

**BIKE
TEST**

**MOTO GUZZI
STEVLIO
1200 4V**



RANGE FINDER

Moto Guzzi expands into the dual-sports market
with a gorgeous yet serious bit of kit

■ TEST JUSTIN LAW ■ PHOTOGRAPHY TONY RABBITTE

Has BMW's R 1200 GS got a serious competitor at last? Moto Guzzi seems to think so, aiming its all-new four-valve Stelvio 1200 4V directly at the Bavarian benchmark in what is its second crack at that market.

More than a decade ago, the Quota 1000 had the AMCN crew reaching for the step-ladder – that enormous beastly with an 880mm seat height produced during Moto Guzzi's less than golden era. It failed to sell in any great number anywhere, no doubt due in large part to the fact it was a big ol' clunky thing that only really had a nice engine going for it. The market wasn't responding to that kind of bike either,

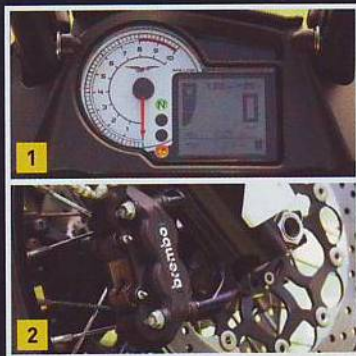
with only the Bimmer selling any decent volume – the category had pretty much been marginalised as being for old duffers wanting to get occasionally dusty.

Times have changed and dual-sport has hit its straps as one of the more popular classes, and with far-sighted Piaggio at the helm of Moto Guzzi, it made sense that the Quota should make a comeback. Only this time around it has been totally rethought.

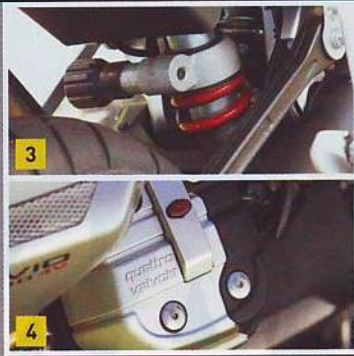
For starters, the Stelvio 1200 4V is gorgeous, as far as dual-sport bikes go, especially in white (it comes in black and red as well). This is a blinged-up, wonderfully crafted motorcycle to add to an increasingly impressive Guzzi range, and clearly aimed at providing a stylish alternative to BMW's

more austere R 1200 GS.

Straight away you notice the wire-spoked wheels with black rims and tall-profile tyres giving the running gear that old classic look. Then there's the curved headers that match the line of the tubular steel frame, then sweep up to meet at the brushed aluminium muffler. The iconic 90-degree transverse V-twin engine sports metallic silver/black heads, the colours divided to integrate with the colour scheme of the tank and seat. The 18-litre tank itself is a neatly styled unit enshrouded with an upper fairing that incorporates integrated indicators and a small glove compartment. Okay, so the tail-lights look like the eyes of a stoned Muppet and the headlights are a bit on the bulbous side, but this is an Italian bike, so they're



1. Simple and neat analogue tacho with a range of LCD functions accessed via a 'bar-mounted thumb switch
2. Quality stoppers with Brembo clamps and braided lines
3. Easy to access rear suspension with preload knob and damping adjustment
4. The finish exudes quality, from the neat badging to the two-tone heads that match the colour scheme



allowed to be a little, erm, voluptuous.

Look closer and you spot braided lines for brakes and clutch extending from Aprilia switchgear. Yep, it has that horrid indicator button that lacks positive feel, which few of us like, and the similarly actuated mode switch directly above it. I found myself cycling through the trip meter, average fuel consumption, trip timer, and average speed instead of indicating a right turn a few times at the start, although after an hour or two on the seat I got used to it.

