Are they the same? Not really. Mainly in their characteristics, the two motorbikes can be distinguished by numerous mechanical parts that you must know about if you want to restore one to its original splendour. Here then, directly from an official parts catalogue printed in March 1957, are all the differences, even the smallest.

Cylinder head, inlet pipe, exhaust valve, rear engine fixing to the frame, complete conrod, piston with rings and oil scraper ring, gudgeon pin and circlips, push rods, cam followers exhaust and inlet valve (with roller and bush), camshaft, carburettor with its cables, thick tube for kickstart shaft, gear pedal, gear pedal lever, gear lever tie-rod with fork end, gear lever selector, gear lever selector return spring, footrest with rubber, handlebar, wheel rims, brake pedal with washer and rear wheel sprocket, chain.

Exclusive to the Turismo model are the leg shields and the luggage racks while the seat on the rear mudguard was mounted only on the Sport.

(centre right)

- The first Falcone (above) not yet called Sport, was presented at the Geneva Salon in the spring of 1950. It can be recognised from those that followed by the chromed tank, sides and front. It was put on the market at 482,000 lire (+3% VAT), against the 490,000 for the Gilera Saturno Sport 500, its major rival. Over the years of production the price had not increased, rather in 1957 it fell to 419,000 lire. The Falcone can be considered the successor to the GTW rather than the Astore and the latter remained in the catalogue assuming the role of the 500 "GT" model up to the arrival of the Falcone Turismo in 1953.

(centre left)

- Above and to the side the versions of 1953 and 1952 (on the right) compared; both characterised by the tank in red and black. From April 1953 the Falcone was given a new oil tank, rounder and without the two circular protuberances present since its debut. Another change is the rear pillion seat that was changed from sloping forward to a flat aspect. The classic fishtail silencer was used up to 1955; from the following year it was changed to a cylindrical one piece construction, much quieter but which did affect the performance of the big single.

(bottom right)

- In November 1953 the Falcone Turismo (on the left), destined to take the place of the Astore, was introduced. Although in appearance very similar to the Sport, (frame and brakes in common) the Turismo has very different characteristics and performance. At first sight it can be distinguished by the presence of the leg guards, by the different position of the footrests, by the shape of the gear lever and by the carburettor that is a Dell'Orto MD 27 F. The engine with its different cam in this case develops 18.9 HP at 4300 revs. Top speed is about 120 km/h.

Technical characteristics of the Sport spec. 1951

Engine: horizontal 4 stroke single cylinder. Head and cylinder in light alloy with return pipe in special cast iron (translation ?). Cylinder diameter for racing 88 x 82 mm, capacity 498.4 cc. Compression ratio 6.5:1, power 23 HP at 4500 revs. Timing with two valves in the head enclosed in an oil bath inclined at 60% controlled by shaft and rockers and closed by spring. Camshaft below. Inlet valve diameter 43 mm, exhaust valve 40 mm. Tappet gap when cold inlet and exhaust 0.05 mm.

Fuel: Dell'Orto SS 29 A carburettor. Choke 29 mm, main jet size 128 for the summer and 132 for the winter, the slow running jet 55, petrol valve 100, atomiser 265, conical needle M13 second groove for summer and third for winter, float rod D, float 14, chamber type VV P1, air intake short horn, clip-fitting.

Ignition: Marelli magneto type MLA 53 with fixed magnet and advance hand regulated. Maximum advance 45% measured on the engine shaft. Contact breaker gap 0.4 mm. plug Marelli CW 225 L (new scale CW 6 L), spark gap 0.6 mm.

Electric fittings: dynamo Marelli type DN 19 G 30/6 2000 D with regulator incorporated and battery, 6 Volts and 30 Watts output. Rotation to the right driven by a gear at the end of the primary transmission (ratio 1.33:1). Maximum power output at 2000 revs.

Lubrication: forced with separate tank and double geared pump with geared delivery and return blades. Automatic intercept (anti-syphon) valve. Flow at full speed 60 litres per hour. Two mesh filters in the oil tank and a return well in the crank case with small filter. Capacity 3 litres, change every 2000 km.

Transmission: Primary gear with helicoidal teeth, ratio 1.77:1 (44/78 teeth), helicoidal anti snatch spring inside the engine pinion. Lubrication by oil vapour. Final transmission by chain, pinion with 16 teeth and rear wheel sprocket with 36 (ratio 2.25:1). Cush drive by rubber rings in the rear wheel sprocket. Total ratios: 9.15:1 in first, 6.90:1 in second, 5.25:1 in third and 3.98:1 in top.

Clutch: multiple dry disks in the primary cover, 5 in steel alternating with 5 in bronze and two disks in Ferodo; 2 helical springs on the right hand side.

Gears: 4 total ratios with gears always connected via front connectors and direct drive. Rocker pedal activated; external pre-selector. Internal ratios; 2.293:1 in first, 1.732:1 in second, 1.317:1 in third and 1:100 ???????in top

Frame: double cradle enclosed in front tubes. Rear part bolted plates that can be separated. Oscillating forks.

Suspension: telescopic front forks with incorporated hydraulic dampers. Useful travel 65 mm, shock absorbers that can be regulated by friction adjuster. Rear oscillating forks with springs fitted under the engine and adjustable friction shock absorbers.

Wheels: rims in light alloy with spokes. Front ribbed tyre 3.25-19, rear block tread tyre 3.50-19.

Brakes: Single-sided drums in light alloy with internal lining in cast iron. Diameter 200 mm.

Dimensions (in mm) and weight: Wheelbase 1.475, length overall 2.240, width 705, height 945, minimum ground clearance 150. Dry weight 170 kg.

Performance: maximum slope allowed in each gear: 45%, 24%, 14%, 6%. Maximum speed in each gear: 60, 80, 105, 135 km/h. Normal consumption CUNA; 4.2 litres per 100 km.

Bottom of page

• Some features introduced with the Normale in 1921 live on in the Falcone. The large racing cylinder bore, the generous lubrication, the dry crank case, the gears in unit construction and above all the horizontal position of the cylinder that offers the hottest part of the head directly to the cooling air have been used on all the engines designed by Carlo Guzzi with the exception of the Lodola. On the first samples of the Falcone the crankshaft had two counterweights bolted. Later instead the crankshaft is in one piece with a conrod that can be opened. The conrod has ball race at the small end and a bronze bush at the big end. A curiosity: the oil tank is connected by a copper tube from the crank case that conducts the oil vapour and is thus not dispersed in the air. A rudimentary system with which, over 50 years ago Moto Guzzi foresaw a cure for air pollution! More than the logo of the golden eagle on the tank is the big red flywheel with chromed border. It weighs 8.2 kg and affects the behaviour of the motorbike. It facilitates, in fact, the starting because due to the inertia of the weight it drags the engine to complete a number of revs with one push of the pedal that on its own doesn't allow the engine even two, that is, a complete cycle. Besides it causes a certain gyroscopic effect because of its reverse rotation compared to that of the wheels which tends to straighten the motorbike on curves so that to lean the Falcone needs some elbow strength beside the body and slows down the gear changes because of having to avoid hearing the classical "clunk" not always welcome it is necessary to slow the revs of the motor which the flywheel opposes.