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SEX APPEAL

1973 Moto Guzzi V7 Sport

Story by Greg Williams
Photos by Jeff Barger

Motorcycles have a certain sex appeal, some more so than others, and the Moto Guzzi V7 Sport is about as sexy as they come. Steven Frazier says this very V7 Sport won him the girl — and he's still married to her.

Built in November 1972 at Moto Guzzi's fabled factory in Mandello del Lario on the shores of Lake Como, Italy, this V7 Sport was imported to the U.S. by Premier Motor Corporation in New Jersey. From there it was shipped to Cycle Craft, a Yamaha and Moto Guzzi dealer in Cleveland, Ohio. There, a young man purchased the V7, but he didn't ride it very long before having an accident. Spooked, he returned to Cycle Craft and traded it off. Enter Steven Frazier.

Steven was a mechanic at the Cleveland shop, and when the V7 was traded back in he bought it. Steven says he used the V7's undeniable sex appeal to court his future wife, Becky. After getting married, the couple moved to a small farm in New York's Finger Lakes. Life moved on, and in the late 1980s the Guzzi was relegated to a leaky shed.

Twenty years later, Steven decided to tear down the shed, and he listed the bike for sale on Craigslist. Tom Pirie spied the advert, and alerted friend and Italian motorcycle enthusiast Don Smith of its availability. Regular readers might remember Don's 1969 Ducati 350 Mark 3 Desmo, featured in the May/June 2013 issue of *Motorcycle Classics*. Don has a penchant for rescuing corroded motor-



1973 MOTO GUZZI V7 SPORT

Engine: 748cc air-cooled OHV 90-degree V-twin, 82.5mm x 70mm bore and stroke, 70hp @ 7,000rpm
Top speed: 125mph (period test)
Carburetion: Dell'Orto VHB 30CD/CS w/accelerator pumps
Transmission: 5-speed, shaft final drive
Electrics: 12V, 180-watt alternator, Marelli coil and breaker points ignition
Frame/wheelbase: Dual downtube steel cradle/58in (1,470mm)
Suspension: Telescopic forks front, dual shock absorbers w/adjustable preload rear
Brakes: Double-sided 8.7in (220mm) TLS drum front, 7.9in (200mm) SLS drum rear
Tires: 3.25 x 18in front, 3.5 x 18in rear
Weight (dry): 453lb (206kg)
Seat height: 31in (787mm)
Fuel capacity/MPG: 5.25gal (20ltr)/35-50mpg
Price then/now: \$2,500 (approx.)/\$8,000-\$15,000

cycles, and the V7 Sport was ideal. Don called, and sight unseen agreed on a price that included Steven loading and delivering the Sport. It landed at Don's shop in the fall of 2010.

V7: The back story

For Moto Guzzi, the V7 Sport represented a return of sorts to its racing roots. Established in 1921, Moto Guzzi immediately went racing, and until 1957 the marque was a formidable force on racetracks, with multiple Grand Prix World Championships and Isle of Man TT wins to their credit. Yet motorcycle sales had been failing, and when the Italian government banned racing on public roads in 1957, Moto Guzzi decided it could no longer justify the expense of racing.

Moto Guzzi struggled through the late 1950s and early 1960s, building a line of single-cylinder machines. During this period, Moto Guzzi engineer Giulio Cesare Carcano, who had designed Guzzi's famous 500cc V8 GP racer, developed first a 500cc and then a 650cc 90-degree V-twin to power a Fiat 500 car. However, nothing further came of his V-twin design until the Italian police requested a replacement for the aging 500cc single-cylinder Moto Guzzi Falcone.

The company's survival depended on the police contract, so Moto Guzzi dusted off Carcano's V-twin concept and conceived the V7 — so called because of the V shape of the cylinder layout and its 700cc capacity. A civilian version was shown at the 1965

Milan show, but with this workaday motorcycle Moto Guzzi was riding down a road far from its winning ways on the racetrack.