Standard analogue tacho and easy-to-read LCD speedo are features of the neat instrument panel that sits behind the clear, adjustable screen (loosen the two knobs and slide it up and down). This you'll need to do once you've selected one of two seat heights, and Guzzi has thoughtfully made them much lower than the Stelvio's earlier predecessor (which did eventually have its seat height lowered) – 820mm and 840mm the options simply achieved by repositioning the seat on one of two sets of mounting points – and as the tank and front of the seat are quite narrow, most people will have little trouble mounting the Italian beauty. Or staying on it for lengthy periods – the thick padding is firm, but nicely formed and wide at the rear, ensuring a good two or three hours before the arse gives out.

What is it with Moto Guzzis and sidestands? I remember the 1100 Sport having its retractable stand mounted right at the front corner of the engine block so you'd need legs as long as mine to put it down or you'd have to get off the bike altogether. The Stelvio's sidestand tang is positioned right in front of the gear lever, and early in our relationship, I found myself accidentally kicking down the (thankfully not retractable) stand as I engaged first gear and shutting down the engine. Not much fun when you've filtered through to the front of the traffic and the lights go green.

But what would a Guzzi be without quirks? Satisfyingly, though, this is perhaps the worst of them, with others being an annoying buzz from the muffler array at 3000rpm, and a dodgy neutral sensor that flickered on and off. Normally this wouldn't be an issue, but as I was trying to discover the source of the annoying buzz with the bike on the sidestand, it would invariably cause the engine to cut out, thinking a gear had been engaged. This problem seemed to right itself after a few days' riding, and in hindsight I could have

instead just chucked it up on the centrestand that comes as standard.

Initially I was tooling around Sydney in warm weather and soon discovered those stylish headers radiate a considerable amount of heat onto the feet and shins. Not very comfortable, but not unbearable unless you have to do long commutes in stop-start traffic. Anyway, I was pretty keen to get out on the highway on the way to Robertson and then Kangaroo Valley. This would be where I'd discover if the Stelvio lived up to its name.

The moniker comes from the famous Stelvio Pass, a sinuous route of 84 hairpins that connects two Italian valleys. You'd need something that handles pretty damn well to get over it at any reasonable clip, and, as I discovered, Moto Guzzi has managed to achieve that with this bike.

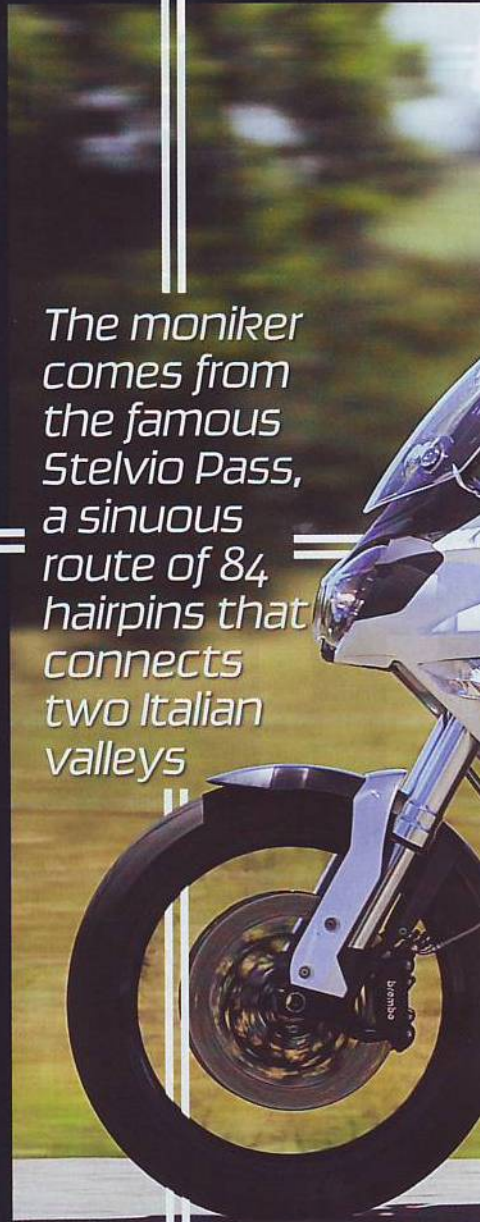
With most of the weight slung low through the beefy bottom end to the shaft drive and single-sided swingarm, along with the small (for this class of bike) tank, the centre of gravity is nicely positioned low in the frame. The wide and beautifully finished handlebars provide tons of leverage so the first array of decent bends were easy, smooth and had me wishing the bike had more punch through the midrange. More on that in a moment.

