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Dependable update

The owner of this Moto Guzzi describes its nature as being a bit like a BSA M20 with suspension and an electric start.

Words: ROY POYNTING Photography: TERRY JOSLIN







Only a couple of motorcycle manufacturers have ever bowed to popular demand and put a discontinued motorcycle back into production. Velocette did just that with its big singles in the early 1950s, and another notable example was Moto Guzzi's Nuovo Falcone. Now, you don't need much knowledge of Italian to deduce that the name means 'New Falcon' or that there must have been a previous model simply called a Falcon and indeed there was; a very popular machine in its own country during the 1950s and 60s. Once seen, never forgotten, the Falcon and Falcone Sports were striking machines usually finished in fire engine red and virtually unique in use of dinner plate sized external engine flywheels, and rather ungainly-looking friction dampers on their suspension.

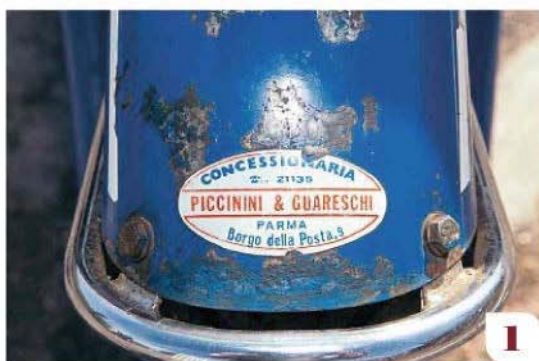
By coincidence the original Falcone and the Velocette shared a rather quirky appeal to marque enthusiasts, and when I tested the Italian job back in October 1996 I compared it favourably with the Venom. But whereas Hall Green persevered with their half-litre single until the end, the Mandello del Lario factory ditched its equivalent in 1967 in order to concentrate on the newly introduced transverse V7 twin. It was a wise choice as the V-twins have remained popular in various formats until the present day, but it didn't please everybody. In particular the Public Services, which had used the lithe singles since their introduction in 1950, mourned their replacement by a rather corpulent twin.

To its credit, the factory listened to the complaints, and set to work on a replacement for the Falcone, unveiling a version intended for the Italian police, Army and municipal authorities at the end of 1969, and releasing a civilian version in 1971. It proved tolerably popular in both roles and remained in production until 1976. Strangely, though - despite being just the type of motorcycle traditional British

motorcyclists always claim to want - Nuovo Falcones were little seen in this country until they were retired from service by their official users. They have subsequently been imported in significant numbers and have become a relatively familiar sight at classic events; ex-public service models being identifiable by a single saddle and fairly drab colours of olive-green for the Army and grey-green and dark blue respectively for the civilian and military police (Carabinieri). Privately purchased models had more flamboyant colour schemes - typically white and red - and later civilian models can be identified by chromed mudguards.

A 500cc single from a race-orientated factory, and one which can be obtained with an electric starter - what's not to like? My chance to decide came when Dorset enthusiast Peter Hallowes turned up at an event on a 1974 example he'd bought last year, which had seemingly been imported by Italian specialists North Leicester Motorcycles. My first impressions were that its unusual dusty-blue finish made it look rather drab compared to civilian Moto Guzzis, but considerably less so than the more common ex-Army examples. The blue is also somewhat lighter than usual on Italian police bikes, and Peter has been informed that's because it was originally used by the Vatican Guard rather than the civilian force. There's no proof of that, but the colour is certainly a good match for that seen on the Guard's duty uniform, which leads to a flight of fancy wondering what the Guzzi would look like in multi-coloured stripes like the Vatican Swiss Guard's famous dress uniform.

Back in reality, sitting on the Nuovo Falcone immediately gives an impression of solidity, and indeed the bike is sturdily built; almost 30 per cent heavier than its predecessor. As a result the Nuovo Falcone feels really planted on the road, and the horizontal wet-sump engine gives it a low centre of gravity. It's a fairly long bike - but surprisingly slightly shorter than its predecessor - and the deeply padded



- 1** Neat dealer sticker shows where this machine came from.
- 2** Unlike the earlier singles, this one has the flywheel fully enclosed.
- 3** The 'Dynamotor' starter is similar to the Villiers effort from two decades before.
- 4** Bulbous silencer has echoes of a similar double-barrelled effort by Norton in 1928.
- 5** Single saddle is quite high, giving a lofty riding perch.





single saddle is quite high. It originally had a separate pillion pad to carry an officer (or the Pope?) but Peter says he tended to catch his foot on its grab-loop while mounting the bike. It also came with original panniers which he has left in the garage since he found the turnbuckle fastening less than reliable; but one amusing original fitting Peter has retained is a police siren which he says has a remarkable effect on jaywalkers! The well-fitting screen is a £5 auto-jumble buy which looks as if it was made for the bike.

One of the main attractions of Nuovo Falcones is that they are usually equipped with the optional electric starters, but if you expect to hear it engage sharply and spin the engine over quickly you are in for a surprise. That's because it relies on a 'dynamotor' (like some Villiers engines from two decades earlier) using the well known phenomenon dynamo will produce electricity, so applying electricity to a dynamo causes it to spin. The device is located above the rear of the engine to which it's continually connected by a modest rubber belt. Simply pressing the starter button tends to produce nothing more than a subdued hum as simultaneously squeeze the valve lifter - the lower of two similarly-sized levers on the left-hand bar - the

Above: The New Falcone was 30 percent heavier than the old Falcone.

