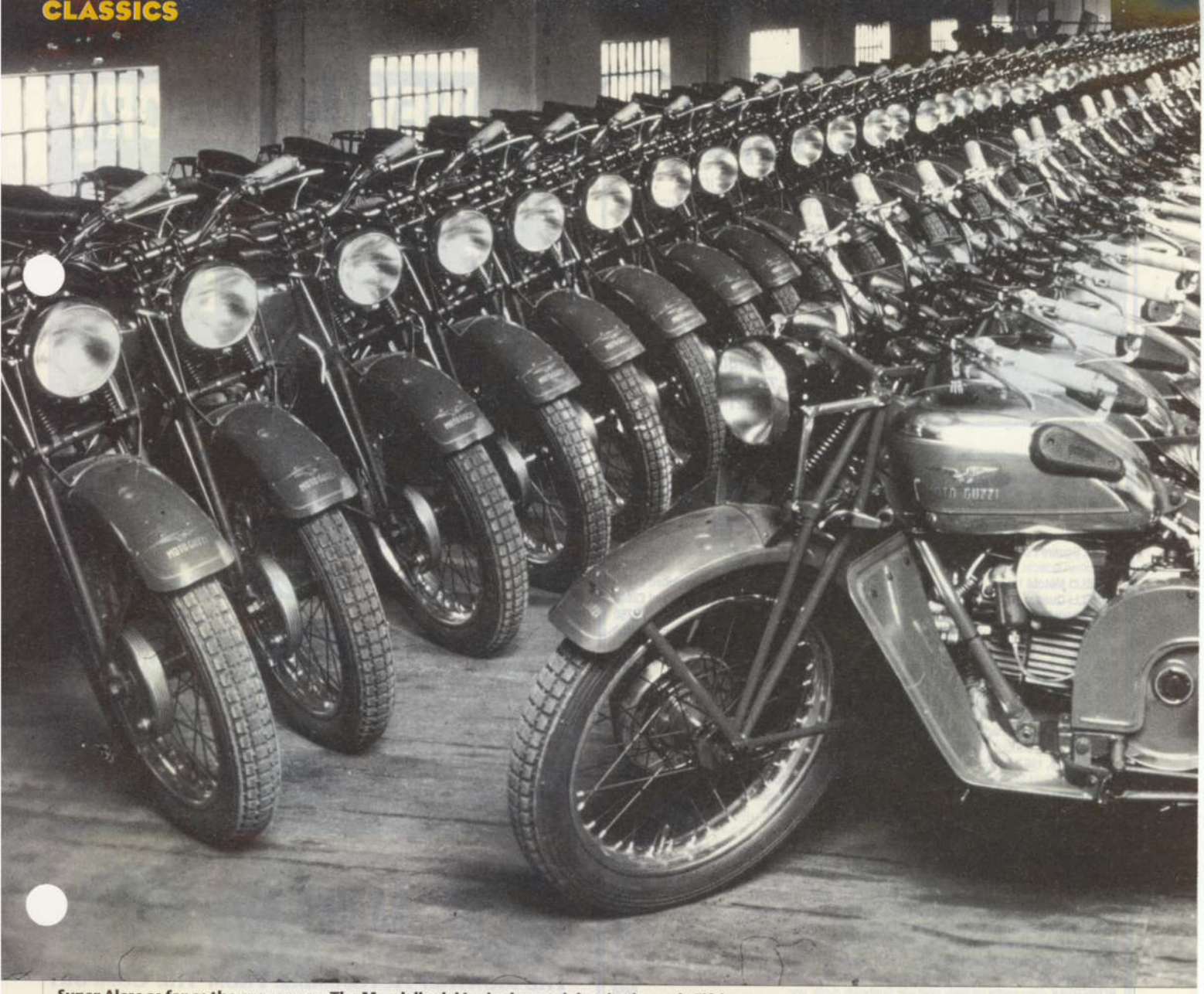


Super Alces as far as the eye can see. The Mandello del Lario despatch bay in the early Fifties.