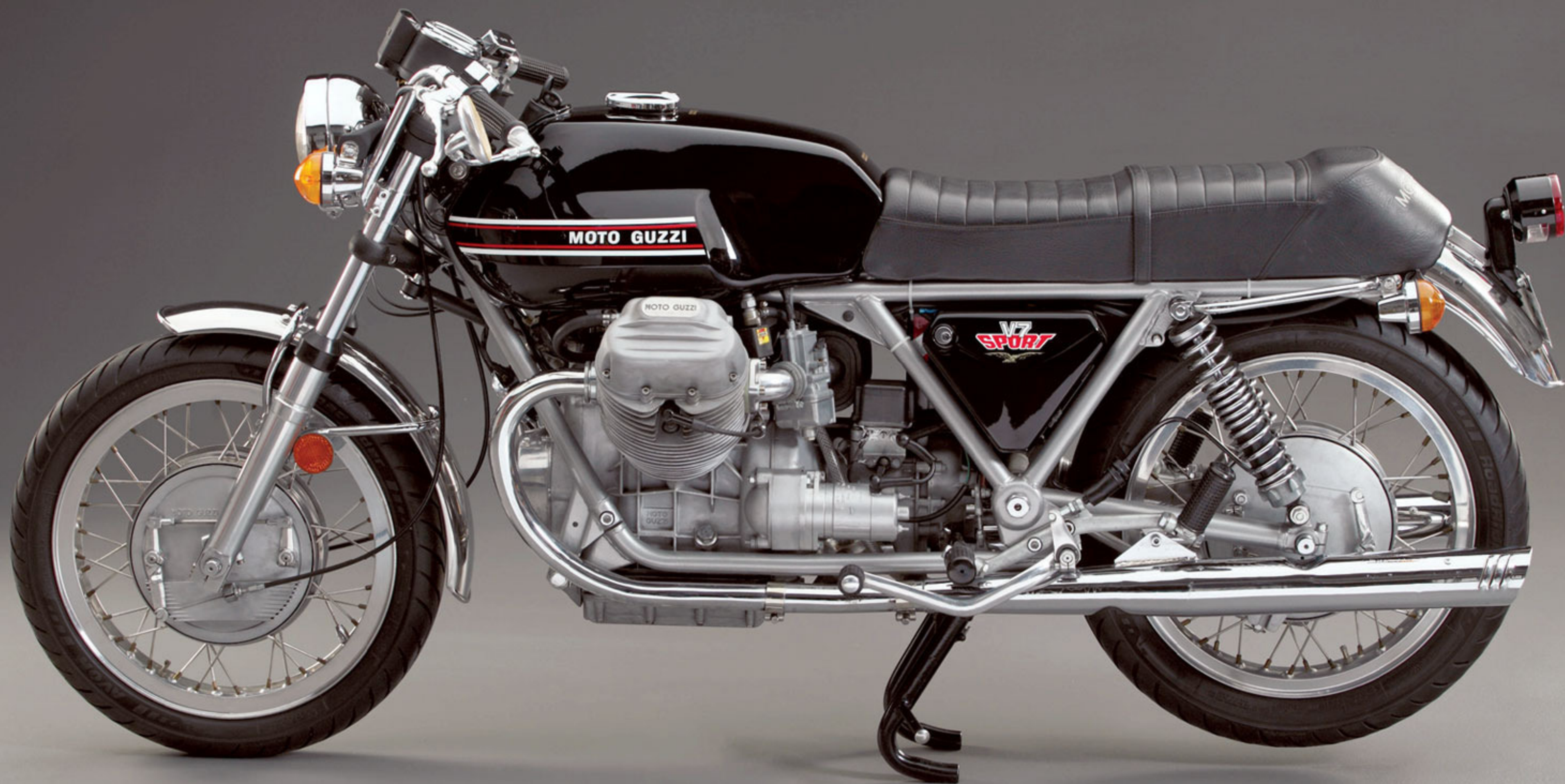
The company's fortunes continued to unravel. Moto Guzzi entered receivership in 1966, and came under new management early in 1967. Fortuitously, Lino Tonti was installed as Moto Guzzi's chief engineer, and along with Tonti came test rider/racer Luciano Gazzola. Tonti's influence was considerable, as he had been connected to several different manufacturers over the years, including Aermacchi, Benelli, Bianchi, Gilera and Mondial.

