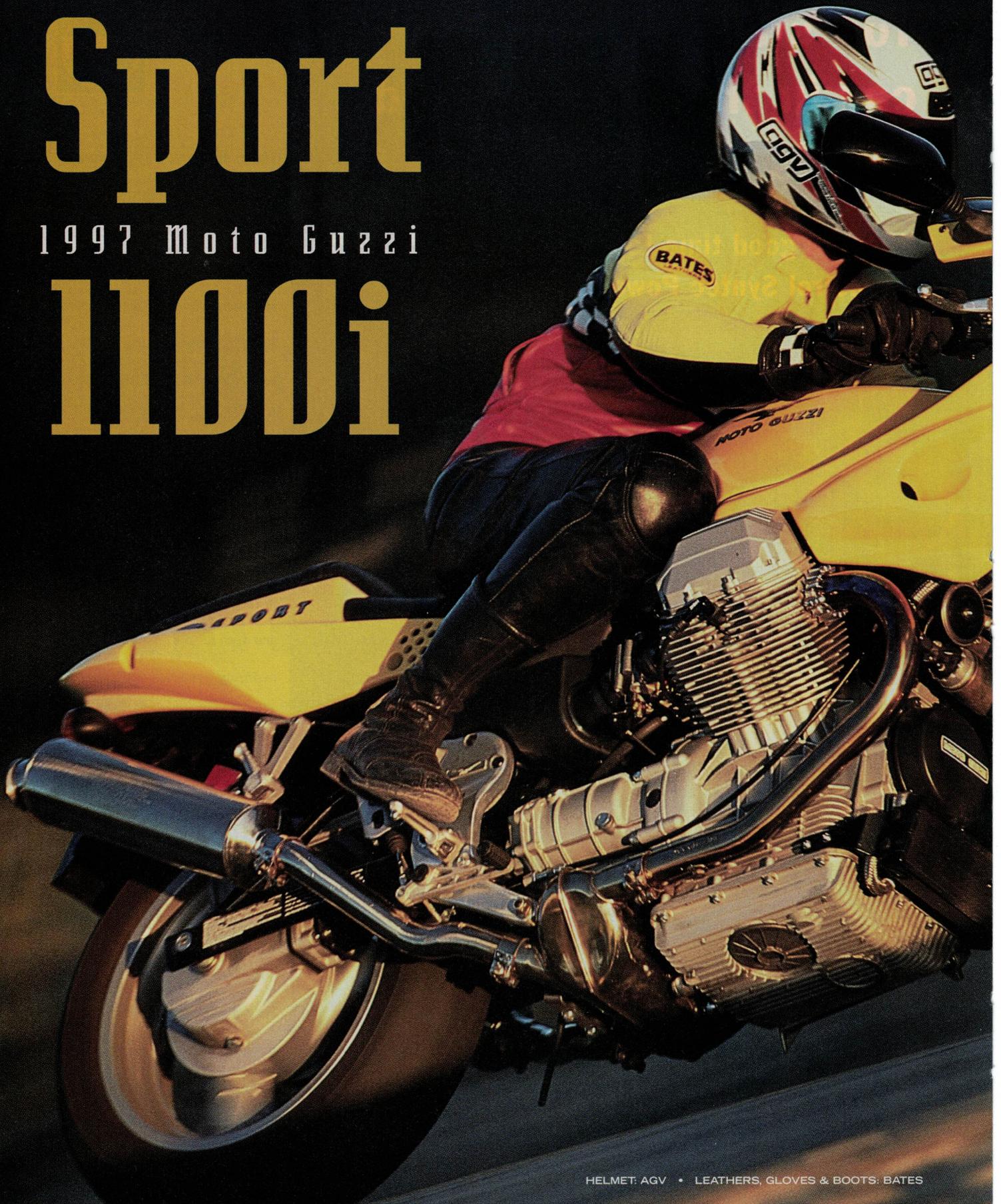


Sport

1997 Moto Guzzi

1100i



HELMET: AGV • LEATHERS, GLOVES & BOOTS: BATES



Moto Guzzi has zooted up its Sport 1100 with fuel injection and all-new suspension bits, but is that enough to run with Bologna's best?