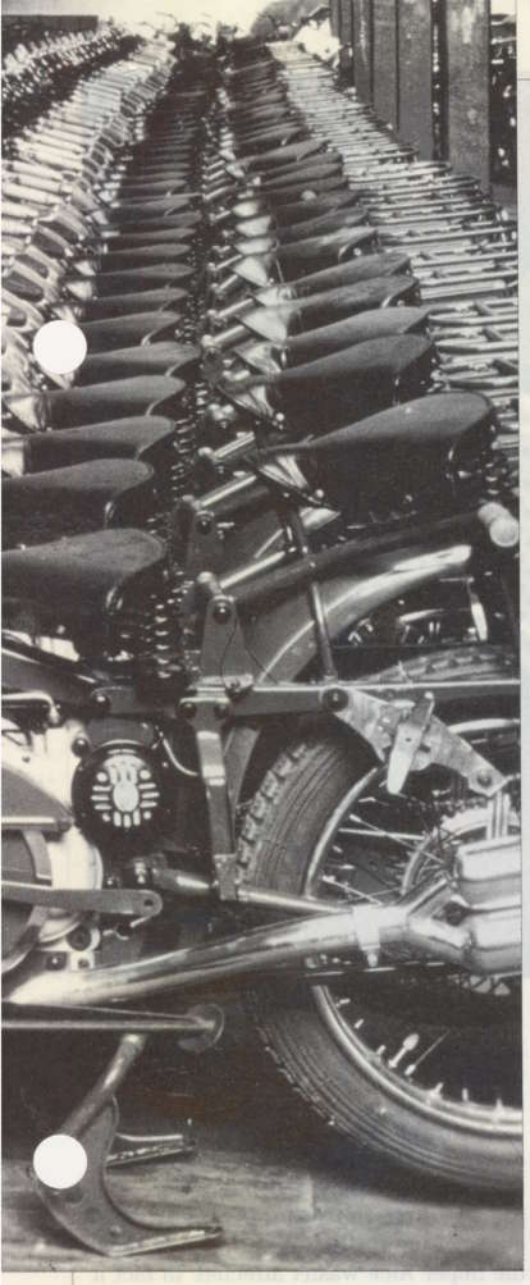
The Mandello Elk

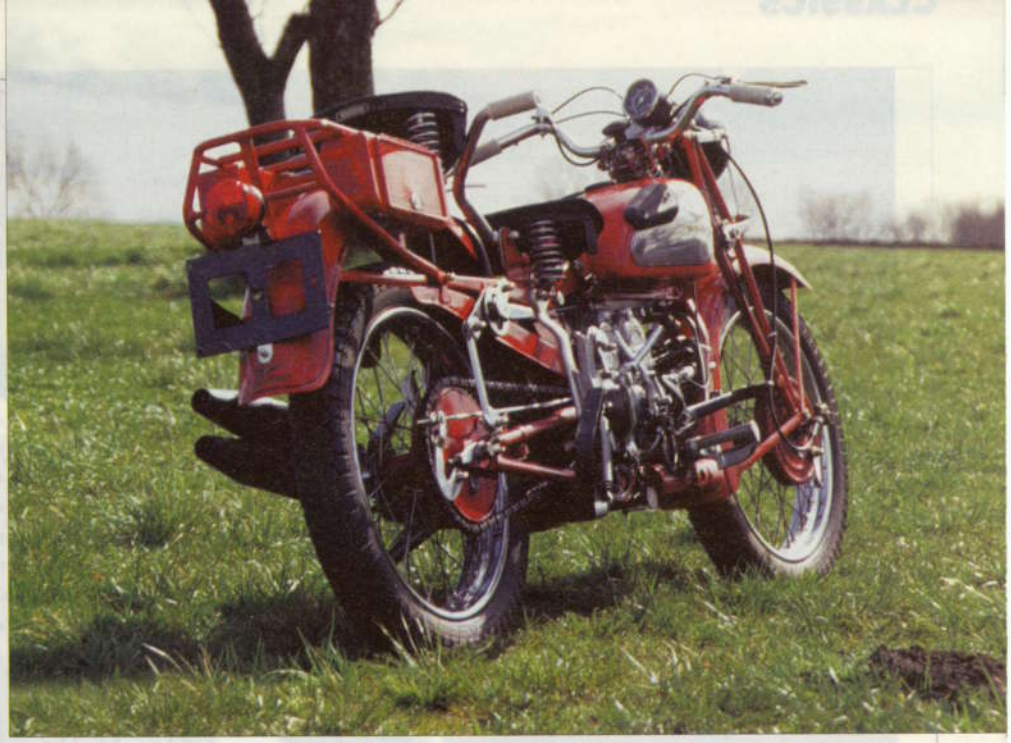
Derived from the GT20 and the wartime Alce (elk), the post-war Super Alce retained the odd look of its predecessors. Despite some revisions, it remained odd to look at – and to ride, reports ***Gerfried Vogt****.*

