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The Classic **MOTORCYCLE**

CIRCULATES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

MARCH 2019

COMMANDO CHARGER!



Gus Kuhn road-going racer

THE ORIGINAL 'NEW' ENFIELD BULLET

PLUS ▶ MOTO GUZZI V50 ▶ BSA SUNBEAM SCOOTER
▶ ROYAL ENFIELD MODEL K ▶ TRIUMPH TWIN REBUILD
▶ STAN DIBBEN ▶ NEWARK SHOW ▶ AJS PORCUPINE



Police issue

In the late 1970s, Moto Guzzi was struggling and its 'small block' engines were a lifeline, finding favour with the general public – and the police.

Words: ANDY WESTLAKE Photographs: GARY CHAPMAN



Something fantastic at a leisurely pace' was the headline when Graham Sanderson tested the newly announced Moto Guzzi V50 for *Motor Cycle Weekly* in the late 1970s. He lavished plenty of praise on the 500cc twin, which he described as '...a machine in classic form, a physically small, light, low motorcycle with superb handling, and it's some measure of proof to motorcycle opponents that not everyone on two wheels is hell bent on achieving twice the legal speed limit.'

It was these attributes that more than 40 years ago saw many hundreds of UK enthusiasts buying the sweet half-litre Latin V-twin and also ones that appealed to West Country couple Richard and Sarah Tupman. Both keen riders, the ex-Italian police Municipale model was spied for sale as they walked around the Paignton Bike Show and, with deal done, the low mileage twin was added to their ever-burgeoning collection in 2017.

I must admit from the first time I saw a Moto Guzzi with Arthur Wheeler in the saddle racing at Thruxton in the early 1960s, I've had a soft spot for the bikes from Mandello and over the years I have owned several of its singles - from 65cc to 500cc - and three big Spada 1000cc V-twins, the latter of which have carried me for over 250,000 miles on four continents. This, however, was my first experience of the Lino Tonti-designed V50, one which was introduced - along with its V35 350cc sibling - at the Milan show in 1976.

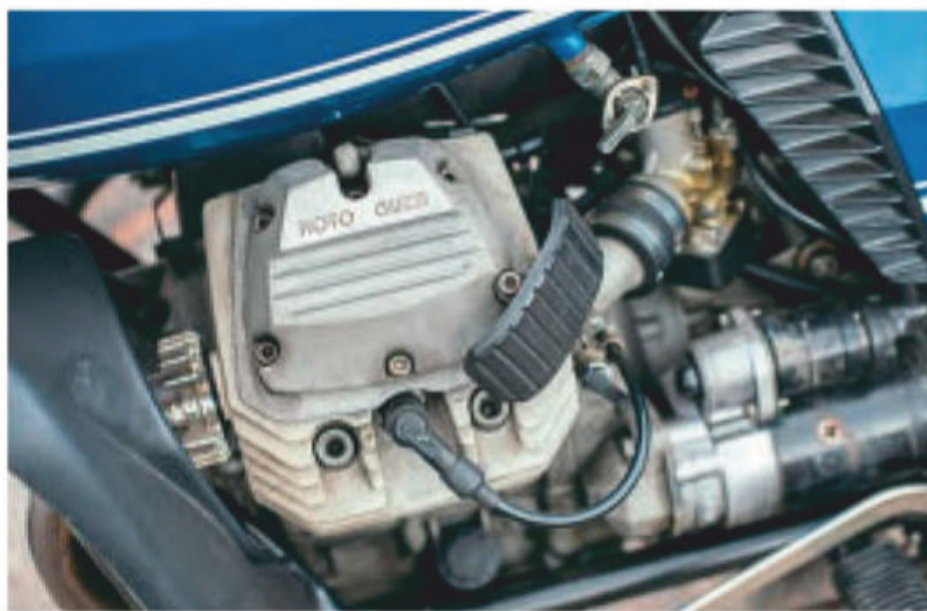
Still in its original blue and white livery, the little Guzzi was a favourite with the Police Municipale and this particular bike was formerly used to patrol the streets in Aosta in north west Italy, an area that borders the Alps and one in which both French and Italian is widely spoken. From its outset, the standard V50 - with a single seat and radio - was supplied to several public bodies, including town councils and the police, but the particular machine we have on test is known as the V50 PA (Pubbliche Amministrazioni) introduced in 1983 and came with legshields, a windscreen mounted on the handlebars, panniers, crash bars and a radio unit attached to the rear mudguard.