Below: Impressive-looking brakes are sharp to start with - but soon fade.



engine churns over and chugs into life when you drop the lever.

The ponderous tickover straightaway indicates that the Nuovo Falcone has a hefty external flywheel just like the original Falcone, and its bottom edge - contra-rotating because of the gear primary drive - can just be seen below the enormous aluminium cover on the left. The flywheel does nothing to help acceleration (some owners have metal skimmed from it to make the motor livelier) but a Nuovo Falcone is never going to be a contender at Santa Pod because the gearbox objects noisily to any attempt at quick changes. Remembering who this model was initially intended for, though, it's perhaps more important that a low bottom gear and a steady tickover make it suitable for processional duties, while an under-stressed motor wouldn't protest at long spells - albeit at fairly modest speeds of 50-60mph - on the autostrada. The generously-sized sprung saddle, plus the a sit up and beg riding stance, ensure that comfort is more than adequate whatever your style of riding.

Nobody much enjoys trundling along in bottom gear, but at the other end of the scale it would be the belt slips, but it's possible to maintain quite decent average speeds on

On the move, the Guzzi is stable with assured handling, but certainly no racer.



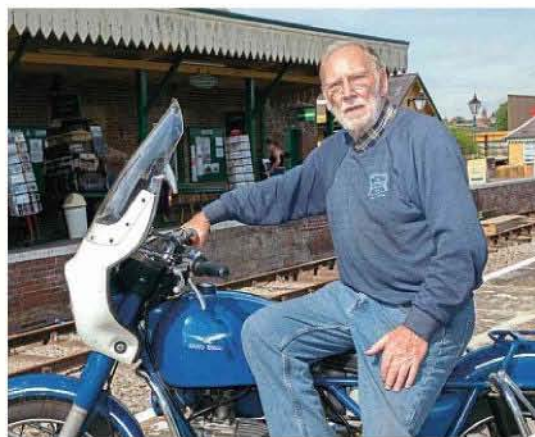
Below: Owner Peter Hallowes describes his Guzzi as '...like an M20 with suspension and electric start.'

“The problem with a communal approach is that you tend to end up with a lot of good ideas cobbled together like the apocryphal camel that resulted from a committee’s attempt to design a horse.”

you’d expect from the marque. Unfortunately, the same can’t be said for the brakes although they look quite impressive. Peter warns me that they have a poor reputation and sure enough they feel quite sharp on initial application, but almost immediately start to fade.

So far I’ve avoided mentioning the looks of the Nuovo Falcone, but even its most ardent fan would admit it lacks the stylistic flair often found in Italian motorcycles. That slabby aluminium casting on the left of the motor is counterbalanced by an inelegant air filter on the right. And as for that silencer! Norton tried a similar design in better half a century later. I can’t even think it’s very efficient with just a fraction of the exhaust being diverted from one barrel to the other, rather than being split evenly between them as on the equally ungainly twin silencer seen on civilian models.

Presumably it met some noise emission requirement, machine may have been specified by a committee, rather responsible for other Moto Guzzis. The problem with a communal approach is that you tend to end up with a lot of good ideas cobbled together like the apocryphal camel that resulted from a committee’s attempt to design a horse. It can also result in over-specification ‘just in case’, so you get items like the crowbar-sized



brake lever, a centrestand fit for a Harley Fat Boy, and a kick-start suitable for men wearing size 13 Army boots, and they all contribute to a weight approaching that of the spurned V7 twin’s. Whether that was the decisive factor, or simply added to the model’s other idiosyncrasies, its production run came to an abrupt halt as soon as Moto Guzzi introduced the lighter, livelier and more attractive V50 twin in 1976/7. And that instantly turned the Nuovo Falcone into a curio which owner Peter Hallowes unentimentally describes as “something like a BSA M20 with suspension and an electric starter.”

1980 MOTO GUZZI NUOVO FALCONE MILITARE

- ENGINE TYPE
Horizontal OHV single cylinder
- CAPACITY
498cc
- BORE X STROKE
88mm x 82mm
- OUTPUT
26.2bhp @ 4800rpm
- COMPRESSION RATIO
6.8:1
- LUBRICATION
Wet sump 5pt capacity
- CARBURETTOR
Dell’Orto VHB
- IGNITION
12V battery/coil
- GEARBOX
Four-speed in unit with engine
- TRANSMISSION
Gear primary, chain final
- FRAME
Duplex cradle
- SUSPENSION
Telescopic forks, swinging arm rear
- TYRES
350x18in front and rear
- BRAKES
7½in drums – t/s front, s/s rear
- TANK CAPACITY
18l (4galls)
- EQUIPMENT
Electric ‘Dynamotor’ starter, crash bars, leg shields, police siren etc
- SEAT HEIGHT
30½in
- WHEELBASE
57in
- WEIGHT
214kg (470lb)
- TOPSPEED
80mph

though, and I suspect the
Club contact:
 Vintage Motor Cycle
 Club, www.vmccl.net or
 01283 540557

Moto Guzzi Club, www.motoguzziclub.co.uk

End