Tonti soon began tinkering with the V7, which had gone into production in 1967. In an attempt to secure lucrative American police contracts, he enlarged the engine to 757.48cc and provided two tuned models for acceleration tests. Tonti also began chasing speed records using the V7 platform. He increased the compression, installed Dell'Orto SS carburetors and a fifth gear in the automotive-style transmission, which delivered power to the rear wheel via shaft drive. Using the standard V7 frame, fork and swingarm, the tuned-for-speed machines weighed less than 350 pounds, and set several speed records at Monza in 1969. According to Ian Falloon's book *The Moto Guzzi Sport & Le Mans Bible*, Tonti's V7s had a top speed around 143mph.

Moto Guzzi also put the V7 to use on the track, but the V7's

Owner Don Smith lovingly restored this V7 Sport, changing the paint scheme to black with a silver frame.





tall, so-called “loop frame” proved to be a shortcoming, with limited ground clearance. Without redesigning the engine cases, Tonti incorporated small changes to provide more room, including moving the generator from atop the engine to the front so the engine could be raised higher in the frame.

Moving to the Sport

These speed and track successes led Moto Guzzi to believe the company could introduce a new sporting motorcycle, one with a top speed of 125mph, weighing less than 440 pounds (200 kilograms) and including a 5-speed transmission.

Tonti decided an updated chassis was required for this sporting machine, and working out of his own shop he handcrafted two special frames. Although the ultimate intention was to produce street legal machines, these were first developed as racers.

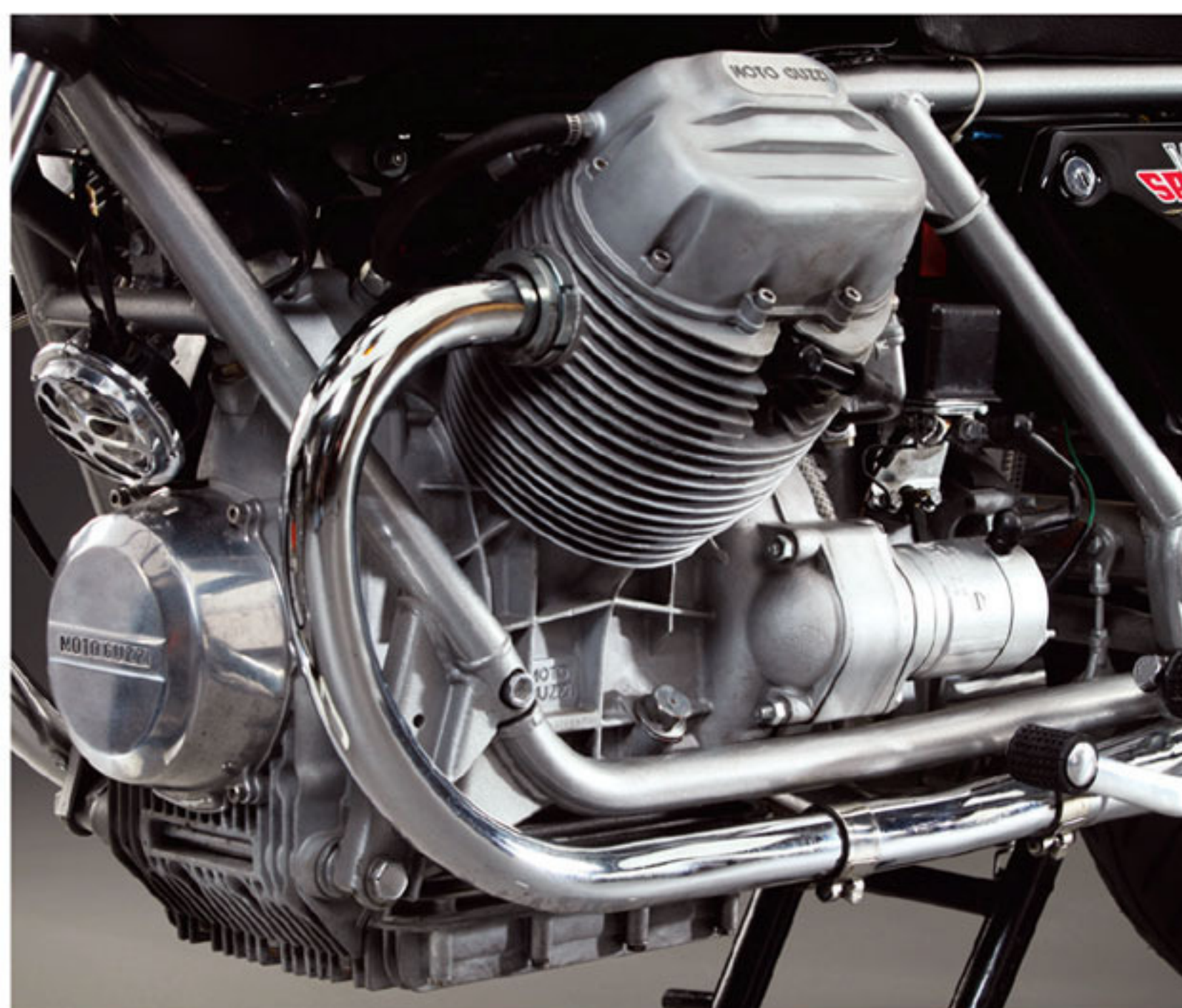
Tonti’s frame incorporated triangulated straight tubes, and thanks to the relocated generator it had a lower backbone. The lower frame rails were removable to allow easy engine access, and lighter Ceriani forks, thinner stainless steel fenders and a smaller generator all helped trim weight. With one of the Monza record-setting V7 engines in the frame, Tonti told upper management that factory rider Gazzola was able to shave six seconds off his previous lap time. According to Greg Field’s book *Moto Guzzi Big Twins*, that six-second claim was a fib designed to grease the way to production.