By R.S. GRIFFITH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRAN KUHN

Full Test

You're in a dead heat with Marvin Snigglesh, coming down the homestretch of the Double Jeopardy round. You say, "I'll take Modern Motorcycles for \$1000, Alex." Bells and whistles go off...it's the Daily Double! The answer is: Big-bore Italian sportbike.

"Piece of cannoli," you think, as you blurt out, "What is a Ducati 916?"

"Ohhh, I'm sorry Jimmy," Alex coos. "What is a Moto Guzzi Sport 1100i?"

But, hey, you still get to keep the *Best of Tom Jones* CD box set.

OK, so maybe this example is a bit *molto*, but think about it: What's the first bike that comes to mind when you ponder large-displacement Italian sportbikes? Well...? We're guilty of it, too, mainly because of Ducati's phoenix-like resurgence on the world market in recent years, led by the all-conquering 916.

Utter the words Moto Guzzi, on the other *mano*, and we'll bet you lire to tiramisù that images of quirky machines with clunky gearboxes, barge-like wheelbases and vibration to spare come quickly to mind. Many write these peculiarities off as flaws, while others—namely Guzzi owners—view them simply as signs of character, attributes that make them special in that eccentric-uncle sort of way. You say tomato, they say charisma....

Last year's Sport 1100 was no different, ushering forth with spotty carburetion, excessive driveline lash and a throttle that required more twisting than Chubby Checker before any discernible response kicked in. (This latter foible—uh, *quirk*—was due to the martini-stiff return springs

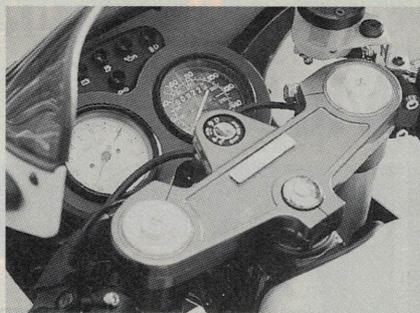
on the Sport's 40mm Dell'Orto slides; wouldn't want them sticking now, would we?)

Nonetheless, the '96 1100 looked great, sounded even better and handled itself respectably in most any roadside scenario. The balance sheet had that Sport showing great potential, but still saddled with the same performance-limiting shortcomings as its predecessors. (Of course, to the Guzzisti, it doubtless remained "Viva la differenza!") Call it motorcycling's equivalent of the ol' "nice guy, but..." kiss of death.

Ah, but what a difference a year can make. A dash of fuel injection didn't hurt, either. In fact, the Weber-Marelli system, identical save for revised mapping to that found on the higher-octane RS Daytona, has improved the '97 Sport's power delivery and throttle response immensely, providing the bike with easy starting and smooth—or, more accurately, smoother than the carbureted version—acceleration throughout the powerband.

In truth, everything about the new Sport can be summed up with a healthy dose of relativity. Relative, that is, to its Dell'Orto-equipped predecessor. Take the two bikes' peak power numbers, for instance: While the '97-spec Sport is much more responsive and quicker on the throttle than the '96 (which might lead one to think that the newer model might just crank out more power), the earlier bike actually came in at 79.1 horsepower at 7500 rpm, versus the fuel-injected's tally of 73.3 ponies at 7000 revs. Quarter-mile times didn't add a whole lot of luster, either, as the 1100i clocked a 12.79-second, 105.5-mph 440-yard dash. We were surprised—and a wee bit underwhelmed—as we expected more out of the 1064cc mill.

