

Seventh Heaven

The Moto Guzzi S3 looks like a bad-ass café racer, anticipates the legendary Le Mans, and is everything an Italian bike should be

By **Adam Bolton** Pictures **John Noble**

Could Moto Guzzi's S3 be the perfect classic bike? Practical, reliable, exclusive, beautiful and quick, it was a marvel of early Seventies engineering and the forerunner to the marque's most famous creation of all – the Le Mans. My answer to the question is a resounding, 'Yes'. I think the S3's perfect, but then I am biased. I've owned this particular bike for the last 15 years.

It's hard not to be seduced by its café racer styling; deep red 'go faster' stripes, long matt-black silencers – complete with dramatic shark gill slashes – and massive cylinders jutting out from either side of the beautifully symmetrical frame that accentuate the aggressive, purposeful lines. I was sold the minute I saw a neighbour's S3; I knew I had to have one.

When new, the S3 stunned people with its intoxicating blend of performance, handling and style. The Guzzi was a breath of fresh air compared to the podgy multi-cylinder Japanese machines of the day. Even, so S3s were a relatively rare sight on UK roads during the Seventies due to their high price and limited supply. That just made us want them more.

For me, the S3's appeal is as much to do with the here-and-now as its heritage. My bike is clean and original, but no gleaming show winner, so I can ride it to the full without fear of it getting damaged. That's the real pleasure. Firing the S3 into life means operating the individual choke levers on top of the 30mm Dell'Orto carbs; then, with a press of the starter, the motor roars into life. At tickover it sways ever so gently from the combined crank and flywheel effect of its transverse V-twin motor. It's so small that I can stand upright with the bike between my legs as I secure my helmet and gloves.

Off to find the sweeping A roads that a long, low-steering 500lb Italian V-twin should excel on. I use the time to warm the motor and sticky Bridgestone BT45 tyres. Even though the clutch is surprisingly light, gearchanges are, at first, on the slow side, and the up-shift from the tall bottom cog demands that I'm patient with my left foot. The footrests are a touch too far forward, forcing my knees upwards over the rocker covers, and although I find the position of the clip-ons fairly comfortable, it's a stretch over the long tank to the bars. Luckily there's plenty of room to slide back on the racing 'monoposto' seat, although the hump is actually too far away to 'bum stop' anything, yet too close to carry a pillon.

The burble from the well-named 'Silentium' silencers is disappointingly quiet as we cruise along at a lazy 4000rpm in fourth, but a burst of throttle



Adam reckons this is the best classic in the world. He would; it's his bike

every now and again keeps it on the pace so there's no need to dance up and down the gearbox. Finally, a break in the traffic beckons the Guzzi towards a long straight, and a series of inviting curves.

In an instant everything changes, and the S3 begins to make sense. Crouched low over the tank, I roll the throttle on in fourth, increasing the revs to 5000 and beyond. Building revs on the S3 is not the in-your-face experience of, perhaps, an RD or Z1, instead building its power like a runaway train. For safety's and my licence's sake I don't try to reach the wildly optimistic 136mph that one tester claimed back in 1975. But even 30 years on, this Guzzi is good for 115mph. The motor feels so strong it could carry on churning over like this all day, every day.

The huge Brembo discs and calipers are superb. One finger on the front lever is all that's needed. Handling is stable and neutral thanks to excellent aftermarket Koni shocks – you get to enjoy a certain amount of exit speed and lean angle when you're bend-swinging.

In a decade and a half this S3 and I have covered 40,000 miles; been to, from and around Italy several times; visited Guzzi's Mandello del Lario factory; and lost a silencer near Lyon in France. It's even flipped end over end down an embankment during the Moto Giro – although with someone else at the controls. After all of that the S3 still runs well, still stirs my soul and still draws crowds just it would have done in '76. For me it really is the best classic bike in the world.

