



WAR TIME

WARRIORS

Comparison features are common enough, but how's this for something unusual? Reg Eyre compares a pair of old war horses...

Photos by Reg Eyre

AN ARMY ARIEL

The engine and frame numbers of this 1944 Ariel W/NG show that this machine was delivered to the Royal Navy from the Ariel works on the 16th June 1944 at a cost of £61, along with another 349 bikes. The finish on this machine equates to the pre- and post-war colour of Royal Navy dark navy blue gloss, or nearly black. Conjecture suggests that the machine arrived late in the war period and was probably consigned to civil defence duties, hence the 'ARP' on the petrol tank instead of the

original RN 35151 to 33,500 number. It is estimated that about 47,500 W/NGs were made for the services, with the majority going to the army. A prototype machine was supplied for evaluation in 1940. This was based on the 1938 Scottish Six-Day Trial winning machine which impressed the French Government who placed orders immediately... but the British only approved it if there was an emergency!

The first machines supplied were basically the civilian sporting singles with very few alterations but, by the time this machine was made, there were several materials shortages, resulting in there being no footrest / gearchange / petrol tank / handlebar grip rubbers, and the images clearly show the canvas webbing handlebar grips. The shortage of aluminium resulted in this machine being fitted with a pressed steel primary chain-case and timing cover. Note also the standard fitting of a pillion

seat and footrests. Sitting on the machine reveals it to be very comfortable, with a low seat height. The engine starts easily, comfortable enough to kick up while standing astride the machine. Engaging first gear reveals the long throw on the gear lever, which may have been to accommodate a squaddy's large boots. The operation of the clutch is typically Burman, meaning that the clutch action is light and, providing the rider 'frees' the clutch plates prior to starting the engine, silent gear changes can be made. First gear is lower than normal, with a reasonable step up to second, with third and top gears as normal. This means that apart from a slow getaway if first is used, a reasonable degree of acceleration can be maintained.

Where this machine is most happy is riding along small, under-used country lanes with grass, mud and stones on the surface. The degree of control in handling

and the flexibility of the engine allows the machine to be ridden at about 45mph, which gives the rider confidence to know that he can safely stop, or take evasive action if a car or tractor is encountered. On main roads, the Ariel can hold an indicated speed of 65mph, with perhaps a small amount of throttle in-hand, but I tend not to ride it in this way.

The performance is slightly down on that of my 1932 Ariel Red Hunter 500cc with its 4 valve head, but the performance characteristics are very similar in the way that the frame feels light, whippy but fully controllable when pressing along uncertain surfaces. It is easy to see why soldiers might have preferred to have the Ariel, since the response to the controls is immediate and the minimal effort required to ride it would have allowed him to concentrate on the mission in hand. I believe that many Ariels were pressed into sporting mode at

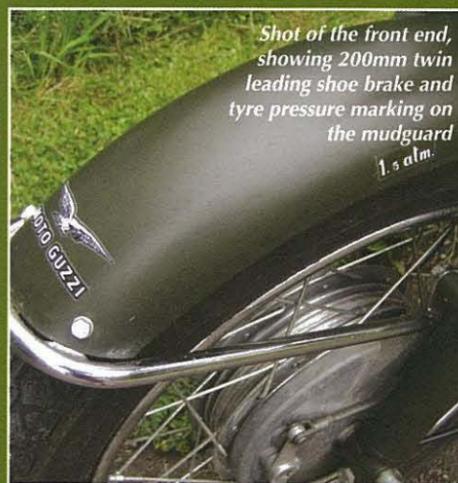
times of relaxation, too. One small thing I have noticed with this particular Ariel was that the engine felt constrained at fully open throttle positions. I suspected that a compression gasket had been fitted to prevent over-enthusiastic use, but I traced it to the throttle return spring not allowing a fully open position. Snipping a couple of coils from this spring allowed the throttle to open fully and the rider now gets a sappy grin when pressing on. The exhaust has a healthy bark when working hard, which gives aural satisfaction to any riders travelling the same roads.

