

HOW TO FIND THE PREVIOUS OWNERS OF YOUR BIKE

With a bit of luck and some perseverance you can unlock the history of your wheels. The Data Protection Act seems to work against you, but it also prevents others finding out your home address simply by knowing your numberplate.

Provided you have a legitimate reason (and tracing the previous owners of your bike is considered to be one) the DVLA will send you the "full keeper history" once you have completed form V888 and paid £5. (www.direct.gov.uk/en/Dio11/DotOnline/DG_10016794) or 0870 240 0010.

A mix of new technology and old-fashioned letter writing helped with finding both the first and second owners of this bike. The further back in time you go the less effective the internet becomes.

THE GUZZI'S OWNERS

First owner Henri Ducommun, then a 58-year-old ex-RAF pilot, bought the bike new on 3 October 1977. "I saw it at Birmingham Motor Cycles and that was it, I was in love. I did a part exchange on a Honda Four I had bought from them previously," says Henri, now 89 years old and still a licensed driver. "I didn't do a lot of miles on it. I looked after it, ran it in carefully and never went over 60mph. I was a director of an aircraft company and my co-directors found out I used a bike and thought it not the best idea for safety reasons so that's why I sold it. It was my prized possession," he recalls. "The gearbox was excellent. The exhaust note was like calico ripping! I bought it out of love more than anything. I treated it like a lady."

The next owner was at the other end of the spectrum. "When I purchased the bike it was in top condition - only a slight discoloration in the black exhausts," says Malcolm Pretty, who was then a 22-year-old draughtsman working for Rolls-Royce in Coventry.

"I had crashed my Ducati Darmah a few months previously - when I got the insurance money I bought the Guzzi, much to my parents' horror," says Malcolm, who paid £1600 for it. "I can still vividly remember riding the bike now. I used to love roaring down the slip road onto the Warwick bypass and thundering up to 120 mph plus - you could get away with it in those days - the Le Mans makes a great noise at higher revs." He owned the Guzzi for about six months before he crashed it. "I wasn't going that fast but I came off, breaking my wrist. That was the last I ever saw of it. My dad sorted it out and got rid of the bike," says Malcolm, who emigrated shortly afterwards to South Australia with a Harris Magnum in his suitcase.

Third owner John Norman (no relation to Peter) spent a lifetime in the motor trade. He picked up the Guzzi after spotting it in storage, post-crash. Making the decision to sell was difficult - he is an habitual hoarder. "I finally realised that I wouldn't get around to restoring it myself. That's why I advertised it in *Classic Bike*," says John. "Time got away from me - I didn't realise I had kept the bike so long. But I'm glad it finally got the love and attention it needs."

know it the bills are enormous," he says.

Surprisingly little was altered from Guzzi's earlier S3 and the cooking T3 to create the Le Mans. Modified heads with high-domed pistons in cast iron liners give compression of 10.2:1. A reduced squish band and oversized valves make for easier breathing through the Dell'Orto 36mm racing pumper carbs with meshed velocity stacks.

Gentle throttle is needed at low revs because neat fuel is squirted straight into the inlet tracts. "They're sluggish down low but get to around 4 or 5000 revs and they come alive. I have had bikes wound open, lying flat on the tank, nudging the eight grand redline - calculated out that gives 135mph," Nigel says. "The joy of them is that at speed there is no shaking, it's ultra smooth and surprisingly quiet. It is mildly tuned compared to a lot of sports bikes so it isn't too stressed."

I'm not feeling so stressed either as we roll the bike onto Nigel's trailer for the trip from

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Essex back to his workshop. The date: March 24, 2007. Nigel agrees a target date for completion of spring, 2008.

In the meantime I am eager to uncover the bike's history. I discover it was retired from the road after a crash in early 1980. Nigel reassures me again, "I wouldn't worry. The Tonti frame is so strong. I've gone over it from every angle. That bike is sound."

