



**STATESMANLIKE &
SOLIDLY STURDY**
Moto Guzzi V750 Ambassador

**VINTAGE SPORTS
TOURER**
Rare OHV Douglas



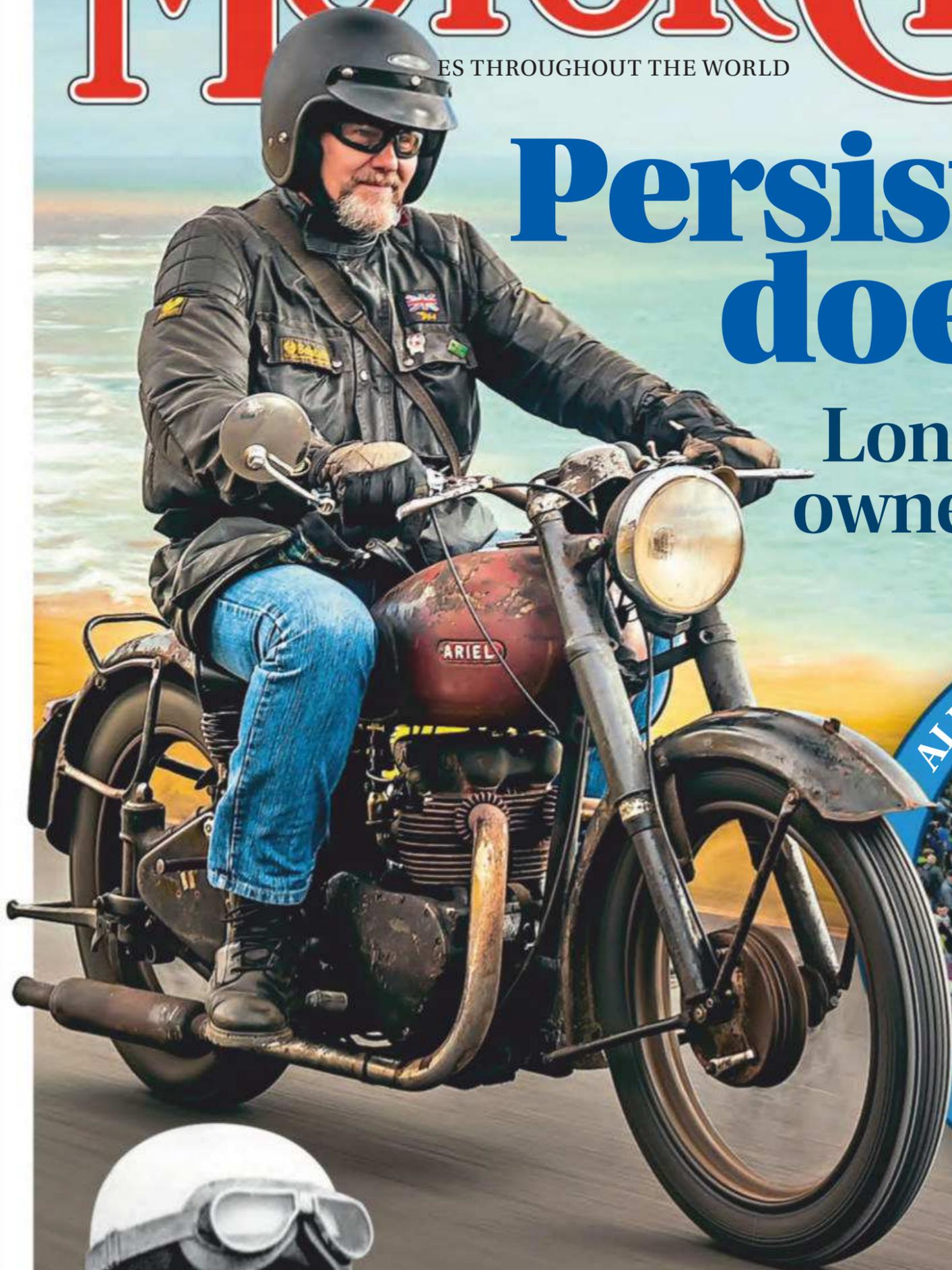
The Classic **MOTORCYCLE**

ES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

DECEMBER 2018

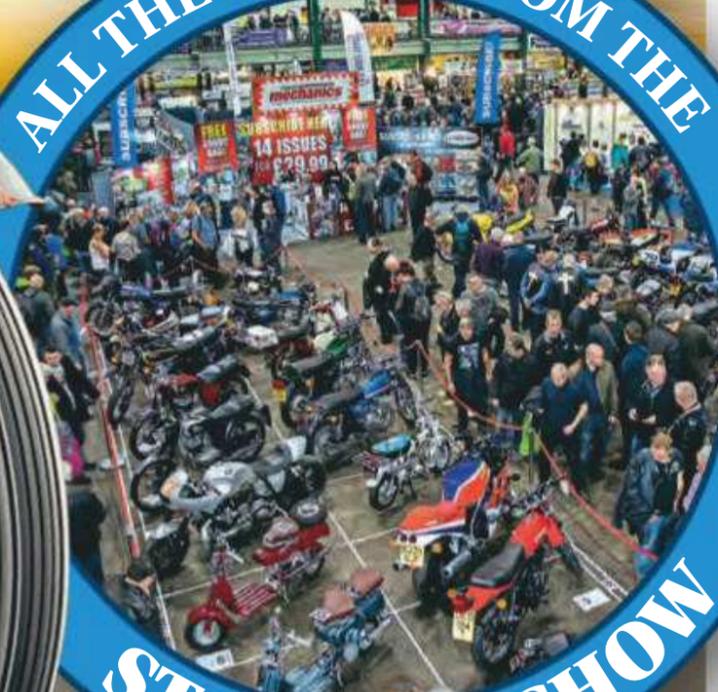
Persistence does pay

**Long term Ariel
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Start of something...

The Moto Guzzi V-twin has enjoyed 50 years in production and this relatively early version proves the formula was right from the off.

Words: ANDY WESTLAKE **Photographs:** GARY CHAPMAN

With the rumbling of the big 'V' reverberating across the water and the late autumn sun dappling through the trees, it took little imagination to picture myself cruising along the shores of Lake Como. Okay, I own up, it may not be Italy and the lake is not Como, but the rather smaller one of Shearwater on the Somerset/Wiltshire border, but as I'm riding one of my favourite motorcycles – in the form of a Moto Guzzi V-twin – I've got a big smile on my face.

Since I bought my first Guzzi in 1982 I've covered more than 250,000 miles on three of Mandello's big twins but this was my first ride on the bike that carries the model name of 'V750 Ambassador'. Launched in 1969, the Ambassador – or the V7 Special in the UK – was the first Guzzi that made a mark in the lucrative US market and, when compared to the established opposition, its regal riding position, oil-tight 60hp engine and low maintenance shaft drive unit offered an air of luxury and reliability previously largely unheard of.

How many of the Ambassadors were sold in the US isn't clear – the Moto Guzzi factory doesn't have any records of Stateside sales during this time – but following a time of uncertainty for the Italian giant, it faced the new decade with renewed optimism.