SPECIFICATION

1976 MOTO GUZZI S3 ENGINE/TRANSMISSION

Type	air-cooled, pushrod, V-twin, four-stroke
Capacity	748.38 cc
Bore x stroke	82.5 x 70.2 mm
Compression ratio	9.5:1
Carburation	2 x 30mm VHB Dell'Ortos
Primary/final drive	gear/shaft
Clutch/gearbox	twin plate dry/five-speed
Electrics	12v, coil ignition

CHASSIS

Frame	tubular steel, full loop duplex
Front suspension	telescopic forks
Rear suspension	swingarm, twin shocks
Brakes front/rear	280mm (11 in) discs, linked hydraulic calipers
Wheels	spoked aluminium rims

Tyres front/rear	3.25 x 18/3.50 x 18
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DIMENSIONS

Kerb weight	499lbs/226kg
Wheelbase	58.7in/1491mm
Seat height	47in/1194mm
Fuel capacity	4.8 gals/21.8 litres

PERFORMANCE

Top speed	124mph (claimed)
Max power	70bhp @ 7000rpm (claimed)
Fuel consumption	48mpg
Price new	£1749

1971-1976 • 750cc • Air-cooled • V-twin • £500-£14,000
RIDING >> DEVELOPMENT >> NOSTALGIA >> BUYING >> OWNING

“Could the Guzzi S3 be the perfect classic bike? It's practical, reliable, exclusive, beautiful and quick”



'S3' denotes the model's triple disc brakes, linked through the front left and rear Brembo calipers

From tractor to scratcher

When the first V7 Sport was shown at the 1971 Milan Show, it must have been impossible to conceive that the inspiration for its transverse 90 degree V-twin motor lay in a bizarre 3x3 military halftrack that was built in limited numbers in the early sixties. Designed by legendary Guzzi designer Carcano, the military vehicle was powered by a 754cc ohv V-twin motor. Power was only 20bhp, but massive torque was generated and the motor was strong, reliable and simple. An engine with the same layout as the military V-twin was seen as a possible successor to Guzzi's ageing single-cylinder 'bacon slicer' motors.

By 1965 a civilian motorcycle powered by the new V7 motor existed. V7 referred to the V-twin transverse cylinder layout and the 700cc (actually 704cc) capacity. In 1967 the V7 became the biggest bike ever to roll off the Mandello production line. The bike was a grand tourer, producing 50bhp at 6000rpm, but most importantly, the motor fulfilled Guzzi's criteria for a long-term engine configuration, with capacity being upped from 700 to 750 to 850cc over the years.

The watershed in the entire V7 development was in 1970 when Carcano's successor at Guzzi, Lino Tonti, took a V7 into his basement to study and improve. His goal was to make the V-twin model into a low, lean sportster. Tonti chopped up the frame, then welded it back together, transforming it into a low, sleek design with superb handling and stability. The capacity was reduced back to 750cc (for 750

racing regulations), and higher compression pistons, a hotter cam, 30mm Dell'Orto carbs and a five-speed gearbox all colluded to give a claimed 70bhp at 6300, although 52bhp was more realistic. The V-twin motor was strong, torquey and reliable, proving itself in speed records, plus endurance and privateer racing. The resulting V7 Sport wowed the public with lime green paintwork, a bright red frame, low 30in seat height and huge 220mm TLS front brakes. Produced in small numbers, and virtually by hand in Guzzi's race department, the 'Telaio Rosso' (red frame) was a masterpiece of design, engineering and styling, and became a template for the Guzzi V-twin range for the next 35 years.

The V7 Sport was an instant sales success despite its high price, so production was stepped up. In 1974 the Sport became the 750S which had two huge 280mm Brembo front discs and black, rather than chrome, Silenium silencers. The motor remained unchanged, although a timing chain and sprockets replaced the timing gears of the V7 Sport as part of a cost-cutting exercise. The last genuine 750 sportster, the S3, replaced the 750S in early 1975. The '3' referred to three large Brembo discs that offered a 'unique' linked braking system.

The S3 wasn't around long before it was superseded by the Le Mans Mk 1, so 750 production ceased, leaving a legacy of practical, strong but beautiful sportsters, and a V-twin motor that would be continued to be developed until the present day.