Conceptual continuity – an idea that featured strongly in the albums of the great rock musician Frank Zappa – was something Carlo Guzzi preserved with his single cylinder motorcycles. Ever since the early Thirties, Moto Guzzi dominated the Italian market, offering no less than seven 500cc models for sale. At the time, rear suspension was still almost unknown on motorcycles, so the bestsellers from Mandello were the still rigid framed, ohv V and the S500 – the latter still fitted with the traditional inlet over exhaust engine and the three-bolt 'catching' device in the cylinder head to prevent engines being destroyed by the cracked valves, that were more common than they should have been, mostly due to poor quality valve material.

In fact, the more popular model was the S, which could be ordered with either the sturdy heel-and-toe foot lever change, or a pre-selector hand gearchange. Like the quicker V, it was built from 1934 until June 1940 when Italy joined Germany in WWII. By then, 4004 examples of the the four speed machine had left Mandello del Lario, each costing costing a mere 6700 Lire. The more modern V, featuring a twin-port cylinder head, could be obtained for an extra 250 Lire. That too, sold well. With 2119 machines being sold, it easily outnumbered motorcycles with rear suspension. At that time, people still seemed suspicious of rear springing and couldn't believe Carlo Guzzi's idea of a frame incorporating a rear suspension would work in terms of stability and roadholding.

However, customers were happy to





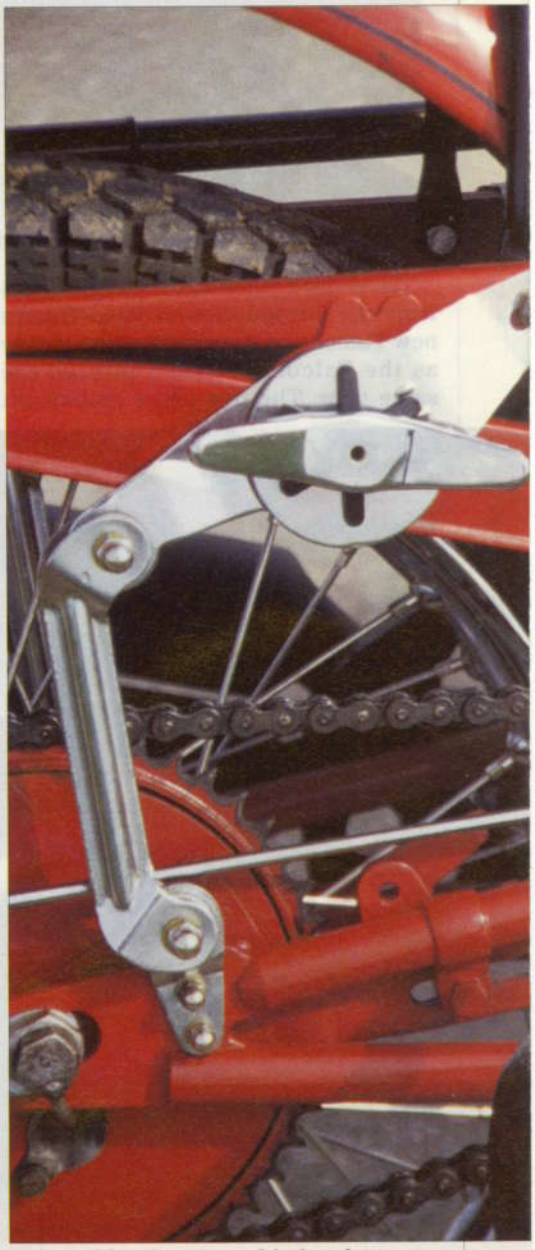
▲ **Fitted with the optional pillion seat and handlebars, Gerhard's machine becomes a biposto model.**