FORCES FALCONE

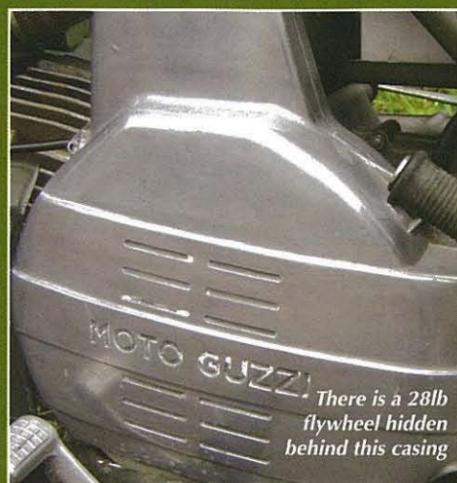
The original Falcone machines can be traced directly to the Astore machines of the 1950s, and were like most Moto Guzzi single cylinder machines in lay-out, being horizontally mounted and using a large outside flywheel.

Interestingly, the Falcone had a sports designation and was ordered by the police and military, which ensured its production life. It was basically a pre-war design that fell out of production in 1968 but had to be brought back into the range due to demand from those police and military types.

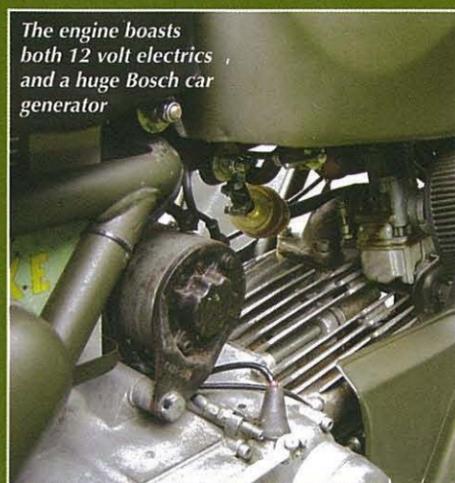
1970 saw the introduction of the production of the Nuovo Falcone, with a more modern frame but with the familiar 88 x 82mm bore and stroke of the earliest Moto Guzzi engines. The major changes were a complete gearbox redesign and a change to wet sump lubrication. The external flywheel was still there, but hidden by an aluminium casing, and coil ignition was preferred to magneto. Suspension was up-rated to telescopic front forks and twin rear shock absorbers. The weight went up from 176kg (388lb) to 214kg (472lb), while the power increased only from 23bhp to 26.2bhp, while the top speed actually



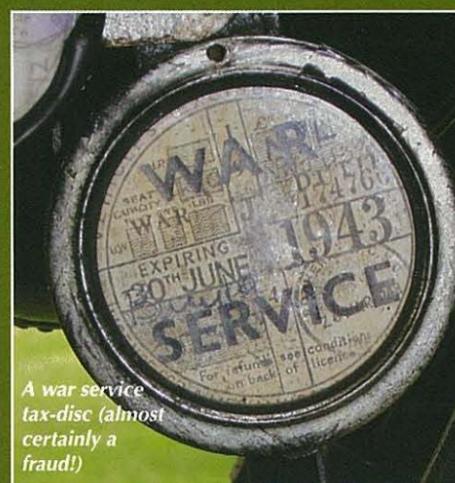
Shot of the front end, showing 200mm twin leading shoe brake and tyre pressure marking on the mudguard 1.5 atm.