Meanwhile, Nigel is on the forensic trail of the bike's mileage. "There are two telltale signs of mileage. Wear on the flywheel ring-gear and carbon dust in the alternator. This bike has neither," he says. "I think you've got yourself a barely run-in bike."

I take four boxes of parts to get cleaned, blasted, painted or chromed while Nigel does the rest - drive train, cycle gear, frame and paint. The chrome is still holding up on the headlight brackets. I saved £60 by polishing them instead of re-chroming. The clip-ons, gear lever and footbrake levers all came back sparkling from London Chroming.

Over the short winter days my dining room table becomes the perfect parts bench. Idle for three decades every component needs grime, dust or rust removed. Years of oxidised gunk make it impossible to clean the alloy. John Andrew of I Cleenz Macheenz worked ultrasonic magic on the carbs before blasting the rusted matt-black metal components and the three cast-iron discs.

John also got his painters to work on the freshened metalwork. He buffed the floatbowls and bellhousings to replicate the polished originals. The pedal rubbers and wiring harness were transformed in the tank too. The rusty terminals, a big obstacle for a meagre 12 volts, came out pristine so I dipped them in melted Vaseline to preserve them.

The Dell'Orto carburetors also reveal how little use the bike has had. The slides and

bore are without marks. I strip and clean one at a time to make sure I don't end up defeated. Eurocarb provide the washer and O-ring overhaul kits and fuel needle valves. I order medium throttle springs to ease the notoriously heavy wrist action and Nigel orders Venhill's nylon-lined cables. He also orders a PTFE-line clutch cable.

The feeling of inclusion in the restoration is great. The rear shocks are rusty wrecks and many owners replaced the original LISPA's with Koni Dial-a-Rides. Koni is now kaput, but the shocks are still made under licence in Australia as Ikon.

On a pre-planned trip there I pick up a factory fresh pair. Aiming for an original look I get chrome, not black, springs. The only difference between original Konis and modern Ikon replacements is that the upper spring holders are no longer name-embossed. I mention this as I order a pair of original Koni emblazoned holders is found on a shelf

and fitted. Brilliant.

Back home I impulse buy the last set of dyno-designed Lafranconi Competizione silencers in stock at Spares GB. Nigel tells me this is a good move. "Production is pretty random, a batch will come out and then no more for a long time."

Nigel's engine overhaul has required the replacement of shell bearings, seals and gaskets. It's sound apart from pitting on a single cam follower caused by surface hardening problems they had in the factory.

Guzzi, like many Italian manufacturers, came under fire for erratic quality control that simply didn't match the riceburners. A key lapse was the use of OEM Aprilia 40/45W headlights, rightly described as woeful. I substituted an H4 halogen unit from Spares GB. It's a tight juggle inside the original shell. I didn't trust the toy town switchgear to handle the increased headlight current so I used Durite micro relays from Vehicle Wiring Products to switch the current. The relays fit under the headstock.

With no kickstarter I decide not to scrimp on a battery that will sit idle during winter and choose a sealed AGM Odyssey battery which offers plenty of amps. An internet find, Active Robots (a robotic parts supplier) sells the batteries at 25 per cent less than the motor trade with next day delivery.

The Metzeler tyres were good at the time. Now, Nigel recommends Bridgestone BT-45s. He resprayed the 12-spoke FPS cast wheels, excluding the rim edges which were always bare, with silver (the same paint was used on Series 1 fork sliders).

Nigel replaced the OEM checker pattern grips with softer, stickier, designs. "A big part of the heavy throttle problem was the original grips. The rubber was so hard; it took a lot of effort. It was like twisting hosepipe," he says.

MAIN This was only Peter's second time on the bike
BELOW Stainless crash protector bars are custom made for NBS. To you, £36.00 plus P&P. Carbs were ultrasonically cleaned, then got new seals and gaskets. Brand new Lanfranconi production race pipes