For the record, we looked into this matter like the moto-detectives we are, and discovered, with assistance from Moto-America's tech wiz, Shelby Canard, that a faulty one-way valve in the bike's fuel breather hose was lightly hampering flow in the fuel line, and thus not delivering petrol at the designated rate for peak performance. We



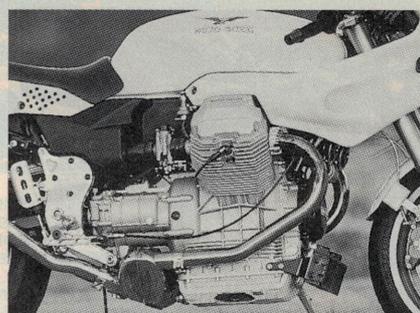
The '97 Sport's control pod is a thing of beauty. Note the machined finish on the triple clamp. The fork is adjustable for compression and rebound damping.

yanked this saboteur, and subsequently experienced noticeably peppier throttle response. Overall power, however, improved only negligibly.

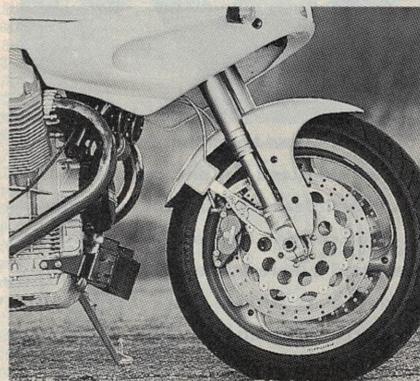
Fret not all ye who endeavor here, because we just *know* there are a few more ponies grazing down in that 1064cc, air-cooled, V-twin mill (the engine gets an oil cooler for '97, too). We haven't corralled them yet (maybe they're Shetlands?), but don't be surprised if we return to this Bat Channel at a later date with a tale of hop-up hijinks.

What the top end lacks, however, is more than remedied when usable torque enters the equation. This be where the fuel-injection system really shines. One glance at the bikes' respective dyno charts (this is where you pull out your dog-eared September '96 issue and turn to page 60) is all one needs to see the vast dissimilarity of power delivery, though you might not see it by perusing the peak numbers alone (59.9 foot-pounds at 3750 rpm carbureted, 61.5 foot-pounds at 5750 revs injected). For those of you still rummaging through your recycling heap, we'll save you some precious time by saying that the '96-spec 1100's torque curve had more peaks and valleys than Pamela Lee's profile. Chalk that up to that model's imprecise fuel/air mixology.

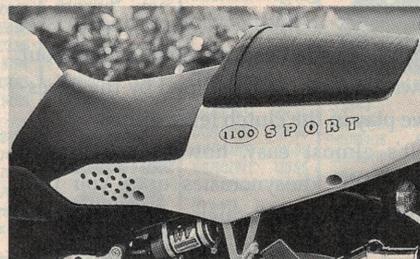
The fuel-injected bike's chart, on the other hand, displays a much flatter curve, and one that hits at about 2750 rpm and keeps pulling to almost 6000, with a minor hic-



The longitudinally arrayed V-twin remains a most unique mill. An oil cooler has been added for '97, though its lonely post leaves it somewhat vulnerable to road shrapnel.



The 40mm inverted WP fork replaces the conventional Marzocchi legs from the carbureted Sport. Those 320mm floating rotors and four-piston Brembo calipers provide brick-wall stopping power, and yes, Luigi, those are cast Marchesini rims.



The seat's a smidge hard on the bum, though bearable over long hauls. Especially nice are the sleekly streamlined tailsection and tastefully restrained graphicwork.

cup around 4500. The Guzzi's torque is deceptive, though, hitting in a somewhat lumbering way, unlike, say, the more instantaneous *thwapp* of a Ducati 900SP or 916. The Sport prefers dwelling in the higher reaches of its rev range, as indicated by its top-gear roll-on figures—5.2 seconds in the 60–80-mph quadrant, 5.5 seconds at 80–100 mph. Nonetheless, the '97-spec Sport is a glitch-free beast when stacked up next to its forebear.

CHEERS

+ *Che bella!*
This is a one beautiful bike!

+ Lives to carve through fast sweepers

+ Improved throttle response and power delivery

- 73.3 hp in a sporting 1100?