...but at least the trains ran on time

V7 FAMILY TREE

V-twin development

1966 V7 PROTOTYPE

Tested by Guzzi, police and military for 100,000K reliability



1967 V7

704cc roadster, also sold as a less powerful police variant



1968 V7

New starter motor, seat and square-slide carbs



1968 V7 SPECIAL

83mm bore increases capacity to 757cc. Known as the Ambassador in the States



1969 V7 SPECIAL

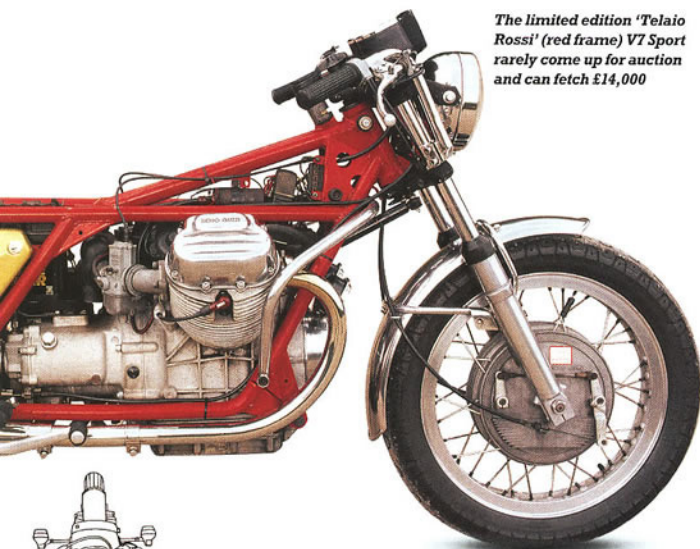
Updated again, with bigger valves and various engine mods



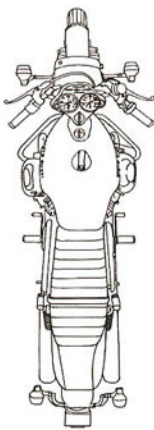
1971 V7 SPORT TELAIO ROSSO

Drop bars, straight pipes. Built in Guzzi's race shop

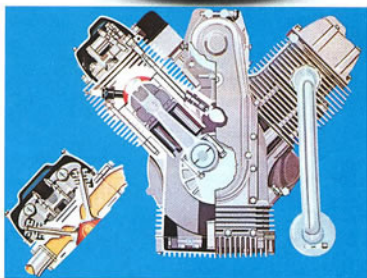




The limited edition 'Telaio Rossi' (red frame) V7 Sport rarely come up for auction and can fetch £14,000



Tonti's low, sleek design in the 1970s gave the V7 a slim and sporty new profile



The V7's V-twin transverse cylinder layout was strong, torquey and reliable

SPOTTER'S GUIDE



● 1971-72 V7 SPORT 'TELAIO ROSSO' (RED FRAME)

Rarest of all Guzzi 750s (200 made), lime/yellow paint; red frame; polished rocker covers; grey starter motor without solenoid. Beware of fakes.



● 1972-74 V7 SPORT

Yellow 1971/72; green or red 1972/73; flat dual seat; swan-neck bars; TLS brakes; Lanfranconi or Silentium shark-gill silencers; triangular toolboxes.



● 1974-75 750S

Chain and tensioner replaces camshaft drive gears; red, orange or green stripes; trapezoid toolbox; twin Brembo discs; black Silentium silencers.



● 1975-76 S3

Linked brakes using 3 Brembo discs; oil filter in sump; clip-ons replace swan-necks; bolt-on exhaust clamps; chrome crashbars, gear and brake levers.

