

THE FALCONE'S FINAL FLIGHT

Designed for a life of hard work with military and police authorities around the world, **Richard Rosenthal** discovers that a de-mobbed version of Mandello del Lario's last big single makes an ideal alternative, long legged tourer.

READ ANY BOOK GIVING OVER A FEW PAGES, or even a chapter, to Moto Guzzi, and the Nuovo Falcone is given scant – if any – coverage. Marque tomes often afford little more than a couple of paragraphs or, at best, a page, on the model, except acknowledged Italian expert Mick Walker who rightly gives the model a full unbiased report in his version. Most, though, choose to largely ignore it.

It seems, among feature writers of the period, or even now, it's a safe model to have a pop at. Looks good on the CV or with the magazine publisher, to have been the thrusting author whose cutting-edge piece takes the Nuovo Falcone apart, except it has been done before. Most lack the full courage of their convictions, rounding off the slating by praising outside flywheel Falcones, V-twin Le Mans and something in the current range. Mustn't bite the hand that feeds, must we?

Spying Robin Church's Nuovo Falcone at the 2003 Louth Lions Run, I was smitten before hearing "How about doing something a bit different for the magazine, Richard?"

Painted in Italian red, which always contrasts superbly with acres of well finished alloy engine cases, it had my vote instantly. Its image in some quarters fostered, I feel, by testers with their brains in their knee sliders, helped endear the model to me further and bonding was complete when I realised by the day's end this hefty single would have covered 250 miles two-up without a moments hesitation, nor the slightest seepage of oil. "Love to," I enthused, promptly exchanging contact details.

Born as a result of popular demand, the reports, press and show launches of the Nuovo Falcone appeared in November 1969. Moto Guzzi thought they'd made their last 500cc Falcone singles in 1967 but, rather as the Triumph Hinkley factory have re-launched the parallel twin in response to demand, the Mandello del Lario factory appear to have buckled to requests especially from police and military buyers to come up with another big single. Fact, fiction or a bit of both I'm not

sure, but clearly Moto Guzzi saw future fame and fortune with their V-twin range, bolstered by two-stroke lightweights – and then seem to have had second thoughts.

Rather than re-work the proven Falcone design, Moto Guzzi engineers unveiled a completely new machine. Gone was the famous spring and friction rear suspension, replaced by conventional swing arm – the distinctive outside flywheel had disappeared too in favour of an internal design. But the horizontal single cylinder concept and even over-square dimensions of 88 x 82mm – which date back to the Moto Guzzi Normale of 1921 – remained.

Another glance confirms the traditional Moto Guzzi horizontal single's oil tank mounted directly under the fuel tank had also gone, replaced by wet sump lubrication. Less obvious are the 12 volt electrics with optional electric start for some models, modern square slide Dell'Orto VHB 29A carburettor and steel liner to the cylinder barrel, permitting rebore or even replacement, instead of the chrome bores found on other period Moto Guzzis. The liner is an essential feature for a motorcycle built specifically for a life of endless toil.

Mandello del Lario continued the concept of an all new machine with the chassis. The horizontal engine mounts into a double cradle tubular steel frame with near conventional style oil damped telescopic front fork and swing arm rear suspension controlled by twin shock absorbers. A full width t/s Grimeca drum front brake sharpened up stopping power, while options of panniers, crash bars and other goodies, enabled the Nuovo Falcone to be personalised to suit many needs.

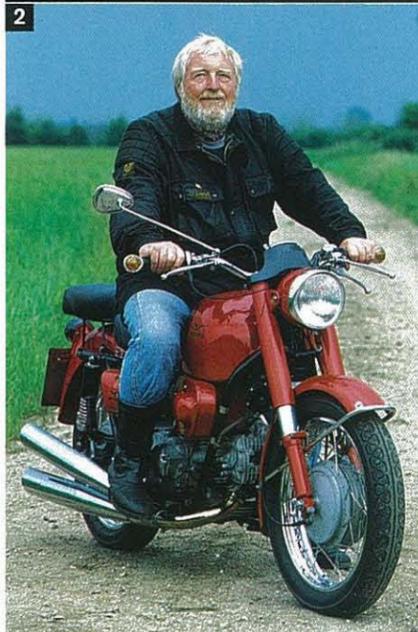
Models in standard trim, like Robin's example, weighed in at 185kg, not that much more than some British singles of the Fifties, but the option of full military or police dress tipped the scales by up to another 30kg. Variances in exhaust pipes, a face lift in 1974 and the over the counter option of the Sahara, in effect a sand coloured civilian version of the