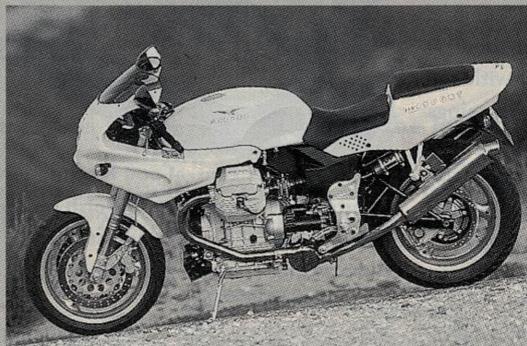
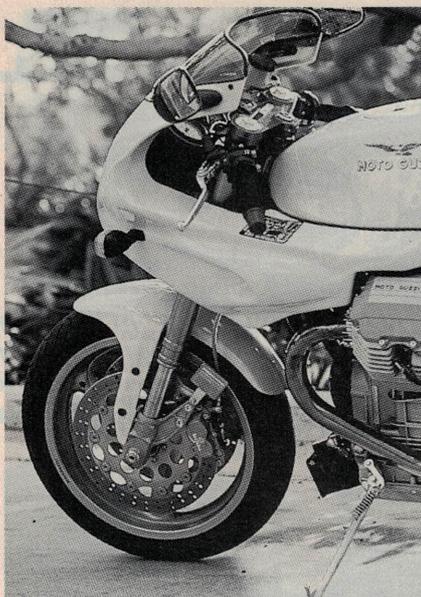
- Excess dive in fork, even at full stiff compression setting, makes for some wrist-wrenching hard braking

- Sidestand is a tip-over waiting to happen

JEERS

SPECIFICATIONS

Moto Guzzi Sport 1100i



A couple of gripes here: That forward-mounted sidestand, for one, requires those of average inseam to dismount while mooring. And...couldn't the good folks at Guzzi have found a more subtle site for that unsightly black sticker? (It's a vacuum system routing diagram.)

It's a good thing the powerband is so broad, because you don't really want to be rowing through the Sport's clunky gearbox (long a Guzzi trait), which is akin to a one-legged River Dance. The shift lever's over-long travel and imprecise action is good for loosening up the ankle, we guess, but somewhat irritating when trying to slot into the desired cog when bandying about town. Matters aren't helped by the excessive play in the clutch lever, either.

It's almost easy, however, to forgive these, uh, idiosyncrasies once you find yourself slicing through canyon country. Always an able sportybike, this Sport simply loves the twisties, preferably those of the long, fast, sweeping variety, as tighter curvature tends to expose the bike's RV-length wheelbase (58.2 inches) and not-exactly svelte 538-pound (wet) weight.

Credit this performance enhancement to the 1100i's chassis nip-and-tuck, starting with a slightly narrower frame—still constructed of rectangular-section, chrome-moly steel—for increased rigidity and, of course, Guzzi's trademark parallelogram swingarm, newly fashioned from oval-section steel tubes. New cast-alloy support plates have also replaced the rougher-cast, Daytona-sourced bits at the swingarm pivot.

Suggested retail price: \$11,990

Warranty: 12 months, unlimited miles

Number of U.S. dealers: Approx. 100

Recommended service intervals: 3,000 miles

ENGINE

Type: Air-cooled, longitudinal, 90-degree, 4-stroke V-twin

Valve arrangement: OHV, 2 valves/cyl., operated by pushrods

Displacement: 1064cc

Bore x stroke: 92.0 x 80.0mm

Compression ratio: 9.5:1

Fuel Delivery: Weber Marelli electronic fuel injection, 1 injector/cyl.