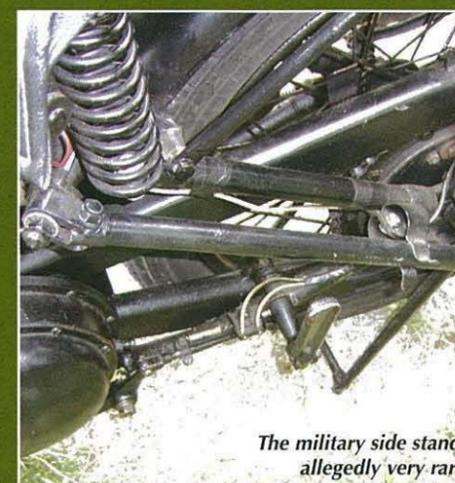
There is a 28lb flywheel hidden behind this casing



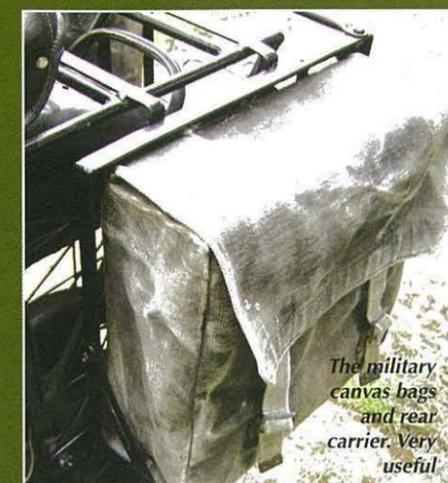
The engine boasts both 12 volt electrics and a huge Bosch car generator



A war service tax-disc (almost certainly a fraud!)



The military side stand, allegedly very rare

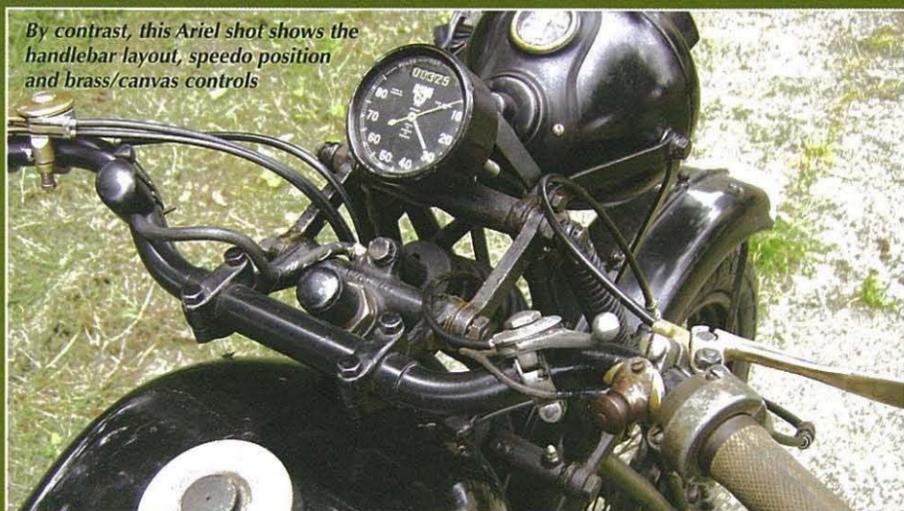


The military canvas bags and rear carrier. Very useful

The nicest part about riding this machine along deserted country lanes is the sound of a vintage engine working effortlessly while the rider is wafted along...



Tidy handlebar control lay-out



By contrast, this Ariel shot shows the handlebar layout, speedo position and brass/canvas controls

dropped from 135kph (84mph) to 127kph (79mph).

The Italian military and police forces were supplied with these machines from 1970 to 1976, and this particular machine had been in storage until released/rescued by North Leicester Motorcycles in 2001 with only 38km showing on the clock.

Departures from standard include the fitting of a modern air filter, with the original heavy item being kept in store, and a rear pannier rack and bags. The original design called for a machine which would be used for solo despatch, escort and general police duties; the lazy slow-revving engine is a plodder of the old school, and would have been totally out-classed if used on the Autostrada.