- 1: The twin leading shoe front brake, from Grimeca, works well.
- 2: Identification plate on the frame confirms a few of the Nuovo Falcone's vital statistics.
- 3: Rather than the outside flywheel, a feature of single cylinder Guzzis from the outset of production, the Nuovo Falcone's is fully enclosed.



1: By virtue of carrying the bulk of its weight low down, the Moto Guzzi feels manoeuvrable at low speed or when being pushed.
 2: Owner Robin Church poses with the machine he bought in Germany, then brought back to the UK with him.
 3: The engine was a completely new entity, rather than a modernised earlier unit – though traditional bore and stroke remained.
 4: The famous Moto Guzzi logo – it's been on motorcycles continuously for over 80 years.



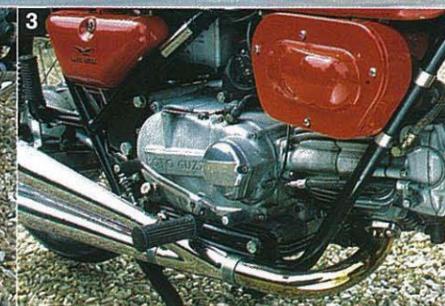
military model, saw the range through until late 1976 when production ended. Steady sales still existed for the Nuovo Falcone, but V-twin production was on the increase and space needs at Mandello del Lario dictated the end of the big single.

Robin bought his Nuovo Falcone seven years ago, while he was working and living in Germany. It's believed to have been originally a dark blue ex-police model, which was painted black before purchase. Severely abused mechanically, the engine was near wrecked with the broken piston skirt lodged in the crankcase, yet efforts had been made to restore it as the barrel had been re-bored. Robin replaced all bottom end bearings, including the white metal big end and, while the engine was apart, modified the oil feed to the inlet valve and control gear, as it tends to run dry. Mechanical spares, including a new piston, were sourced from specialists in Germany who hold good stocks and a civilian

type, rather than military style, exhaust system was settled for, as it extremely difficult to replate the service item. Restoration, including re-finishing in red and all chrome plate was completed in Germany, and the Nuovo Falcone put into use before Monika and Robin Church returned to the UK.

One of the common criticisms of the model I learned from my research is of the electrics. It seemed a touch of, 'when in doubt, knock Italian electrics,' except it's not applicable here, as this Nuovo Falcone boasts Bosch equipment including a VW Beetle car dynamo and regulator. And, as we all know, Bosch is a byword for electrical reliability. The standard equipment is supplemented on Robin's motorcycle by the addition of ex-military Hella bar end indicators, which are a boon on crowded British roads.

Shifting motorcycles for the benefit of our picture shoots gives scribes like me an early opportunity to get the feel of a machine



1: Tester Rosenthal finds the Nuovo Falcone to be a pleasant, long-legged tourer.
 2: A real Italian touch! The single exhaust splits into two in a touch of flamboyant design.
 3: Horizontal single cylinder engine is a traditional feature of Moto Guzzi singles.

before we hit the road. Despite being a heavy single, the Nuovo Falcone carries its weight well with a low centre of gravity thanks to the low slung horizontal engine, which combined with its narrow build, would make manoeuvring around the workshop or even into the garden shed relatively easy. Likewise, hoisting it onto its centre stand needs effort – but not that much. It's a refreshing change, from some of its top heavy Oriental rivals!