Lubrication: Wet sump, 3.7 qt (3.5 L)

Battery: 12V, 12AH

DRIVETRAIN

Primary transmission: Straight-cut gears, 1.3529:1 (17.23)

Clutch: Dry, two-plate

Transmission: 5-speed

Final drive: Shaft, 4.125:1 (8/33)

CHASSIS

Front suspension: 40mm inverted WP, 5.0 in. travel; adjustments for compression and rebound damping

Rear suspension: One WP damper, 4.6 in. wheel travel; adjustments for spring preload, compression and rebound damping

Front brake: 2, four-piston Brembo calipers, 320mm floating discs

Rear brake: Two-piston Brembo caliper, 282mm disc

Front wheel: 3.50 x 17 in.; cast alloy

Rear wheel: 4.50 x 17 in.; cast alloy with cush drive unit

Front tire: 120/70ZR17 Pirelli MTR03 Dragon GT radial

Rear tire: 160/70ZR17 Pirelli MTR04 Dragon GT radial

Rake/trail: 26.0 deg./3.72 in. (93mm)

Wheelbase: 58.2 inches

(1478mm)

Seat height: 31.5 in. (800mm)

Fuel capacity: 5.0 gal (19L)

Weight: 538 lbs (242kg) wet, 508 lbs (228kg) tank empty

Colors: Black, Guzzi red, yellow

Instruments:

Speedometer, tachometer, odometer, tripmeter; lights for neutral, high beam, turn signals, low oil pressure, low fuel

Speedometer error: NA

Rpm at indicated 60 mph: 3400

PERFORMANCE

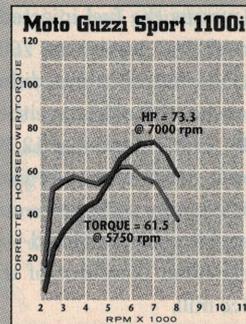
Fuel consumption: 32 to 43 mpg, 39 mpg avg.

Average touring range: 19 miles

Top-gear roll-ons, time to speed: 60-80 mph: 5.2 sec.; 80-100 mph: 5.5 sec.

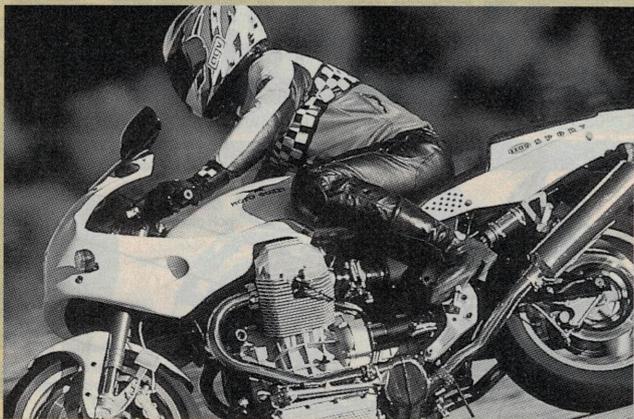
Corrected best ¼-mile acceleration*: 12.79 sec. @ 105.5 mph

*Performance with test-session weather conditions corrected to sea-level standard conditions (59 degrees F, 29.92 in. of mercury)



FOR COMPARISON...

	price	hp/torque	wet weight	¼-mile acceleration
Ducati 900 SP	\$10,495	hp = 7.28 @ 7000 rpm torque = 57.2 @ 5250 rpm	445 lbs	11.86 sec. @ 111.0 mph
Kawasaki GPz1100	\$7999	hp = 110.7 @ 9750 rpm torque = 67.7 @ 7000 rpm	590 lbs	11.17 sec. @ 123.9 mph
Suzuki RF900R	\$9099	hp = 114.6 @ 9500 rpm torque = 64.0 @ 8500 rpm	521 lbs	10.79 sec. @ 128.7 mph



My sincerest apologies all around, but I just can't bring myself to worship at the altar of the Holy Guzzi. Sure, the Sport 1100i is a beautiful piece of hardware, it's plenty fun to play wring-around-the-twisties with, and the improvements for '97 have brought the bike's performance up several notches—though still way short of its better-behaved,

sporting-twin brethren. And for the same \$12K, I'm giddy at the thought of how I might go about hopping up the majority of them.

Now those who would label us whiners will probably chime in here and cry, "Yeah, but they're not a Guzzi." Got me there, but then, I'm not in the market for a quirky conversation piece.