The colour of this machine identifies it as ex-army. The Highway police used grey-green bikes and the Carabinieri/military police used blue. The plush pillion seat, really appreciated by personal management, probably shows that this machine was used for transporting an officer, but does not have the WW2 machines' rear handlebars! These meant that the officer could stand up, rest his thighs against these bars and take the salute.

The first impression on sitting on the machine is of its great length; 1450mm, compared with the 1360mm of the Ariel, and its weight. The gear lever on the right is of the continental heel-and-toe type, but is long enough for British riders to use only the toe part as a conventional gear lever. The kick start is on the left, which means that I favour starting the

engine while the machine is on its stand. The starting procedure is to free the clutch plates first, use the kickstart lever to locate top dead centre, use the decompressor lever to move the piston just over TDC and allow the kickstart lever to come back to its top position, then use a long follow-through action to start the engine, which will then

tick over at a remarkably low number of revs. It is not necessary to jump on the kickstart lever or use great effort to achieve consistent satisfying starting to amaze your friends.

The first time first gear is used in the morning usually results in a graunch, but this disappears once the gearbox warms

up. The gears are one up, three down, and therefore familiar to British motorcyclists used to Burman gear changes. The gears are well spaced and forward progress is stately since there is a lot of weight to move. The brakes are more than adequate for slowing down or stopping this forward progress. There is a problem with this particular

MILITARY MINUTIAE

>>ARIEL'S SOLUTION to the demand for an Army bike was straightforward. Val Page adapted the competition version of their standard NG 350 by removing the easily damaged bits and raising the ground clearance. The result was a tough, easy to ride 17bhp slogger with widely-spaced gear ratios

>>THE W/NG FRAME was similar to Ariel's rigid roadster version, with an adapted rear sub-frame to lower the rear wheel and the addition of a monster prop-stand suitable for the battlefield. The girder forks were extended to help ground clearance

>>AS WW2 PROGRESSED, so Ariel had to substitute materials on several components on the W/NG. The aircraft industry hogged all the light alloy, so items like the chaincase, timing cover, gearbox cover and such were made from pressed steel or cast iron

>>THE W/NG EARNED a good reputation during the war for riding on

rough ground, although its off-road bias made it a little less comfortable on tarmac. It could reach 70mph, however, although braking was marginal from that speed!

>>AFTER THE WAR, the W/NG could be upgraded for civilian duties by fitting Ariel's telescopic forks which slotted neatly into place

>>DEPENDING ON CONDITION, W/NGs are now worth anything between £2500 and £5000. A 1942 bike is currently up for grabs at £6000, described as being in 'running condition'

>>SOME TIME LATER, IN ITALY, Moto Guzzi built their flat single Falcone for the Police and Presidential Guard. The Falcone lasted from 1950 to 1967, and then in 1969 came its successor, the Nuovo Falcone. The Nuovo is quite different to the original Falcone, with unit construction, wet sump, coil/battery ignition and a tubular duplex cradle frame built along the lines of the Forth Bridge

>>NOT EVERYONE LIKED the Nuovo

Falcone: fully fuelled the bike approached 500lb; its massive (20lb...) flywheel produced performance characteristics which some love but many don't, and the valve gear can suffer from poor lubing if oil pressure falls (normally through neglect)

>>A CIVVI VERSION of the Nuovo Falcone boasted a dual seat, different fuel tank, chrome mudguards and such. There was even a 'Sahara' model, based more on the military machine, finished in a fetching shade of beige with matching panniers

>>FLAT OUT, the Nuovo Falcone could achieve 80mph, although it'd take about 10 seconds to get there

>>PRICES NOW reflect the Nuovo Falcone's growing appeal as more people are attracted to its quirky styling, lolloping performance and excellent spare parts supply - scruffy ones go for £1500 or you'll pay £2700 for a really shiny example

>>MORE INFO and an owners' group can be found at www.devce.demon.co.uk/falcone.htm



machine in changing from second to third gear. NLM mechanics suggested a worn profile in the selector mechanism but the addition of weld has not helped and it is just as easy to change from second to fourth if third has not been engaged properly.