By the time I took over riding the Moto Guzzi, it had clocked a few miles and was nicely warm. Starting simply depended on giving the engine a purposeful spin to create momentum in the substantial flywheels and internal combustion took over.

Mindful that the engine develops 26.8hp at 4800rpm, I'd expected acceleration to be sluggish; instead it's on a par with a British 500cc touring single, though would be left by a Velocette Venom or a Gold Star. Interesting, but not really what this motorcycle is about, as

I soon learnt. Hitting 50-60mph, the Nuovo Falcone assumes a leisurely canter, which I'm sure it would keep up without a trace of fuss until the petrol tank ran dry or a call of nature necessitated a stop. On hitting a hill, I simply turn the wick up. Shut the throttle on the descent and the confidence inspiring engine does the rest. Seldom, except at a junction or in an emergency, is there a need to stir the gear lever or resort to the brakes.

My pre-test research had led me to expect the gearbox to be at best heavy and notchy. Instead, while being a little slow compared with a Triumph twin or Japanese 'box, it's again by no means sluggish and, with only a couple of changes under my belt, I had become adept at totally silent, smooth shifts. Nothing to do with my skill, simply a well engineered gearbox which has ratios to suit the softly tuned nature of the engine.

Still, with the words of past scribes spinning in my mind, I am dreading the action

photography part of the road test feature. Often, we find a quiet country lane with suitable bends and ride a dozen or more passes for our photographer. The session works both gearboxes and clutch excessively. On occasions, clutches become hot, bothered and won't disengage; not so the Nuovo Falcone. As I roll to a halt, clutch action is as good as it was 80 gearchanges ago and I found neutral with one tap of my toe.

By the time we return to base I've become settled to the nature of this motorcycle and it turns on the charm. Bends are a doddle, often negotiated with little need to change gear as I simply lean the Nuovo Falcone into curve after curve, feathering the delightful front brake or stirring the engine as appropriate. All thoughts of riding a heavy machine drift from my mind as do the comments of those past testers, giving me time to absorb the rolling countryside with confidence that 'down below' all is fine.



Speedo' sits atop the forks - there is no rev-counter fitted.

On active service

Italian factories, including Bianchi and Frera, were old hands at supplying the home armed forces with suitably modified motorcycles, by the time the Mandello del Lario workshop - which became Moto Guzzi - was established on the east shore of Lake Como in 1921. Despite designing motorcycles which flew in the face of convention, the Italian military began to assess the suitability of these durable singles for active service, leading to sizable contracts. Here we take a look at Moto Guzzi's leading military models.

1928 GT

A single batch of 245 single cylinder 499cc roadsters adapted for military service. Formed the basis of Moto Guzzi's first purpose built military model, the GT17.

1932-39 GT17

Hand change, three-speed, exhaust over inlet valve 499cc horizontal single with Moto Guzzi patented adjustable rear suspension. Supplied either solo or with pillion facilities, including fixed handlebars. Options included rear racks, tool boxes, machine gun and other gun transportation mounts. Used for dispatch, attack, personnel transport, liaison and police duties.

1932-6 32

Military type commercial pick-up truck, based on GT17 with two rear wheels between which a truck body was mounted on leaf springs. Replaced by Trialce.

1934-40 GTV

Adapted 499cc production roadster, offered with limited military optional extras for similar duties to GT17, except attack.

1938-9 GT20

Limited production of purpose built military motorcycle, in effect an uprated GT17 with ohv engine, four-speed gearbox, revised frame, increased ground clearance and designed for easier 'in action' repair. Replaced by Alce

1939-45 ALCE

Directly based on GT17 design with eoi horizontal single cylinder engine, four-speed hand change gearbox and shorter rolling chassis with more ground clearance. As popular with Italian forces as the Matchless G3L was with Allied riders. Over 7000 were built including approximately 700 with sidecars. Intended for DR, reconnaissance, transport and military police duties, options included pillion facilities, luggage racks and mounts, ski attachments and legshields.

1940-43 TRIALCE

Military three wheeled truck in the style of the Moto Guzzi 32 able to carry 443kg payload. Adapted as gun ship or personnel carrier as well as being used for general military transportation over rough terrain.