According to Falloon, Tonti crashed and broke his leg during testing. Unwilling to give up his role in testing the motorcycle he was creating, Tonti had doctors set his leg in a riding position, carrying his crutches with him on the machine.

Yet after all of the excitement, Moto Guzzi’s production manager decided he didn’t want the expense of launching a brand-new motorcycle. Upset by this development, Tonti tendered his resignation, but after reviewing the disagreement, Moto Guzzi management finally gave the V7 Sport the green light late in 1970.

Telaio Rosso

Moto Guzzi’s 50th anniversary was in 1971, and Tonti wanted the V7 Sport in production for that model year. However, manufacturing tools and dies weren’t ready, plus the factory was struggling with labor disruptions. Determined to have a V7 Sport for 1971, the racing department began hand building pre-production prototypes. To meet international homologation rules for production racing, Moto Guzzi had to build at least 100 V7 Sports in 1971, resulting in the Telaio Rosso (literally, red frame) V7 Sport, easily identifiable by their red-painted chrome-moly frame.



The 748cc V-twin produces 70 horsepower, giving the V7 Sport a top speed of 125mph.

Displacement was 748cc with a 9.8:1 compression ratio and cylinder bores were chrome-plated. A high lift camshaft was gear driven via the crankshaft, with Dell’Orto square-slide VHB 30mm carbs, complete with accelerator pumps, feeding the fuel. To cope with the 70 horsepower at the crankshaft (52 at the rear wheel), the lower end was stiffened and the forged steel, single-piece crank and split connecting rods were polished and assembled with stronger nuts and bolts. Lubrication was by a high-pressure crankshaft-driven pump with filtration via wire screen. A dry, 2-plate clutch transferred power to the 5-speed gearbox.

With an estimated 150-204



built, it should come as no surprise that today the Telaio Rosso V7 Sport is the Holy Grail for Moto Guzzi collectors. Engine cases in the Telaio Rosso feature a rough sand cast, and that's the easiest way to discern an original from a homebuilt replica.

"Regular" V7 Sports production started in November 1971, with production bikes using a thicker steel-tube frame instead of the chrome-moly tubes found on the Telaio Rosso. Moto Guzzi planned to continue painting the frames red, but a decision was made to finish them in either black or silver. Also, engine cases were now a smooth die cast, and the transmission featured external webbing. According to Falloon, crankshaft and connecting rods were no longer specially polished, and transmission gears were updated to deal with what was a rather fragile gear set in the original. For the U.S. market, the gas tank and toolboxes were finished in red (maroon), green or lime green.

Essentially a factory-built road racer, the V7 Sport was fast and agile. In one Italian magazine test, the V7 Sport was clocked at 125mph. Pitted against the Ducati 750 GT, Honda CB750, Kawasaki H2 750 and Laverda 750 SF, the V7 Sport proved fastest. This was the nascent age of the Superbike, and although

other manufacturers were producing quick machines, not all of them could handle as well as a Moto Guzzi. The V7 Sport lasted only a few short years, however, and was discontinued in 1974 after De Tomaso took over Moto Guzzi in 1973.