rely on Moto Guzzi's engine concept: a 500cc single cylinder motor, which was much updated in 1933, by which time Carlo Guzzi had the money to invest in the development of his motorcycles. The cylinder head gained a hemispherical combustion chamber and its two valves were angled at 62 degrees. The camshaft, mounted above the crank, was gear-driven, the helical-geared primary drive had torsion damper units and the clutch consisted of five plain steel plates, together with two 'organic' and five metal friction ones.

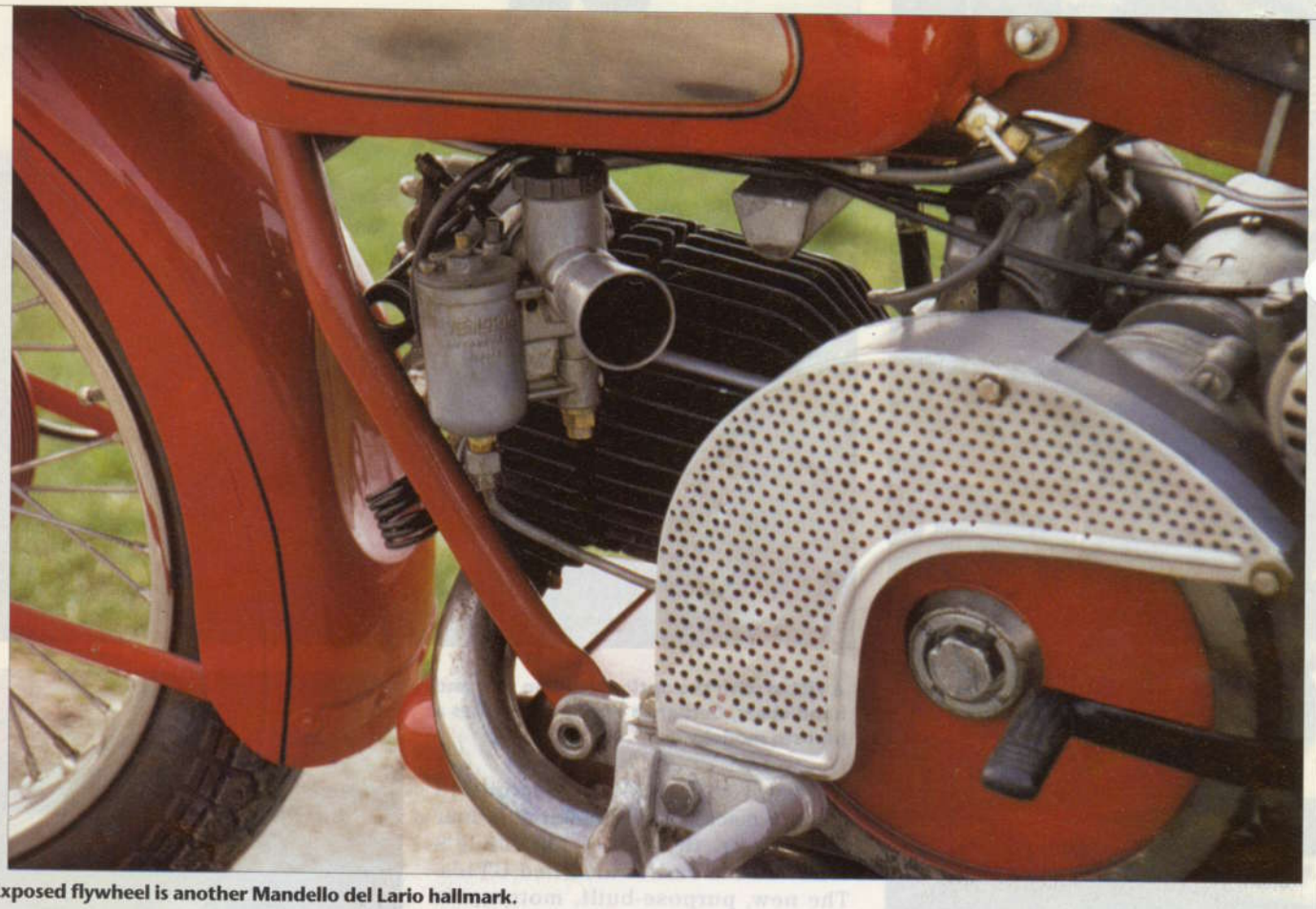
The all-new frame concept was developed in 1928, the same year Moto Guzzi produced their first of many military motorcycles. Four fully enclosed, heavyweight springs – with lighter secondary springs inside them – at the bottom of the frame, were linked to the swingarm. Two adjustable scissor-type damping units with cork plates – one on each side – helped to keep the rear wheel on the road. Up front, the girder-type front forks were now fitted with friction dampers on each side.