1940-6 AIRONE

Standard production 247cc lightweight adapted for military service. Options included pillion pad on rear mudguard, leg shields, racks and gun clips.

1942-C5 500U

Heavyweight version of Trialce three-wheeler with ohv engine and four-speed gearbox. Designed to carry 1000kg payload.

1946-57 SUPERALCE

Purpose built military model which followed on from WWII Alce. Boasted foot change gearbox and ohv engine design. Again a favourite with military riders thanks to increased power from the engine. Used for DR, military police, liaison, escort and personnel transport duties. Standard military trim included racks, pillion equipment and leg shields.

1952-C4 AIRONE SPORT

Like the earlier Airone a production roadster adapted for military work. Producing 13.5hp at 6000rpm against 9.5hp at 4800rpm for earlier model it was faster. Military trim included option of luggage racks or pillion pad, leg shields and crash bars. Served for liaison, DR and escort duties.

1953-1967 FALCONE TURISMO

Another favourite roadster converted for service use. The four-speed 499cc ohv horizontal single cylinder motorcycle was also a favourite amongst Italian police and even the Vatican guard, who used models with fully enclosed mudguards. Military trim included luggage carriers and/or pillion pads, leg shields, screen and front crash bars.

1957 350

On/off road motorcycle in trail trim, based on Lodola design but enlarged to 350cc. Only ever built as prototypes, trim included leg shields which doubled as crash bars, separate pillion seat, luggage rack and Earles style front fork.

1960-C2 STORNELLO

Production four-speed ohv 124cc lightweight adapted for Italian military light

DR and liaison duties. Equipment included leg shields, crash bars, single saddle, panniers and screen.

1959-62 3 X 3 MULO MECCANICA

Developed at considerable cost, the three-wheel drive tricycle was the first in a long line of production model Moto Guzzis powered by the transverse V-twin engine. Built in unit the Mulo Meccanica gearbox had six forward and one reverse gear driving through a differential to the wheels, 20 per cent to front wheel and 80 per cent to rear wheels, which could be locked off in turn resulting in only one rear wheel driving. The track of the rear wheels could be varied to suit terrain yet enable it to get through narrow gaps. Also small bogey wheels could be fitted behind the rear wheels to prevent it toppling backwards on steep climbs and for extra grip the rear wheel set-up could be clad in temporary tracks.

Approximately 200 were supplied to the Italian Alpine forces. Some sources claim up to 500 were built, but I can't confirm this figure.

1967-73 V7

Used nationally by military and civilian authorities, as well as other forces from Africa to Holland. The ohv 703cc V-twin was offered with much optional equipment including radio, screen, siren, extra lights, panniers, racks, crash bars, leg shields and even seat choice.

1970-76 NUOVO FALCONE

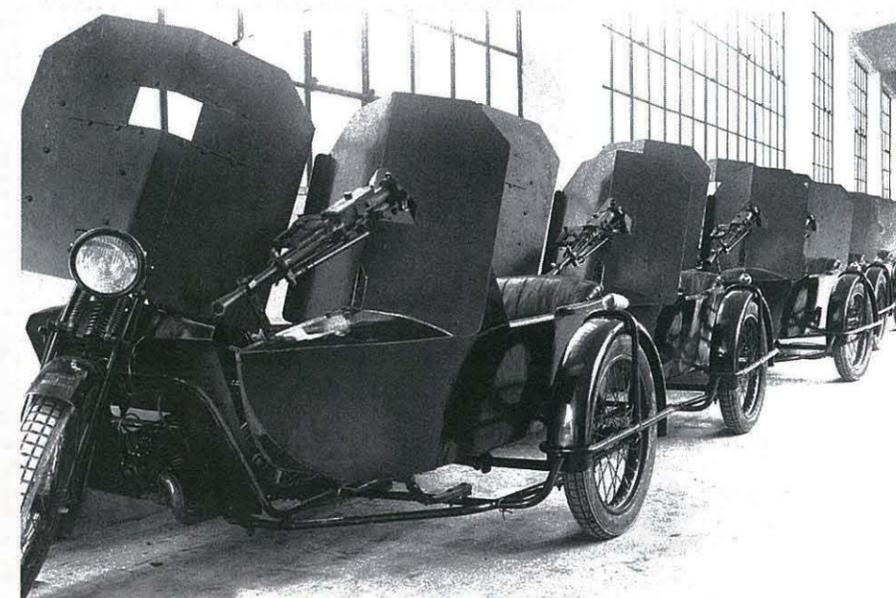
Our feature subject. Initially built for a military role, it was later offered as a civilian model too. Options as for V7 available and was exported to other military users.