—R.S. Griffith

Well it's not a motorcycle for whiners, is it? I'll admit there are areas for improvement here, but the overall package is excellent and deliciously different from anything else on the market. Like a 900CR Ducati, what you get is a development platform. There's definitely more power lurking in there; your mission is to set it free. At least the injected version of the bike has a normal, non-Popeye-arm throttle and excellent ergos for sport riding or touring, as well as a taut, yet non-bone-jarring ride. Anyway, the Guzzi motor will never be some whippet-quick rev-monger; what it is is a *Two-Lane-Blacktop*-style, heavy-duty, long-legged, rumpity-rump torquer—a marathoner rather than a sprinter. It's not the sort of thing you trade in every couple of years, it's a beek for a long-term relation-

ship. When you grow up, you'll be able to appreciate that....

—John Burns

A friend of mine recently called our Guzzi Sport 1100i test bike an "Italian Harley." He's right—and not only because of the clattery, almost agricultural-machine manner in which bikes from the two marques function.

Just as Harley owners must put up with subpar engine and chassis performance in order to bask in the aesthetic, social and aural pleasures of Harley-Davidson ownership (and I have to admit there's certainly something appealing there), so too must Guzziphiles deal with substandard performance and general weirdness from their bikes of choice. I love the look and the *idea* of the Guzzi, but riding it is a different story.

—Mitch Boehm

OFF-ROAD



STREET

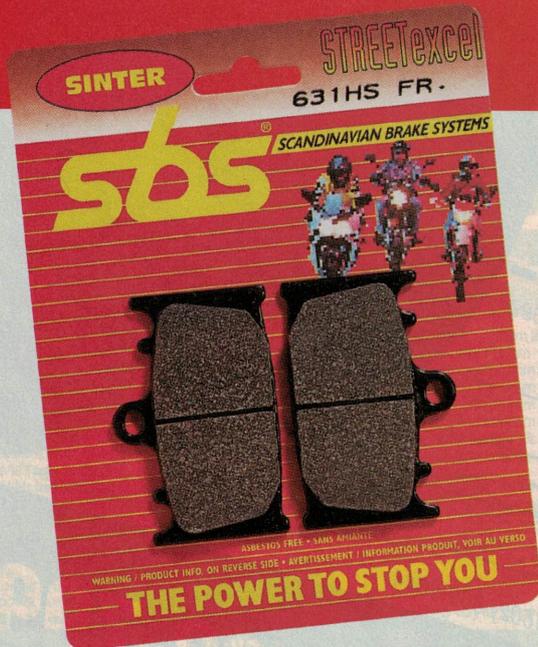


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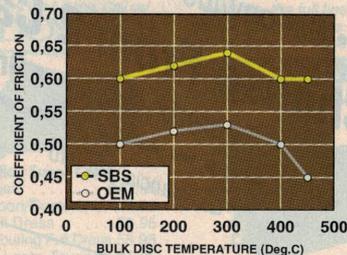
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Aftward, the fully adjustable WP damper has changed little, though it is equipped with a stiffer spring this year. The Sport behaved near-perfectly on the backroads, tracking smoothly and stably through everything from medium-speed corners to high-speed sweepers. With little-to-no discernible shaft squatting (the drive shaft has received revised U-joints), which is the parallelogram swingarm's claim to fame, the rear end offers up smooth sailing at pretty much any speed. And with plenty of ground clearance to spare.

At the bow, while a marginal improvement over the '96-spec 1100's conventional 40mm Marzocchi fork, the inverted 40mm WP legs (compression- and rebound-adjustable) are, well, a mixed bag. Yes, they soak up what the tarmac throws at you well enough, keeping the front end on line and happy (Guzzi has also seen fit to mount a diminutive Bitubo steering damper up under the instrument pod). Even after dialing in compression damping to full stiff, the fork was still too soft for more aggressive riding, leading to *molto* front-end dive under heavy braking. Memo: Longer preload spacers might provide the cure.