1972 V7 SPORT

Now mass-produced, with black rather than red frames



1974 750 S

V7 Sport with twin front discs, black pipes and smaller seat



1975 750 S3

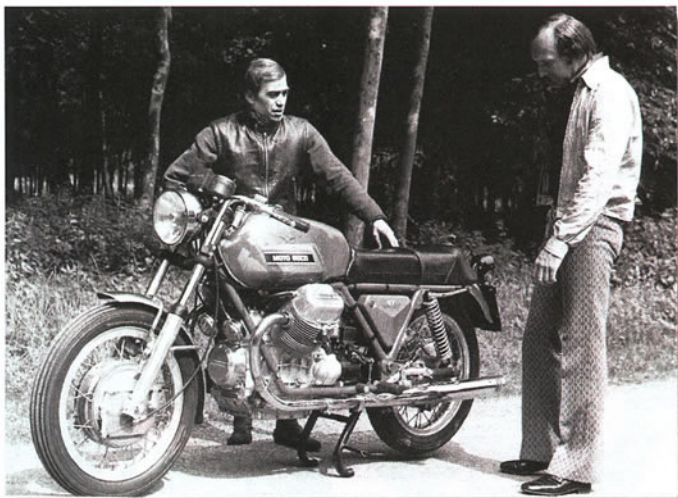
S3 designation highlights triple disc brakes



1976 850 LE MANS

The S3's natural evolution became Guzzi's most famous model





▲ **1972** Mike 'The Bike' Hailwood was invited to race a V7 Sport at the '72 Imola 200, only Guzzi couldn't afford him



▲ **1975** At the S3's launch, Guzzi made much of its famous factory windtunnel at Mandello del Lario



► **1972** The V7 Sport had Lafranconi or Silentium shark-gill silencers, swan neck bars and a triangular lockable toolbox. Pure class



READER MEMORIES

John Dyer, 48

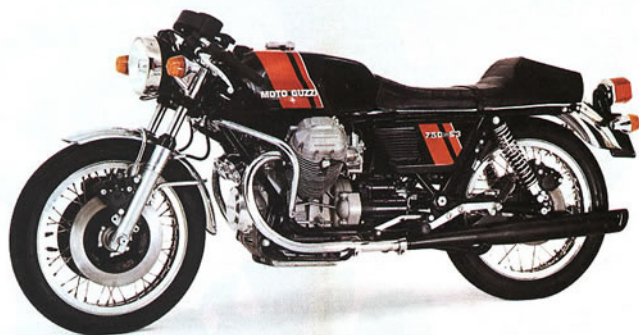
"When I got the V7 Sport in 1978 it would spit flames on the overrun because of a damaged exhaust valve. I bought the Dresda fairing because it was racy described as a 'Bol D'Or fairing', but it was always vibrating loose. It had two Cibies for main beam, so I added another lamp for dip. All those lights made the switch melt on a trip to France, so I rigged one light to stay on permanently and used the rear brake light at the back, taping a 2CV switch to the bars. The Guzzi later got a coat of metalflake red paint to match the tank...oh, the folly of youth."



"I loved it so much I painted it red"



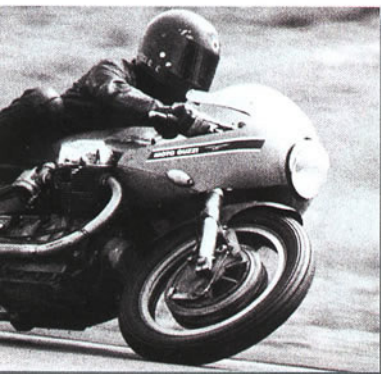
MOTO GUZZI
750-S3
FREINAGE INTEGRAL



▼ **1971** An 844cc V7 Sports comes sixth in the Bol d'Or at Le Mans, raced by Raimondo Riva and Abbondio Sciaresca

▲ **1975** The height of Seventies modernity: the 750 S3 had linked brakes and a proper oil filter in the sump

▼ **1974** The 750S is launched, embodying the Italian's famous attention to detail and styling



That was the world that was

1972

- The *Godfather* sets the new standard for mobster movies
- Eleven Israeli athletes are killed at the Munich Olympic Games, after Arab terrorists storm the Olympic village
- First ever cell phone call was made in New York