Compared with the Quota, the Stelvio has an 85mm shorter wheelbase (coupled with a 27-degree headstock angle for 125mm of trail), while the front wheel diameter has been reduced from 21 to 19 inches, as seems to be the norm with dual-sports these days – most manufacturers realising these bikes will spend a majority of their time on road. The rear stays at 17 inches with both wheels shod in Pirelli Scorpions, their tread pattern again suggesting road rather than dirt use.

Securing all this to the chassis are fully adjustable 50mm Marzocchi forks with flathead screwdriver clickers on top for rebound and compression. The shock has rebound adjustment and a large, easy-to-access knob for preload, which I had a crack at after bouncing around on rough-as-guts Liverpool Road. A few clicks and the suspension became nice and compliant, absorbing those bumps, and I didn't feel the need to fiddle with it again for the rest of my 1500 kays on the Stelvio.

I always marvelled at how well the BMW R 1150 GS handled corners (so much so, I bought

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GUZZI V-TWIN

Moto Guzzi is now defined by its 90-degree transverse V-twin engine, but its introduction wouldn't be until 46 years after the brand's first bike was launched. In the early to mid-60s, Moto Guzzi was in crisis, with changing demands in the marketplace and the company losing its inspirational



5. Neat tail-light array although rear-on it does look like a stoned Gonzo from the Muppets



6. No machine welds here – these bear the hallmarks of a handbuilt frame

7. Bead-blasted alloy with neat logo on the headstock. The 'bars are also adjustable by loosening this plate

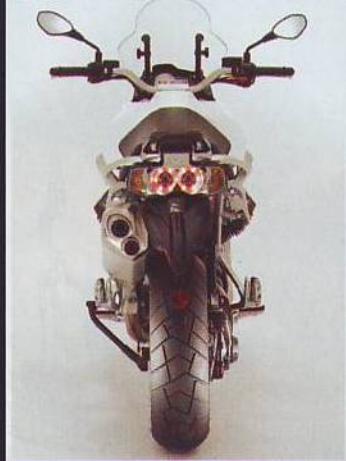


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8. Gotta love neat touches like right-angled tyre valves. Guzzi really has turned a corner



ENGINE

Engine Type Air-cooled, 8-valve OHV, 90° transverse V-twin

Bore x stroke 95mm x 81mm

Displacement 1151cc

Compression ratio 11:1

Ignition Electronic

Fuel system 50mm Magneti Marelli IAW5A

Starting system Electric

TRANSMISSION

Type Six-speed

Primary drive Gear

Clutch Single plate, wet

Final drive CARC shaft drive

CHASSIS AND RUNNING GEAR

Frame type Tubular steel

Head angle 27°

Trail 125mm

Wheelbase 1535mm

Suspension

Front: 50mm USD forks, fully adjustable

Rear: Monoshock, adjustable preload and rebound

Wheels Spoked aluminium alloy

Front: 2.5 x 17 **Rear:** 5.5 x 17

Tyres Pirelli Scorpion Sync

Front: 110/80R19 (59V) **Rear:** 180/55R17 (73V)

Brakes

Front: Twin 320mm floating discs, four piston radial-mounted calipers

Rear: 282mm disc, twin-piston caliper

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Weight 214kg (dry, claimed)

Seat height 840mm

Fuel capacity 18.0L

HOWSITGO?

Power 77 kW @ 7500rpm (claimed)

Torque Above 108Nm @ 6400rpm (claimed)

Fuel consumption 6.5L/100km (average)

Top speed 195km/h (claimed)

WHAT'SITCOST?