While sales were good in the US, few of the V7 Specials found their way to the UK and our test bike is one that was imported by a Midlands dealer and later sold to a Yorkshire enthusiast. Since early 2017, it has been owned by West Countryman Roger Chapman and joins his collection of numerous British, European and Japanese exotica from the last 60 years.

I was keen to fire the Ambassador into action, but before we press the button – there's no kick-start – perhaps we should reflect on the launch of the Guzzi V-twins. To most enthusiasts the name of the bikes from Mandello Del Lario had usually been associated

with the horizontal singles that carried works racers like Bill Lomas, Fergus Anderson and Bruno Ruffo to world championship glory, but by the early 1960s the Mandello management was acutely aware that the 500cc single (Falcone road bike) was now past its best and a new engine was needed. It was to come from a most unusual source.

In addition to their range of road bikes from their early days, Guzzi (founded in 1921) produced numerous two and three-wheelers for the Italian military and it was through this association in 1960 that the first V-twin appeared. The brainchild of General Garbani, the 3x3 was a bizarre-looking vehicle driven by a 90° V-twin that could climb virtually everything.

Although only produced in relatively small numbers, the power unit and drive chain sowed the seeds as the perfect one to power a two-wheeler and the first prototype development of what would later appear as the 700cc V7 began in 1964. The new departure's first public appearance was at the following year's 39th International Milan Show (in which the new Guzzi was the star exhibition) but it would take another two years before the first production models appeared.