A total of 245 slightly modified military machines were built and, four years later, the first GT17 models followed the earlier modified GT16s. The new, purpose-built, motorcycle was ordered by various ministries – even the 'Milizia della Strada' equipped their men with the reliable ioe machines, still featuring a three-speed gearbox. After 4810 machines had been produced, the four speed GT20 closed up the gaps in the Alce gearbox. Modified hubs meant the brakes could remain undisturbed if a puncture had to be fixed on the roadside and the oil tank was now positioned higher up. Updates on the Alce meant the manual oil pump could be abandoned thanks to a new valve in the oilpump, plus a very sturdy sidestand and a new exhaust system. An impressive 6390 Alces were manufactured during WWII – the single-seat version with a top speed of 55mph, could climb hills of up to a 91 per cent gradient, while the higher geared (15:48 rather than 16:48) biposto machine with a second pair of handlebars would still potter on to the top of a 66 per cent rise in first gear.

Still in wartime, a few examples of the Alce V were built – not for the forces, but again for the Milizia della Strada in cities like Rome, Naples and Milan. The old ioe motor was replaced by the one first used on the V first in 1934, and the single-seat machine even gained some chrome parts. The Alce V, in turn, gave way to the Super Alce, which was again, modified slightly. Unlike on earlier wartype models, the preload of the heavy-duty springing could be altered, although oddly enough, Guzzi's GT17 model – first built in 1932 – already had this type of adjustment.