Testbike JSA Australia

Contact www.motoguzzi.com.au

(02) 9772 2666

Availability April 2009

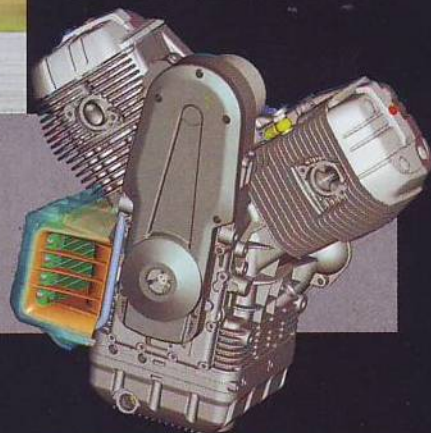
Price \$22,990+orc

Colours Guzzi Black, Lunar White, Red Corsa

founders in the years previous. After selling out to government-controlled holding company SEIMM, which set about launching smaller bikes onto the market, engineer Giulio Cesare Carcano, who had been with the company since the 30s, delivered the revolutionary V7 motorcycle with a 700cc 90-degree V-twin that marked a turnaround in the brand's fortunes.

The design was bent and stretched into smaller and

larger applications, evolving into such models as the 850GT, V50 Monza, Le Mans 850 and 1000, and California 1100 – the 1100 motor improving significantly in recent years. Then in 2007, the 1200 was launched – a fuel-injected V-twin that built on Battle of the Twins success in 1200S guise, and with eight valves, fitted into the punchy 82kW Griso. The Quattrovalvole (four-valve) 1200 is now the workhorse of the Guzzi range.





one), often embarrassing sportsbike jockeys with its competence and ease. The Telelever front end has much to do with that, keeping the bike balanced through the corner under braking, but there is another school of thought about the benefits of softer forks on these bikes. Some prefer the front to dive so that under braking, the steering angle steepens allowing the bike to tip in more sharply, and that's a characteristic the Stelvio provides.

Personally I prefer to carry corner speed, rather than be too heavy on the brakes, hence my preference for the GS, but the Stelvio is equally capable and only once did the front push – that on a downhill 25km/h hairpin for a number of possible reasons. Chances are I tried to ask too much of the 19 inch, although preload settings can also contribute to that – it truly is worth having any bike's suspension set up professionally.

As for the brakes, the Brembo four-piston calipers clamping twin 320mm discs up front are fine, with nice feel although with gentle bite, while the rear twin-piston caliper on the 282mm disc is the strongest rear brake I've experienced. This set-up gave me loads of confidence on the dirt – I wasn't so worried about losing the front and felt I could rely on the rear to keep me out of trouble. Those with more than my modest off-road ability will enjoy backing it in on the brake... oh, yes, the Stelvio is quite competent off-road.

Perhaps that goes without saying, given that it's essentially what it's designed for, but when you consider bikes such as the Ducati Multistrada are only happy to tip-toe across tricky dirt sections, you could be forgiven for thinking the Stelvio is equally sensitive. However, with BMW in its sights, Moto Guzzi has worked at giving this bike more off-road capability and cred.

It will be interesting to see how they stack up head-to-head (watch this space), especially given reports that the Guzzi lacks midrange punch when compared to the boxer. This brings us back to the power delivered by the

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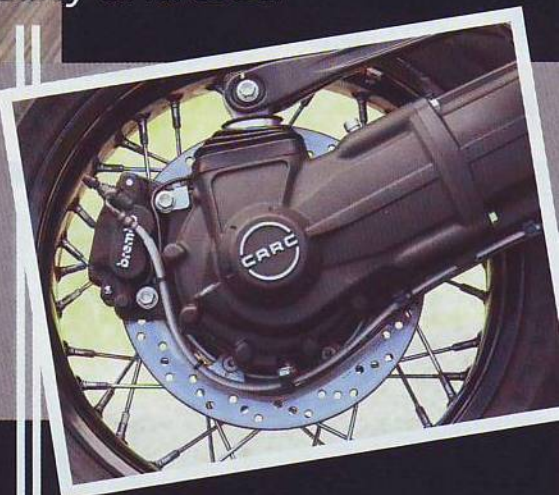
CARC SHAFT

Shaft drives have an inherent problem in the way they react with the rear suspension. Snap open the throttle and the rear wants to stick up in the air like a bitch on heat, which upsets the balance of the bike, particularly while accelerating out of corners.