By 1969, an enlarged version, with a capacity of 757cc called the V7 Special, was introduced and for those looking for more performance the engine was turning out a respectable 60bhp at 6000rpm, giving a top speed of around 115mph. In addition to the 'basic' Special, between 1969 and 1971 Guzzi produced the Ambassador for the American market. The imports were handled in America by the Premier Motor Corporation – an off-shoot of the Berliner Motor Corporation – and although the bikes were fundamentally the same as the V7 Special, they were fitted with US-market accessories including side reflectors on the mudguards, the round rear light from the earlier V7 and Ambassador V75 artwork on the side panels. It's in this specification we



A tank capacity of almost 4½ gallons was a boon for going a reasonable distance.



Shaft drive runs on the right-hand side and within the swinging arm – just like Velocette's 1939 Roarer.



Twin 29mm Dell'Orto carburetors take care of the fuelling.



find our test bike, but as this is a mark two produced in 1970, it also includes an upgrade of a separate rev counter on the handlebars. Roger's bike - which carries the registration number XHH 156H - is very much as it was bought but as I discovered from the previous owner/restorer (who preferred not to be named) it needed quite a lot of work after arriving from the US. He takes up the story...

"Roger originally came to look at an early Moto Guzzi T3 California I had recently completely rebuilt, he liked it and he nearly bought it, but he was keen to learn about the Ambassador I had on the table waiting further fettling. The earlier, almost 1950s styling attracted his eye and when I cracked it up for him, I saw his face break into a big grin. The sound of a fresh V-twin with unbalanced exhausts is quite something to hear in a confined space!

"He phoned me back a few days later to say he would like to buy the Ambassador and could I do some more work on it to meet his requirements. We agreed a price and I fitted some stainless exhaust pipes, a single seat and some other bits and bobs.

"I'd originally bought it from a Midlands dealer who specialises in importing bikes from the States. It was in a bit of a mess and had been stood for some time. Having rebuilt several Guzzis previously and run them as my main bikes for many years, I felt confident of taking on this earlier project, but I knew there were several significant differences to the later [Lino] Tonti-framed bikes I was used to.

"The engine was stripped right down and the bottom end was found to be in excellent condition. The main issue with the earlier engines is with the chrome bores. These are fine as long as the bike is being used but they will deteriorate rapidly once a bike is stood for any length of time. The chrome bubbles and peels off just like an old chrome bumper. The solution is to fit cast



Above: Although it was launched in 1969, the Ambassador almost seems 1950s in its styling.

1: Generous owner Roger Chapman lent the Ambassador to Andy Westlake for 'a few days' so Andy could properly assess it. (Photo: Andy Westlake)

2: Sidepanel details tell exactly what you're looking at.

3: Happy to head to Lake Como - Andy would have no qualms taking the Guzzi for a long, long ride.



iron liners, which is what I had to do here. Everything was rebuilt with new parts as required, including a full overhaul of the cylinder heads and fitting them with the later valves and guides, which are more durable.

“The original four-speed gearbox was stripped and given a full set of new bearings – I had to use some novel extraction techniques to get the old ones out. The rear drive box is a common source of problems, so it was stripped down and all new bearings were fitted. New clutch plates were sourced and fitted and the rest of the bike went together surprisingly well, with lots of stainless fixings. In addition, I treated it to a full rewire, the brake shoes were relined, the painting was done locally, the seat was recovered and new tyres and tubes were fitted. I am indebted to Guy and Ed at Gutsibits in Huddersfield who managed to supply many of the required new parts, however some were not obtainable in the UK and these – including the brake pedal, side panels and grab handles – were sourced from the US.

“With the bike finished, it flew through an MoT so off I went to get some shakedown miles under the wheels. It soon became apparent that despite the new bearings the gearbox was very noisy. I found out later that this is a well-known ‘feature’ of the four-speed boxes and I suspect the gear profile was changed with the advent of the five-speed box. The brakes bedded in after a 100

miles or so and after a bit more fettling the whole bike ran and rode like a new machine. It has quite a turn of speed too, when asked.

“I could have left the gearbox, knowing that it was mechanically as good as it could be, but it was around this time that I decided I liked the bike and would be keeping it, so the best way forward was to fit a five-speed box. Some brief research indicated it had been done, but I could not find anything definitive to be sure of the problems I would come up against. Gutsibits had a low mileage Le Mans II in stock, which was being broken for spares. We negotiated a price for the five-speed box and I stripped the Ambassador down again to do the work.