1973 850 T3 AND SUBSEQUENT LARGE CAPACITY MOTO GUZZI V-TWINS

Standard production models including automatic V-1000 Convert and sports models adapted for military and civilian service roles. As well as serving the Italian military these models have been used world wide by police, paramedics, fire departments, aid agencies and many other authorities.

1978-82 V-35 AND V-50

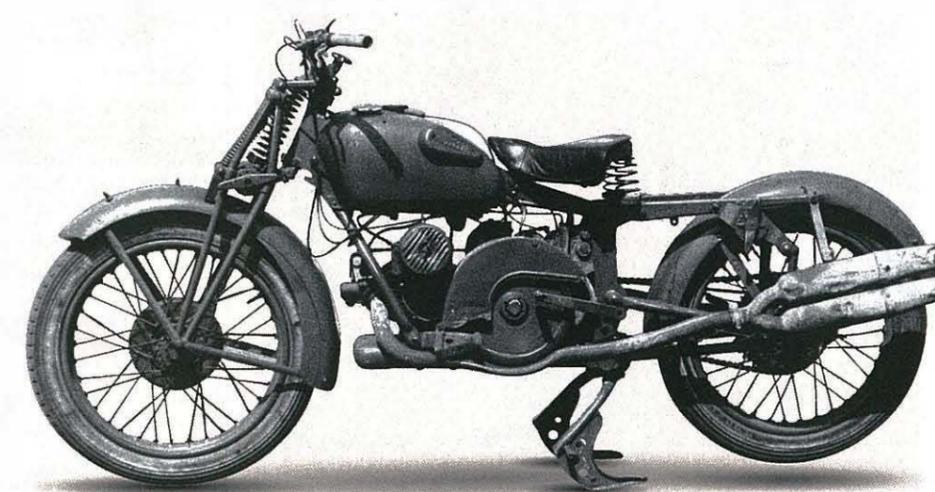
These smaller Moto Guzzi V-twins were used by Dutch military (V-50, 490cc) and Yugoslav military (V-35, 347cc). Adapted from standard roadsters, they were offered with a number of military trim options but saw little service with the Italian military. Were offered along with bigger V-twins to authorities across the world however the larger 850/1000cc models usually gained the orders.



Moto Guzzi powered 'armoured cars,' apparently completed with the consent of Mussolini for use by the Italian police.



A restored version of the Alce, pictured in the early Eighties.



A 1945 picture of the 'Alce,' with the outside flywheel clearly in evidence.

1971 MOTO GUZZI FALCONE NUOVO

Engine horizontal ohv single cylinder four-stroke
Capacity 499cc
Bore x stroke 88 x 82mm
Compression ratio 6.85:1
Carburettor Dell 'Orto VHB 29A
Ignition coil
Electrics 12V, 150wat/ dynamo, optional electric start
Lubrication wet sump (3litres)
Primary drive helical gear
Gears four

Final drive chain
Suspension front, telescopic fork; rear, swing arm with twin shock absorbers
Brakes front, 200mm (8in) t/s drum; rear, 200mm (8in) s/s drum
Tyres both, 3.50 x 18in (ex factory)
Wheelbase 58 1/2in
Seat height 32 1/2in
Weight 185-214kg (407-471lb) dependent on specification
Speed 80-85mph