Lastly, the 17-/18-inch front/rear wheel setup from 1996 has now been swapped with a 17/17 combo, delivered in gorgeous three-spoke Marchesini cast-alloy rims shod with sticky Pirelli Dragon GT radials. (The '96 Sport wore Dunlop 205s.) The rear wheel is now rigged with a cush drive unit as well, making it the first modern-era sporting Guzzi to come so equipped.

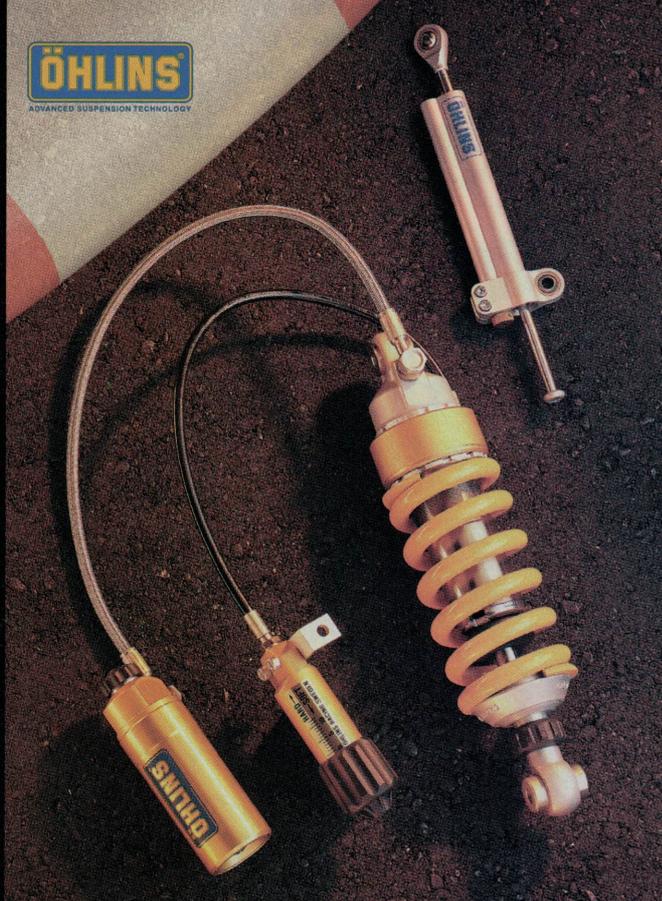
Brakewise, the four-piston/320mm floating disc Brembos provide decent velocity scrubbing with excellent feedback, making one-finger slowing the norm in most cases. There was some brake fade now and then, usually after especially spirited romps, though never serious enough to pose a real problem.

Ergonomically, the Sport 1100i is suitably comfortable, though a couple of testers found the reach to the low clip-ons a strain after long stretches in the saddle. Decent wind and weather protection comes courtesy of the smallish fairing and windscreen, and the vibration factor is perhaps the smoothest of any Guzzi yet. All in all, the 1100i is most at home at speed on a backroad, and not trolling to and fro doing the commute thang.

Did we already say this bike is gorgeous? The Sport's fit and finish are top-shelf, from the paint (we're partial to the yellow) to touches like the white and black Veglia dials and the flush machined finish on the cast triple clamps. One gripe, though, and we know this is quibbling, but what is *up* with that sidestand? Does Guzzi mount that too-far-forward, self-retracting nuisance simply to irritate its customers and boost replacement bodywork sales? We realize that it's placed with ground clearance in mind, but couldn't they, *per favore*, maybe slide it back an inch or two for those of us lacking a 38-inch inseam?

So, then, back to that nagging question posed at the very start: Can the revamped Sport 1100i run with the blood-red beasts coming out of Bologna? Well...yes and no. Under a skilled pilot, the Sport can fly with two-valve Ducks under most any conditions. Only the Guzzi will demand a bit more rider tolerance as it begs you to bear with its quirky nature. To the true Guzziphile, this is but a point of pride. To the average Giovanni, though, and at \$11,990 a pop, this might just be asking too much. **MC**

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