1973

- Britain joins the EEC
- US soldiers leave Vietnam

- The three-day week comes into force in the UK

1974

- Evel Knievel tries to jump the quarter mile-wide Snake River Canyon on his rocket-powered X-2 Skycycle. His parachute opens prematurely
- Disgraced US President Richard Nixon announces his resignation after Watergate

1975

- War ends in Vietnam after Communists take Saigon
- The name 'Micro-soft' is first used by Bill Gates

1976

- Riots in Soweto, South Africa, mark the beginning of the end of apartheid
- The first punk rock single (The Damned's *New Rose*) is released in October

PERIOD ROAD TESTS

“Admittedly my racing leathers added something to the speed”

Motorcycle Mechanics Aug 1975



“Screwing along the Mountain Mile I glanced at the speedometer and saw the highest top speed on any 750 I’ve ridden, including the H2 Kawasaki which fades out at 105mph while

the Guzzi presses on for another 10mph...

“Admittedly I was wearing racing leathers, which added something to the powerful speed increase, but watching the speedo needle tick round to 120mph as fast as it did was very unusual.

“I can only pay compliment to the utterly safe roadholding... The Sport’s handling and relaxed power style give the machine a magnificently indolent manner at speeds which generally bring other machines of the same size to their knees.” **Laurence Powell**

“If you’re into the blurred scenery style of biking, you can’t help but like the S3”

Bike – December 1975



“The Guzzi S3 is a machine without compromise. Making the transverse V-twin look acceptable to the fickle biking public can’t have been easy. You can imagine the engineers looking at

the archetypal superbikes of the Seventies and breaking into cold sweats. But they haven’t flunked the job... instead they’ve come out with the most beautiful production motorcycle you can buy. If you’re into the blurred scenery style of biking, you can’t help but like the S3. It’s at such times that the £1750 price ticket seems justified.”

Mike Nicks

What to look for

ENGINE/FRAME

V7 SPORT TELAIO ROSSO

(Red Frame)

Engine VK 30000 to
VK 30300, approx
Frame prefix VK, C or VKC
Frame numbers VK11111 to 11260

V7 SPORT

(Black frame)

Engine VK 30098 to 34167
Frame prefix VK
Frame VK11261-14262

US MODELS

Frame prefix VK3 then
4 digit number

Frame and engine numbers matching

750S

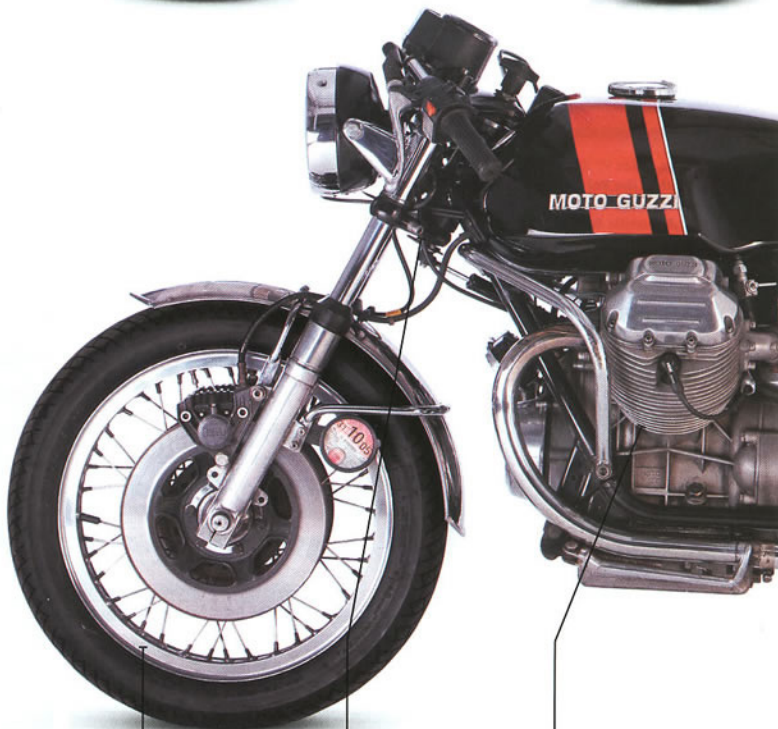
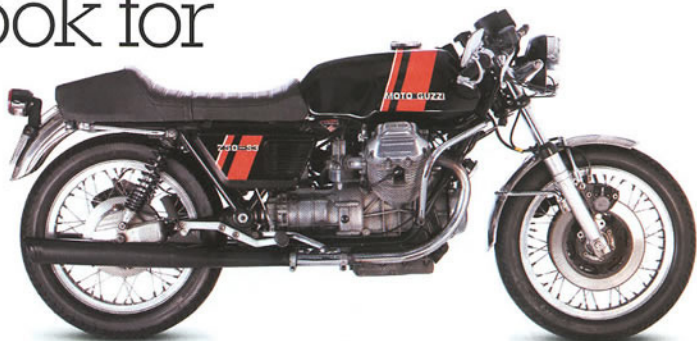
Engine VK 33723 to 34974
Frame prefix VK1
Frame VK1 11111 to 12315

