

THE MARK 1 MYSTERY

Around 5000 Series 2 bikes (Mark I) were made but several authorities on the marque have erroneously branded them as Mark II bikes and the error has spread on the internet.

Mick Walker warned would-be owners not to buy a frame number above VE13040 in his 1995 *Buyers' Guide*. So too did Moto Guzzi Club (GB) secretary Serena Powis in Brookland Books' *Le Mans 1976-1989 Performance Portfolio*. Ian Falloon's *Sport & Le Mans Bible* brings some accuracy to the controversy, but still lacks a definitive answer. His frame number count is 7036 bikes but he admits some US bikes are probably missing. Mick Walker pointed out that some poorly primed frames were replaced under warranty.

As for this bike? It falls within the last 200 of the Series 1 production and the Guzzi 'Historical Office' (call the factory, but you'll need to speak Italian) tells us it was built in September 1976.

Mark I Series 1 bikes (1975-76)

Frames VE1111-13040, engines starting circa 70000

Mark I Series 2 bikes (1976-78)

Frames VE13041-17311, engines ending circa 76000

Mark II bikes (1978-81)

Frames VE17312-24086

■ SPECIFICATION 1976 MOTO GUZZI LE MANS MK1 SERIES 1

ENGINE/TRANSMISSION

Type	OHV V-twin
Capacity	844cc
Bore x stroke	83x78mm
Compression ratio	10.2:1
Carburation	2 x 36mm Dell'Orto
Clutch	Dry twinplate
Gearbox	5-speed

CHASSIS

Frame	duplex cradle
Front suspension	telescopic fork
Rear suspension	twin shocks
Brakes front/rear	2x300mm Brembo discs /1x300mm Brembo disc
Wheels	cast alloy
Tyres	3.50Hx18/4.00x18

DIMENSIONS

Dry weight	476lb (216kg)
Wheelbase	59.5in (1470mm)
Seat height	29.25in (743mm)
Fuel capacity	5gal (22.5-litre)

PERFORMANCE

Top speed	132.15mph
Max power	71bhp @ 7300 rpm
Fuel consumption	37mpg
Price new	£1999

Peter Norman's shirt reads 'oil addict'



Nigel has also got to grips with modern digital ignitions. Me too. After fitting a German-made Sachse Electronic ZDG3 unit to a Morini Sport, I'm happy to install another with an advance curve matching the 8-34° Guzzi original. I also buy their alternator controller. The Schottky diodes replace both regulator and rectifier and are hidden beneath the alternator cover.

"I set the ignition by the static timing LED. Once I had the tank back from spraying it was fuel in, fuel on, choke on and the bike started on the button," says Nigel. "The timing was almost spot on with just a bit of fiddling with the strobe."

I begin to notice Nigel's attention to detail. The rear tyre's valve cover includes a valve remover, and the lengthy runs of stainless steel brakehose braiding are sheathed at frame contact points. All the fasteners are stainless and those gripping alloy have copperslip to stop them binding.

"It's a beautiful bike. If you take in the cost of the bike and the restoration, it is still better priced than the cheapest modern Guzzi on the market. And I know which will hold its value longer," says Nigel when I sit astride the completed bike for the first time. "If you ever decide to sell it, let me know."

The Guzzi starts on the button and I begin the 140-mile trip home with a smile.

The Lafranconis are a blast. Whether it's on the way up to max power at 7300rpm or the overrun, the growl is gorgeous. I hunt for another parade of shop windows just to hear the bark bounce back. Fuelled up, I hit the motorway after a shakedown of less than 20 miles. But I'm confident I won't be cursing Nigel from the hard shoulder.

My knees rest against the cylinders and with my elbows on my knees there's no weight on my wrists at a steady 80mph. Windblast hits the top half of my helmet but the miles just disappear.

A single modern bike ploughs past in the fast lane; with a stretch of his left leg the rider doffs respect to this middle-aged Italian.

Near High Wycombe the M40 drops into a valley and a couple of young hoons in a Golf slice downward across several lanes without care. I bide my time.

I reach the valley floor while they are still halfway up the long four-lane slope ahead. Then I twist the throttle wide in top gear and the Guzzi gallops obediently. Seconds later I flash past them with the Veglia needle sitting solidly at 120mph. I feel like a billion Lira.

Ciao, boys.

CONTACTS: NBS Motorcycle Servicing (07958 584889, www.motorcycleservicing.co.uk), Active Robots (01761 234 328, www.active-robots.com), Eurocarb Ltd (0118 943 1180, www.dellorto.co.uk), I Cleenz Macheenz (020 8766 7164, www.icmhome.org.uk), Ikon Suspension, (www.ikonsuspension.com) - UK distributors MotoMecca, Norman Hyde and SRM Engineering), London Chroming (020 7639 6434, www.londonchroming.co.uk), Motomecca Spares (01202 823453, www.motomeccaspares.com), Sachse Electronics Digital Ignition & Alternator Controller (+49 57 416 1188, www.elektronik-sachse.de), Spares GB - Corsa Italiana (020 8540 7155, www.corsaitaliana.com), Vehicle Wiring Products (0115 9305454, www.vehicle-wiring-products.co.uk), Venhill Engineering (01306 885111, www.venhill.co.uk)