“There were four main problems to address. Firstly, the gear linkage was going to need major surgery. I fabricated a new offset arm to fit the existing cross shaft and a new shaft bearing bracket to mount on the back of the gearbox.

“Secondly, the original starter motor would not fit. While it was working okay, it was a bit slow in turning the engine over, so I decided to get the latest Valeo starter and do the necessary modifications to that.

“Thirdly, the clutch lever on the back of the gearbox came out on the opposite side. This was solved with a cable from another model slightly modified to fit.

“Finally, the speedo cable came out at a different point



Crash bars are a sensible addition when there are ‘sticky out’ cylinders.

“When the bike was designed it’s obvious that some serious thought went into the riding position.”

necessitating a slight repositioning of the battery, and a new hole in the battery tray. Changing over to the five-speed box took quite a bit of head-scratching but the finished result was a revelation, as it gave a much quieter and smoother change than the old four-speeder.

“I was delighted with the finished machine, which was a cracking bike to ride. Initially I was reluctant to let it go but it was obvious it was going to a good home and with other projects on the go and space needed, I sold it to Roger in early 2017.”

So what’s it like to ride? Glistening in the autumn sun, the black Guzzi is a super-looking machine and, as I soon discovered, the big Italian goes and handles with equal aplomb. Thanks to Roger’s generosity I had use of the Mandello twin for a few days, so instead of the usual ‘round the block’ road test, I could cover a reasonable distance before handing it back to its proud owner.

Just a turn of the ignition key into the ‘start’ mode had the engine bursting into life with a deep melodious bellow through a pair of long tapered ‘pea-shooter’ style silencers. The note caused my neighbour to look over the fence and make a comment about a ‘Howitzer’ field gun. The gear change is in typical Guzzi manner from the 1970s with a toe and heel system – I find it easier just to use my ‘toe’ on the front of the gearchange lever. Once underway, the box was, as the restorer promised, ‘top notch’. The 757cc engine turns out its peak power of

60bhp at 6000rpm, but this is fairly academic, as high revs are not what Guzzis are about and it’s easy to bowl along at the national speed limit with just a whiff of throttle using just fourth and fifth gears.

When the bike was designed it’s obvious that some serious thought went into the riding position, as the layout of the seat, handlebars and footrests are just about perfect, although a screen would be a handy addition for long days in the saddle. The Ambassador is fitted with a twin leading shoe brake on the front and a 9in single shoe on the back and this is one area that needed plenty of planning when bringing the heavy 545lb twin to a controlled halt. The rear was perfect for feathering the bike through bends, but the front was – as pointed out in period road tests – quite ‘grabby’ and needed plenty of care to avoid locking the front up.

From a company that earned its reputation for pin-sharp handling on the racetrack, it’s no surprise that the Ambassador can be whistled through bends like a thoroughbred, and the suspension, front and back, did an excellent job of soaking up the numerous potholes in the bumpy Wiltshire roads.

It’s great that a motorcycle that was made 50 years ago can still be regularly used with confidence in modern traffic and it’s one I would be more than happy to load up and ride through France, across the Alps to Mandello Del Lario, the home of Moto Guzzi. **End**

The success of the Ambassador in the US renewed Moto Guzzi’s optimism.

FINER DETAILS

Moto Guzzi Ambassador

ENGINE
Air-cooled OHV 90°
V-twin

CAPACITY
757.7cc

BORE
83mm

STROKE
70mm

COMP RATIO
9:1

MAX POWER
60bhp@6000rpm

CARBURATION
2x29mm Dell’Orto VHB

DRIVE
Shaft

CLUTCH
Dry

GEARBOX
Five-speed foot change
(originally four-speed)

ELECTRICS
12v

FRAME
Tubular steel
double cradle

SUSPENSION
Front: Telescopic
fork; rear: twin shock
absorbers

BRAKES
Front: Twin leading shoe
drum; rear: 9in SLS drum

TYRES
4.00x18 front and rear

DRY WEIGHT
545lbs

WHEELBASE
57¼in

SEAT HEIGHT
32in

FUEL CAPACITY
4.4 gallons

TOP SPEED
115mph