Not imported to US

S3

Engine VK 35084 to 36137
Frame prefix VK2
Frame VK2 15001 to 15998

Not imported to US



Clockwise from top: adjustable steering dampener and ignition cap; shark gill motif on the exhaust pipe; mudguard flips up so you can remove the rear wheel

IS IT DODGY?

Walk away when...

- The frame number doesn't start with the VK prefix. Later T3 models have similar frames, different numbers.
- The engine number doesn't begin with VK: other Guzzi motors may be fitted. If in doubt about authenticity of parts, don't buy it.

● WHEELS

Guzzi 750s had Borrani aluminium rims. Strong but prone to corrosion and, sadly, no longer available. Check for cracks around the spokes.

● STEERING STOPS

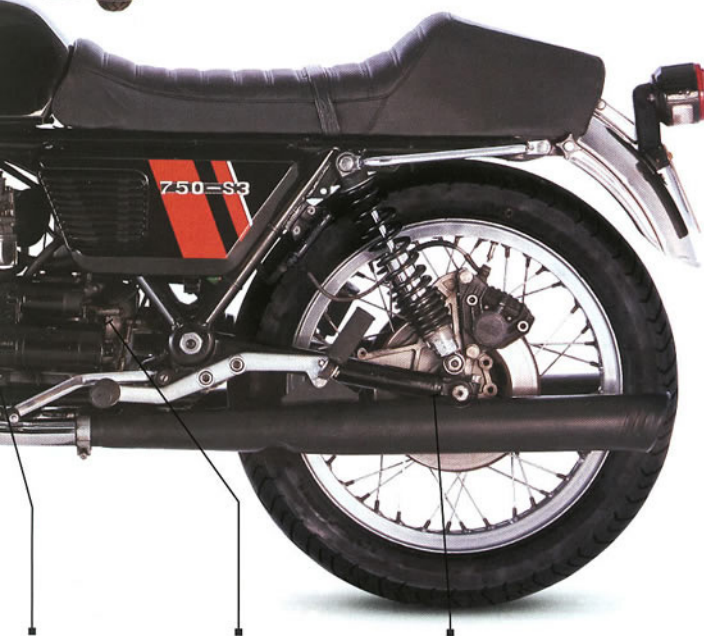
Can be snapped off if the bike's been down the road, or had a particularly viscous tank-slapper. Hard to rectify properly.

● MOTOR

Original chrome and Nickasil bores rust if left standing for a while. Go for a bike that's had regular oil (and filter, if it's an S3) changes.



The 750 is a long, symmetrical bike – slim too, despite that transverse V-twin engine



● CRANKSEAL

Check for oil leaking from between the gearbox housing and the motor. Crankseal replacement requires removal of the gearbox and clutch, so can be expensive.