From Steven to Don

When Don took delivery of his rusty V7 Sport, his first thought was to dismantle the bike. Prior to taking it completely apart, he and friend Eric King pulled the heads to check the chrome bores. They were clean and weren't flaking, so they put the heads back on, changed the oil and cleaned the carbs. With fresh gasoline in a test tank and a hot-wired ignition system, Don says the bike turned over four times and purred to life — and actually settled into an idle.

Encouraged, Don commenced disassembly. The exhaust header nuts were stuck tight, so he hung the engine and frame in his garage so he could pour penetrating oil around the exhaust pipe retaining nuts. Every once in a while, he'd walk by the carcass and give the nuts a good crack. It took two months, but they finally broke free.

The frame was perfectly straight, and Don only had to prepare

"The billet-clamp clip-on handlebars indicate his V7 sport was an early production machine."

Don has added some 3,000 miles to his V7 Sport since finishing the restoration.



the surface for silver powder coat. Originally, his V7 Sport was delivered with a black frame and maroon body panels. Because Don had read that U.S. market bikes came with either a silver or black frame, he opted for the more eye-catching silver. Apart from the rusted fork tubes, which Don replaced along with new seals, every other front end component cleaned up and was returned to service. Most of his replacement parts, especially rubbers and cables, came from MG Cycle (mgcycle.com) in Albany, Wis.

The Borrani Cross rims were too corroded to reuse, but Don was able to source a new set. With the wheels apart, he polished the stainless steel spokes, changed the wheel bearings, and surfaced the old shoes in the front and rear drum brakes. On went a pair of Avon tires, and Don installed a set of 320mm Lispa rear shocks in place of the Koni originals.

The Veglia speedometer and tachometer were in surprisingly good condition, and Don simply detailed the instruments and the separate panel that holds four warning lights — oil, ignition, high beam and neutral. The billet-clamp clip-on handlebars indicate his V7 Sport was an early production machine, as later bikes came with stamped steel clamps. The controls, levers and perches were cleaned and detailed, and he polished every piece of alloy. The stainless steel fenders were dent and scuff-free, and these were polished, as well.

As purchased, the Moto Guzzi only had 20,000 indicated miles. After hearing the bike run, Don felt confident he didn't need to take the bottom end apart. The top end was in good shape and he didn't replace the piston rings, or even the points. After sealing everything as best he could, Don bead-blasted the engine and transmission. The transmission and rear drive only required cleaning and buttoning up with new seals.

The most expensive pieces to replace during the restoration were the rotted Lafranconi silencers, which feature "gills" and distinctive slash cut ends. Reproductions are available, but Don found a pair of correct mufflers on eBay. Don kept the Marelli ignition system and cleaned and reused the original wiring harness.

Two of his favorite V7 Sport features are the under-seat courtesy light and the 2.5-watt Sarai electric fuel tap, which opens when the ignition is switched on. Exposed fasten-

ers were chrome-plated, as original, and Bryan Gagnon of B & J Custom Cycles (bjcustom.net) in Shawano, Wis., took care of painting the steel gas tank and lockable toolbox covers. Don notes that black wasn't offered in 1972, but says, "I'm not a complete purist. I have to do some stuff, such as the paint, to satisfy myself. It might hurt the resale value down the road, but right now I'm happy with it." Bob Korth stitched up a new saddle cover for a finishing touch.

Once back together, Don says the V7 Sport started as easily as it did the first time, and in the 3,000 miles he's added to the clock since it's never missed a beat. "I bought this bike because of its handling capabilities," Don says, emphasizing that

he bought it to ride. He's a fan of the marque, having traded his 1974 Kawasaki 900 in on a new 1975 Moto Guzzi 850T. "The V7 Sport is a quality bike to ride, and it does absolutely everything very well — I don't see a shortcoming in it at all. It would be as easy to ride it across the country as it would be to the corner store." Now that's a ride we'd like to make. **MC**



Don managed to find a set of correct Lafranconi mufflers on eBay. One of the best looking details on the bike, they were also one of the most expensive.