The nicest part about riding this machine along deserted country lanes is the sound of a vintage engine working effortlessly while the rider is wafted along, in a cushioned way, across any type of road surface. There is no problem with using this machine along fast A-roads, since it will maintain its speed of about 70mph with little vibration. I have ridden it along green lanes with and without a pillion, and here the length of the machine gives a strange feeling of the front and back wheels doing their own things. The clutch action is heavy, in comparison to

the Ariel's Burman box, making town riding an exhausting experience, but open road riding is a pleasant, almost sedate ride.

HEAD TO HEAD

Here are two ex-military machines built less than thirty years apart, and a comparison should be possible, but is it? The machines were built in different eras, for different purposes and under different circumstances, so direct comparisons may be unjustified. The Ariel was built under wartime conditions and down to a price. It was intended to work as a convoy escort and despatch rider machine for use on roads which were not in the best state of repair, or occasionally off-road. On the road it maintains a reasonable average speed, while off-road it is easy to manoeuvre and

control. The pannier frames are heavy, solid and unyielding if you catch a leg on them while pushing the machine with a dead engine and manoeuvring the machine while seated, which can also result in a bruise from the unprotected footrests. I would not wish to ride at night with a headlamp blackout mask on, as the spread of light coming out of the slit would not illuminate much of the road while on night missions.

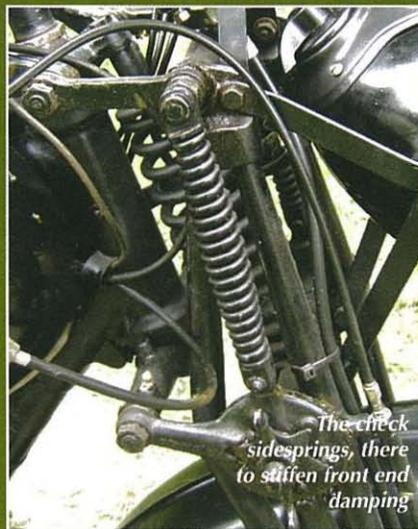
The two toolboxes allow enough equipment to be carried for roadside repairs, such as blocked jets in the carburettor, repairing a puncture or cleaning the magneto points. Compared to the sidevalve machines of the era, the Ariel must have seemed a luxury, but I would like to try a comparison with the ohv Matchless G3 and Royal Enfield WD/CO machines of the period. (That's a hint for owners to make contact!)

The Nuovo Falcone was not built for war combat service, and was only intended to be used as an escort vehicle or as officer transport. Its performance on the road is leisurely, with a long gait, beautiful sound and good comfort for both rider and pillion. In comparison with other machines of the Seventies, its performance is slovenly and dated, although its road-holding and comfort levels are exemplary.

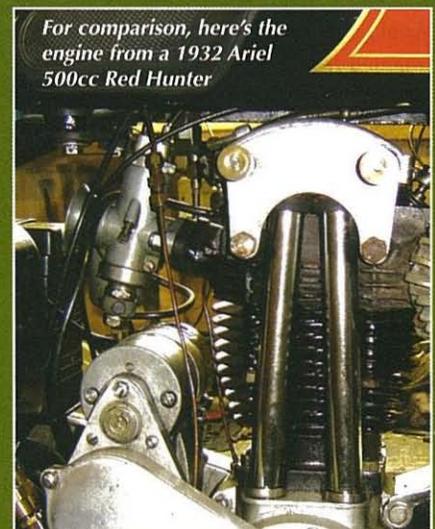
Which do I prefer? Well both actually, because they are both descended from sporting Thirties machines. The Ariel still maintains some of its performance characteristics while the Moto Guzzi has the comfort level sufficient for 100 mile journeys. **Rc**



Head-on view with blackout mask



The check sidesprings, there to stiffen front end damping



For comparison, here's the engine from a 1932 Ariel 500cc Red Hunter