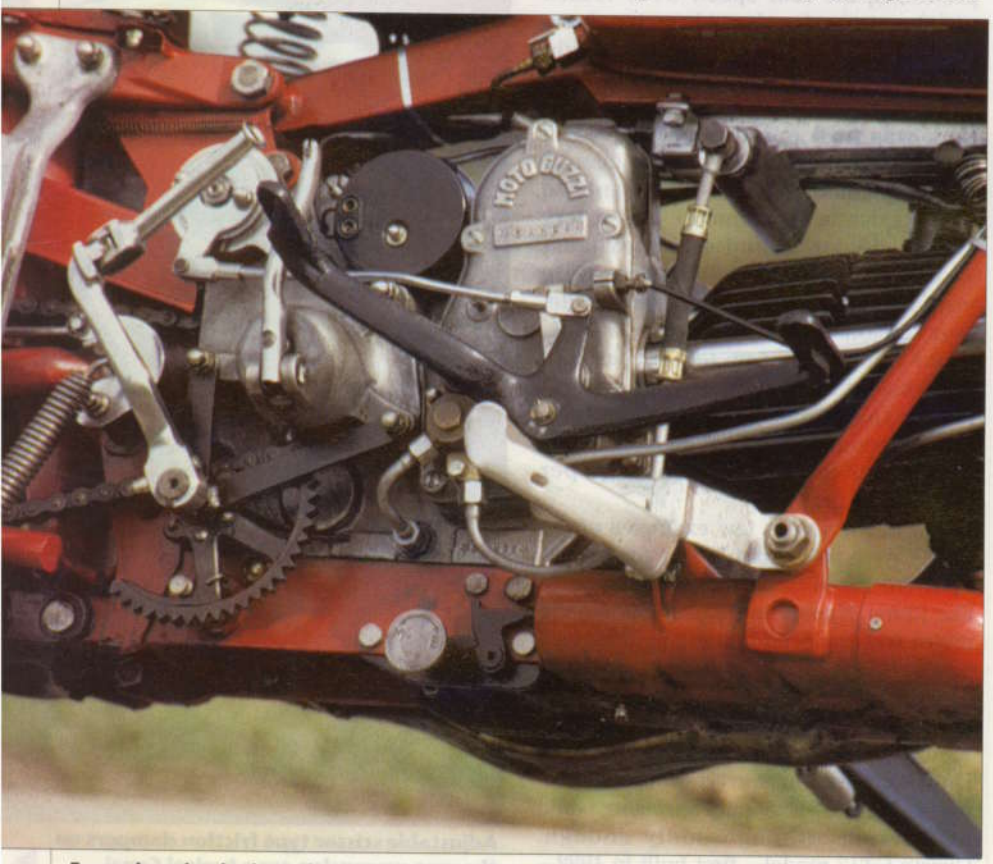


Adjustable scissor type friction dampers on the rear suspension are a typical Guzzi feature of the era. ▶



Exposed flywheel is another Mandello del Lario hallmark.

The revised Super Alce benefited a lot from the introduction of Moto Guzzi's new Falcone as it used the same engine as the Falcone Turismo offered the same year. The one-piece crankshaft featured integrated balance weights; with its 29mm diameter big end, while the main bearings were just as sturdy at 35mm so the motor seldom needed tinkering with. The mighty engine still featured the big, 8.2kg flywheel nicknamed "l'affettatrice" – Italian for meat slicer!



Frame is an intriguing mixture of tubular and pressed steel construction.

Although the chassis was rather outdated, government orders for both the Army and the Carabinieri were still plentiful. If the Falcone lost all its chrome due to the Korean war in 1952, the Super Alce wasn't affected. In fact it gained another new device which made life easier – one of the new magnetos from Marelli. The new MCR4-E had its magnets rotating inside the coil, the manual advance/retard was replaced by a centrifugal auto-advance unit and output was up to 40 watts.

Gerhard Epple's Super Alce was built in 1948 and finished in typical olive green colour. "The machine came from Udine and was obviously converted to an auto advance ignition instead of the usual manual advance/retard unit. I don't mind – it's just one less thing to think about," the 44-year-old explains with a grin. Both the Falcone and the Super Alce were equipped with this modern device in 1952.