Iconic

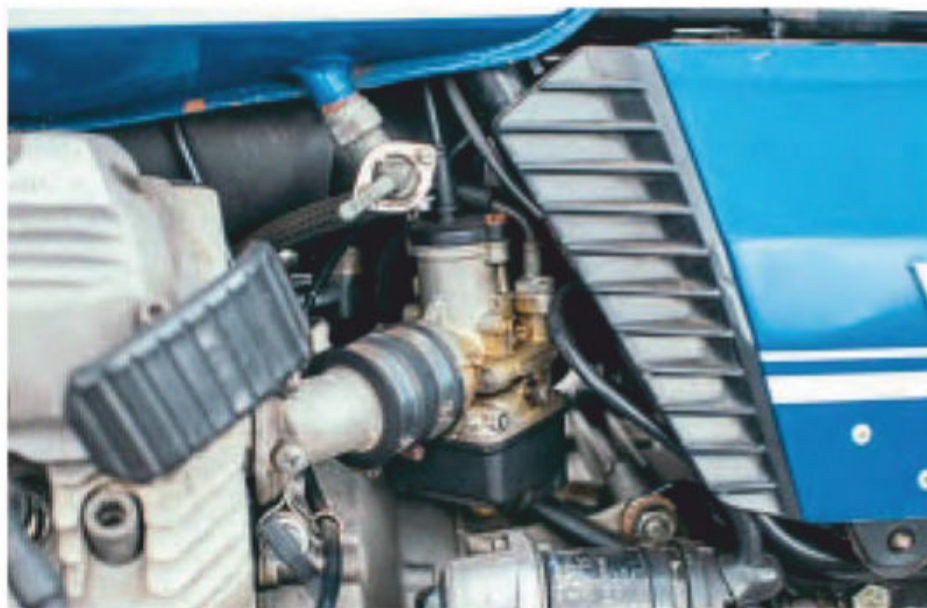
It should be remembered that although most of us would associate Guzzi bikes from the 1970s with the big twins like the V7 Sport and Le Mans, at that time the Mandello concern was in serious financial trouble and it was probably the launch of the 'small version' of the 500cc twin that kept the iconic Italian Eagle flying. To reduce costs, Tonti and his team came up with the design that saw the V50 hit the scales - complete with lights, electric starter and silencers - at just 150kgs and in comparison the dry weight of a V7 was 230kg.

Although they were inspired by the Carcano's 'original' V engines, they had been completely redesigned with a view to reducing dimensions and cost alike so they could be produced on a large scale in a fully automated plant. Initially, production was split between the Innocenti works in Lambrate (engines) and final assembly in Pesaro, but after a while these were sold off and, much to the joy of Guzzi aficionados, all of the manufacturing was then transferred to Guzzi's home on the shores of Lake Como in the picturesque town of Mandello del Lario.

Mounted in a duplex frame of which they formed an external and partial load-bearing part, the V-twin, 



Although its engine shared the configuration with bigger models in the range, the V50/V35 was an all-new design.



There's a 24mm Dell'Orto carburettor for each cylinder.



The panniers contain a holster for a pistol...



Single seat offers a good degree of comfort and nice riding position.



engines that turned out a fairly modest 48bhp@7500rpm, featured Heron cylinder heads, a dry single plate clutch, five-speed gearbox, electronic coil ignition and an electric start. Like their big brothers, drive to the rear wheel was by cardan shaft and stopping power was supplied by Guzzi's famed linked braking system, one which as Graham discovered gave a smoother and more progressive weight transference than a conventional system.

"And when you are hustling through the countryside another superb aspect of the V50 comes to light. Moto Guzzi's linked braking system has been eulogised now for several years and on the V50 it aids cornering just as much as promoting safe and predictable braking.

"Pressing the rear brake lever operates the rear disc brake and also one of the front pair of Brembo discs. The linked system doesn't reduce or increase braking power, it merely cuts out the weight transfer that occurs on conventionally braked machines, which is a great advantage when carrying a pillion passenger. It allows you to hammer up to a bend and brake without the niggling problem of being concertinaed along the seat. In total, the linked system seems to be a more precise way of reducing speed."

He was also equally full of praise for the handling: "It feels taut and well balanced to the extent it deals with every type of bend and surface in the same easy-going manner. You hardly need to think about corners because the little V50 whips around them as quick as any sane person can ride.

"The bike has a low centre of gravity and comparatively short wheelbase - two requirements which are a great benefit when you go off main roads and on to twisty lanes. And it's here where the Guzzi comes into its own. The bike effortlessly sweeps around tight zig-zags and refuses to be upset by even badly surfaced roads."

He summed up the road test by saying: "True, many

Above: Although Richard Tupman wasn't looking for another motorcycle, he saw the Guzzi and, well, we all know that feeling...

Right: Despite panniers, fairing and mirrors, the Guzzi remains admirably slim.



The big fairing does tend to direct smells and noise back towards the rider.



Twin discs at the sharp end of the V50.



FINER DETAILS**V50 PA****ENGINE**

Four-stroke, 90°,
air-cooled, twin
cylinder V-twin

CAPACITY

490cc

BORE

74mm

STROKE

57mm

OUTPUT

45bhp@7500rpm

COMP RATIO

10.1

CARBURETTORS

2x24mm Dell'Ortos

LUBRICATION

Wet sump

DRIVE

Shaft

GEARS

Five-speed
foot change

ELECTRICS

Bosch 12V

FRAME

Duplex tubular cradle

SUSPENSION

Front: Telescopic,
Rear: Twin shock
Marzocchis with
five-way adjustment

WEIGHT

365lb

FUEL

Capacity 3.95 gallons

WHEELBASE

55½in

TOP SPEED

103mph

PRICE NEW

£1449 (UK)

machines are faster, some handle as well and are cheaper, but the Guzzi provides a sensible balance of these factors and emerges as one of the most desirable middle-weights around."