Different manufacturers have solved this issue in various ways – BMW's Paralever, Kawasaki's Tetra-lever – but the main idea is to separate the shaft's torque reaction from the shock. Moto Guzzi first had a crack at it in '93 on the Daytona,

but developed an all-new system called the Cardano Reattivo Compatto (compact reactive shaft drive) abbreviated to Ca.R.C. This is also a tribute to Giulio Cesare Carcano, who developed the iconic 90-degree transverse V-twin.

Basically it's a shaft drive that 'floats' inside the alloy single-sided swingarm so there's no load on the drive aside from the torsional forces from the transmission to the hub. This eliminates the reaction on the suspension, while keeping drive smooth on and off the throttle.



Oh, yes, the Stelvio is quite competent off-road. Perhaps that goes without saying



1151cc 77kW Quattrovalvole air-cooled twin.

With just 1200 kays under the wheels, perhaps it was still a little tight – Guzzis are notorious for having a long bed-in period, although we believe Piaggio has brought in new tolerances to try to ease that. However, the Stelvio was downright gutless through the bottom to midrange, the pistons feeling as though they were slapping my palms through the solid-mounted 'bars as it chugged up from 2000rpm, then finally freeing up around 5500. From there, it's an all-too-brief, but spirited rush through to the 8000rpm redline, which I only flirted with after adding 800 kays.

It wasn't until the trip back to distributors, the John Sample Group, to give the thing back (with 2500km on the clock) that it felt it had finally loosened up. The 108Nm pushed the bike off the line much harder and acceleration through from around 3000rpm had improved markedly – I'd been swapping with Honda's returned Varadero, which has strong and syrupy power throughout the rev range, in comparison. Hopefully we'll get it back with some bigger numbers on the odometer for a proper comparo to see just how good that famous twin truly is.

The fuel-injected V-twin is also reasonable on the juice, averaging around 6.0L/100km in touring mode, which crept up to 7.0L/100km around town – not bad for a 250kg (wet) shafty. I measured this consumption myself, and found the onboard computer to read

0.1L/100km or so high, so you're actually doing better than what the bike tells you. However, you're only getting a safe range of about 270km from its 18L tank, which is adequate, but not what you'd hope for if you wanted to tackle the Australian Outback.

If you were to take on such a trip, the Stelvio comes with a load of luggage options. A set of panniers is available to fit onto the mounts integrated into the subframe, along with a tank bag, although oddly no topbox to fit onto the rack. Still, strapping stuff to the back is a cinch thanks to the design of the rack, which is like a U-shaped loop and has occie strap lugs underneath. The pannier mounts are excellent for straps as well, so even if you don't lash out on the extras, loading up is no drama – although with a bike this sexy, you'd want to dress it up nice. Other bits and pieces include heated grips, 110W lights, anti-theft unit and a navigation kit.

I was sad giving the Stelvio back, especially as the engine had just started to come good. Had it been around when I was handing over the readies for my secondhand GS, perhaps I would have hesitated – and then put the idea out of my head, as the circa \$22k price tag (the official figure hasn't been released) is much more than I could afford.

But when you consider a stock GS is \$21,140 and the Adventure \$25,470, you can see it's nicely positioned in that market to be a true, Italian-style alternative. ☘

GUZZI FIRSTS

CENTRESTAND – in 1921 the Normale is launched with this soon-to-be-copied-by-everyone innovation

SWINGARM – the 1928 Guzzi GT features the first ever swingarm and rear suspension

WIND TUNNEL TESTING – in 1950 Guzzis are the first full-sized motorcycles to be aerodynamically tested

SHAFT DRIVE – Moto Guzzi is credited with the first prototype of the shaftdrive, although it was BMW who went into production with it first

AUTOMATIC MOTORCYCLE – before Honda's 750 and 450 autos, the Moto Guzzi Convert launched in 1975 was the first non-scooter two-wheeled auto