● GEARBOX

Very strong but individual parts can be very expensive to replace, so check all ratios engage properly, ideally by riding the bike.

● UNIVERSAL JOINT

Spin rear wheel in neutral and in gear, check for rumbling or excessive backlash. UJs are pricey, but last if maintained. Vibs through r/h footrest also mean the UJ's had it.

PRICES

V7 SPORT TELAIO ROSSO

CONCOURS	£10,000-£14,000
GOOD	£7000-£10,000
RATTY	£4000-£7000
BASKET CASE	£2000-£4000

V7 SPORT

CONCOURS	£5000-£6000
GOOD	£3000-£5000
RATTY	£1750-£3000
BASKET CASE	£500-£1750

750S

CONCOURS	£3000-£4500
GOOD	£2500-£3000
RATTY	£1000-£2000
BASKET CASE	£500-£1500

S3

CONCOURS	£3000-£4500
GOOD	£2000-£3000
RATTY	£1000-£1500
BASKET CASE	£500-£1000

I SPECIALISE IN THEM



Paul Harris

CORSA ITALIANA
(0208 540 7155)

● It's a myth that Guzzi electrics are rubbish. Components on Guzzi 750s were of high quality (lots of Bosch) and reliable, it was the spaghetti wiring between them that let them down. Most are easily rewired, if they haven't been.

● Batches of the chrome and black Silenium shark-grill silencers are still made occasionally. Put in an order and be very patient. Lafronci silencers are a good option and easier to find.

● No need to be scared of a Guzzi 750 with plenty of miles on the clock – cranks and cams will last forever if the oil has been changed regularly.

● Clutches aren't heavy if the clutch cable is lubricated and adjusted regularly.

● Brembo brakes are superb but watch out for rusty caliper pistons and replace with Teflon ones; the early master cylinder is no longer available.

● Back off the ignition timing a degree or two to help with running on unleaded. Guzzi valve seats will last for years before unleaded conversion is required.

● Bridgestone BT45s are superb on the Guzzi 750S and make a superb-handling bike even better. Front 100, rear 110.

● Buy the most original bike you can. The deep Aprilia headlamp shells, indicators, V7 Sport and 750S toolboxes haven't been available for years.

● V7 Sports and 750S models have a gauze screen for an oil filter, so use a good quality 10/40 or 15/40 mineral oil and change it every 1500 miles.

● V7 Sport and 750S downpipes are held into cylinder heads by threaded collets. Check for thread wear as they can come loose and chatter, ruining the thread.

● Don't overtighten filler and drain plugs on the bevel and gearboxes. It's easy to strip threads, meaning remedial work and Helicoil inserts.

Owners' tips

GYLES FAIRCLOUGH

Scottish Borders

Owens: 1975 750 S3

Owened for: Five years.

One previous owner

Top tip: "BT45 tyres improve grip dramatically. I also fitted progressive fork springs - it's best to fit Fontana FAC dampers too. Thrash it mercilessly once warm - I've never mollycoddled mine."

JOHN FAIRCLOUGH

West Yorkshire

Owens: 1974 750S

Owened for: More than 15 years

Top tip: "Frequent oil changes are so important as there is no decent oil filter on the 750S, and use quality oil. I prefer Motul 15/50 synthetic."

EVAN MORRISON

Portobello, Scotland

Owens: 1972 V7 Sport

(since 1977), 1975 S3

(since 1979); recently

bought 2003 V11 Scura

Top tips: "Buy any spares you see! Stick with Koni shocks but buy the optional fairing - it's the best handling improvement you can make. Lastly, use Shell Optimax fuel."

LES HAMPTON

Nr. Worthing, West Sussex

Owens: 1973 V7 Sport

imported from Italy late

1980s, and another V7

Sport to restore

Owened for: 17 years.

Restored to US spec

Top tip: "Install a 850 GT crown wheel and pinion 8/37 instead of the Sport 8/35. The flexibility it gives the bike improves the riding pleasure."