The Moto Guzzi enthusiast from Bavaria decided to do a proper nut and bolt restoration, but wanted to get rid of his machine's army look. "Don't think the petrol tank has been chromed – I have just polished the steel," he explains. And before the first of you writes in about non-original colour and paint scheme – the owner simply couldn't paint the tank's inner and

Fact File

Moto Guzzi Super Alce 500 (1946-1957)

Engine	ohv-single
Bore and stroke	88mm x 48.2mm
Capacity	498cc
Compression ratio	5.5:1
Power output	18.5hp at 4300rpm
Transmission	multiplate clutch; four-speed gearbox, gear primary drive
Carburettor	Dell'Orto MD 27F
Chassis	Tubular/pressed steel frame
Suspension	Girder (Webb-type) forks with hydraulic damping, front. Friction damped, swinging arm rear
Tyre size	3.50 x 19in front and rear
Brakes	177mm sls drum front, 200 mm sls drum rear
Electrics	6 volt
Ignition	Magento Marelli, 40 watt magneto
Tank capacity	13.5 litres
Seat height	750mm
Wheelbase	1455mm
Weight	195kg
Top speed	110kph

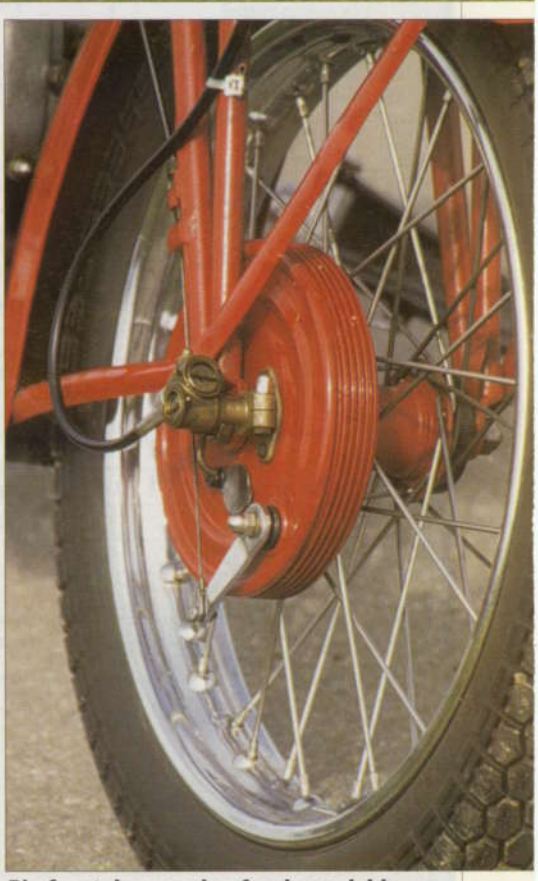
Club contact Moto Guzzi Club GB Sue and Peter Creech, 3, Union Place, Tewkesbury, Gloucs GL20 5RE. 01684 299037. Website: http://freespace.virgin.net/motoguzzi.clubgb/home.htm

▲ Gerhard takes life on his Super Alce a little easier since a piece of broken valve spring very nearly hit him on the ear!

polish the complete circumference as it was dented. Stainless steel spokes and new rims made a difference to the originality of the machine too, but Gerhard wanted things to last.

How's the ride on this old Guzzi? "Well, it's never been an Italian Stallion, and I wouldn't expect it to maintain its 110kph top speed for too long," he says, having once experienced a broken hairpin spring, one half of which made a bullet-like exit, flying off only a few inches from our man's cheek. That's the price of owning a soldier's machine I suppose!

Never available for private customers, the Super Alce was still listed on Guzzi's 1949 price, with a list price of 480,000 Lire as a single seater and 490,000 Lire with the extra seat and the folding handlebars (biposto). Late on during its production run in 1955, the Super Alce got a single-tube exhaust pipe. Two years later, it was curtains for the Super Alce as Italian authorities decided they would rather equip their personnel with the new, lighter and easier-to manoeuvre Falcone. ■



Big front drum makes for dependable stopping power.