All of these attributes made the V50 the ideal tool for the Municipale Police, who total around 60,000 in towns, cities and communes across the country. It should be pointed out that in Italy there are no fewer than five different police forces and at the last count these totalled 324,339, which is over twice the number found in the similarly-sized UK. Unlike the armed Carabinieri and the Polizia di Stato, those officers employed in the Municipale seldom carry guns – although the pannier on the Tupman example has a holster for a pistol inside the nearside pannier lid – and they are mostly employed in enforcing municipal laws and ordinances, carrying out investigations for robberies and minor offences and small-time drug-dealing.


Now wearing the number plate C468 CFG, nothing of the V50 PA's former life in the Italian police is now known, but it was imported into the UK in 2003 and 14 years later it was added to the Tupman stable. Richard takes up the story of how he became a motorcyclist and how – on a trip to the Paignton Bike Show in 2017 – he bought the little V-twin in early May of that year.

"My father had no interest in motorcycles and up until my early teens I'd never even considered that I would ever be a motorcyclist. However, that changed thanks to our school's woodwork teacher, Mr Greasby.

Before training as a teacher, he had formerly been one of the White Helmets display team and, appalled by the amount of accidents to motorcyclists, he decided to start an after-hours training scheme in the school.

"My pal Ralph Sherborne was keen to have a go so I decided to join him. After telling us what all of the controls did and making sure we were suitably attired with jacket, helmet and gloves, I was let loose on a 50cc FS1 Yamaha. After travelling about four bike lengths, I was hooked and knew instantly that when I was old enough I was going to be a motorcyclist. At 16 my first bike was an RS50 Gilera and in the next 45 years I've owned, ridden and collected many British, European and Japanese bikes.

"My wife Sarah is also a keen motorcyclist and at the beginning of May 2017 we went to Paignton to have a look at the bikes lined up on the seafront for the local club's annual show. Strolling around we happened to see this ex-police V50 with a for sale sign displayed on it and although at the time I wasn't looking to get another bike, I was drawn to the small and compact layout of the Italian machine. I felt it was too good of an opportunity to miss and after agreeing on a sensible price with the vendor/owner, the V-twin became bike number 23 in our collection.

"Still in its original paintwork and with only a shade over 45,000km on the speedo – just under 28,000 miles – the Guzzi had obviously had a fairly easy life. It started with one turn of the key and the engine sounded as 



**Dare to be
different?
It certainly
stands out.**

sweet as a nut with a deep, purposeful bark through the pair of Lafranconi silencers. The sticker on the front mudguard revealed it had originally been supplied by M.A.C based in Lorenzo (Aosta) and, after being retired from police duties, it was imported and sold by Castle Moto in Brighton in May 2003. Other than its radio pack, siren and outrigger lights, which had been removed when it was de-commissioned, the V50 PA was still exactly the same as the days when it patrolled the streets of Aosta and the first MoT issued in the UK reveals that it had only covered 29,717km in that time.

“It came with all of the old MoTs and most of the service and repair bills and it would appear that other than regular changes of oil and the fitting of stainless steel brake pipes, it had covered the next 15,000km (9500miles) with little or no attention.”

With plenty of other bikes to ride, Richard has so far only covered a few hundred trouble-free miles on the V50, so what are the overall impressions of the middleweight Guzzi? After spending much of my riding life on ‘big’ Mandello twins, the ex-police machine looks incredibly small and sat aboard it feels more like a 250 than a bike of twice that capacity. That’s not to say it feels cramped for a six-footer, as all of the controls fall easily to hand with a nice balance between handlebars and footrests giving the pilot a slightly ‘tipped forward’ riding position on the single, very comfortable seat. Below 3000 revs the engine feels slightly hesitant and ‘fluffy’ but over that it smooths out and something of the long leggedness of the larger V-twins shines through.

As Graham discovered, the V50 is no speed machine, but it will hold the national speed limit with ease and



Above: Although he’s only covered a few hundred miles on the Guzzi so far, the owner is impressed.

Below: The V50 PA (Pubbliche Amministrazioni) was introduced in 1983.

through the twisty roads of South Devon, the lightweight Mandello twin was in its element, with its pin-sharp handling and top notch braking. As Richard commented, the silencers are a bit on the ‘noisy side’ giving car drivers or pedestrians plenty of warning of your approach and although the fairing – often known as the flying squirrel – works well, it tends to suck exhaust fumes into the rider’s face and needs a couple of holes drilled into the large screen to dissipate them. It’s just a slight criticism of a superb Italian thoroughbred, a machine that really does deliver something special. **End**