ADAM ST-JOHN CLARKE

North London

Owens: 1975 S3

Owened for: 20 years

Top tip: "Mothball the original bits that are hard to get, put on decent Japanese switchgear, Agostini rearsets and loud pipes - and enjoy the bike!"



The love of Guzzi V7s spreads from father to son team Gyles and John Fairclough



FAST FACTS

SERVICE DATA for E&F models

Recommended plug type	BTES
Plug gap	0.5mm
Ignition timing	39° fixed, automatic advance 13°
Oil filter (S3)	Guzzi part 41153000 - brand UFI
Oil capacity	3.5ltr of good quality 10/40W or 15/40W
Points gap	0.37-0.43mm
Gearbox oil type	85/140W
Gearbox oil volume	750ml
Drivebox oil type	85/140W
Drivebox volume	250ml
Fork oil type	ATF - 70ml each leg
Head bearing type	Taper roller bearing number 30205 (x2)
Tyre pressures	32 front, 36psi rear
Headlamp bulb	40/45W twin filament type
Valve clearances	0.22mm inlet and exhaust
Recommended clutch plate thickness	7.5mm
Recommended brake pad	Ferodo FDB148p front and rear S3, front 750S
Recommended air filter life (S3)	15,000 miles
Factory main jet size	142
Factory needle position	2nd notch

SPARE PARTS (pattern)

Most Guzzi spares are provided by companies who supplied Guzzi when the bikes were produced, so are not strictly 'pattern' parts. New Guzzi parts are becoming rare so try a used parts specialist such as Reboot Guzzi Spares: www.rebootguzzispares.com

CORSA ITALIANA	0208 540 7155
Clutch cable	£7.63
Front brake pads 750S/S3	£16.73
Brake shoes V7 Sport	£35.19 per side
V7 Sport barrels and pistons	£220.70 per side
Rear flip up mudguard (all models)	£114.95
MOTOMECCA	01202 823453
Ducar rear undrilled 242mm S3	£144.63
Cable brake rear V7Sport/750S	£15.76
Clutch plate friction	£41.13
Footrest carrier L/H for S3	£74.99
Exhaust balance pipe V7 Sport/S3	£65.99

FURTHER INFO

CONTACTS

● **Motomecca** 01202 823453; fax 01202 826844; www.motomeccaspares.com. Nothing they don't know about Guzzis, plus spares and servicing

● **NBS** 07958 584889; www.motorcycle servicing.co.uk. Guzzi specialists: rebuilds, repairs, spares, stainless bits

CLUBS

● **Moto Guzzi Club Great Britain**

Contact: Membership Secretary - Bryan Peck tel 01242 518976 or email: Guzzi@bryanpeck.wanadoo.co.uk; www.motoguzziclub.co.uk

● **Italian Motorcycle Owners Club**

Contact: Barry Wilson, Membership Secretary, 70 Brinklow Cres, Shooters Hill, London SE18 3BP. Tel: 0208 4732224; www.imocgb.info

USEFUL BOOKS

● **Guzziology** By Dave Richardson (Moto Intl) ISBN: 0967065402

● **Illustrated Moto Guzzi Buyers Guide**

By Mick Walker (Motorbooks International) ISBN: 0879389885

● **Moto Guzzi Twins** By Mick Walker (Osprey Collectors Library) ISBN: 0760319863

USEFUL WEBSITES

● <http://monsite.wanadoo.fr/guzziv7sport>

Axel's exhaustive 750 site, register of Guzzi 750 frame numbers and decent Tellaio Rosso information

● www.s3750motoguzzi.co.uk UK Guzzi

750 site, owners register and good photos

● www.guzzitech.com US based site with loads of info. Forum is good for tech info

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- Honda CB400/4 ● BSA Road Rocket
- Laverda Jota ● Triumph Daytona
- Kawasaki Z1 ● BSA Singles
- Ducati Singles ● AMC Twins
- BSA A65 ● Triumph T140
- Yamaha RD350LC ● Suzuki GT750
- Norton Dominator ● Honda CB750
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