

# Fools and Guzzis



**John Purser**

For several years the old T3 Cali had lived in the loft space above my office desk. She was in bits now, stripped down with vague intentions of a rebuild, but the task never progressed due to the usual limitations of time and money. Back in the '90s I fondly remember following her around the West Country and occasionally France when she belonged to my lifelong biking pal, Andy, now business partner and sat at the desk to my right, slightly nearer the old Italian lady upstairs.

A year or so earlier we had taken the engine to Nigel at NBS who, in his own cheery manner had informed Andy that he could rebuild her if we crossed his palm with a not unreasonable amount of money, but enough to dampen any restoration thoughts. And so she retired to the loft to gather dust – frame, wheels, suspension, wiring scattered randomly around and the post examination engine and gearbox in a thousand pieces, seemingly never to be reunited. As the years had gone by, my own Guzzi ownership story had progressed at a steady rate and four fine examples of old and new Mandello craftsmanship now resided in my garage.

Having spent my formative years (10-18) living in Shaftesbury, Dorset, the V-Twin rally must have had a subliminal effect on an impressionable teenager. I remember gazing in disbelief at the Italian exotica that would arrive each summer, seemingly never to be seen anywhere else until the following year's rally came around again. Back then, the V7 Sport, the 750 S3, the Le Mans, the California, etc. all took on a mythical status in my mind, as I wandered amongst them, wondering how it would ever be possible to own one. The occasional rare beauty, a Brough perhaps, a Ducati SS900 or I even remember a Hesketh, would draw me

away for a moment, but the noise of a Guzzi firing up would always bring me back.

The years moved on. The keys to my first Cali were handed over in a north London dealership and I rode her back to Dorset with a permanent smile on my face. At last I could ride in the V-Twin procession and stand on Park Walk as an owner. The smile I wore from north London to Dorset was replaced by tears a few years later when the keys were passed on for a pile of Scottish banknotes. The sale was forced upon a newly trained RAF engineer who now needed a car to move his belongings around the country. Aircraft had replaced bikes, but I knew it would be a waiting game and I was prepared to wait.

Eventually Cali 2 arrived, a less than attractive 1980 model, but countless weekends and evenings slowly turned her into a beautiful fully restored example who eventually made the pilgrimage back to Mandello. She is with me still and now resides beside a 1976 Le Mans and a 1975 S3 along with my European workhorse Stelvio who replaced my beautiful but impractical Griso. And so my collection was complete. Or so I thought...

On the pin-board to the left of my desk I would occasionally put up a print of a Guzzi cafe racer I had come across on the web. The collection grew along with the formation of a few wistful ideas that involved the old Italian lady upstairs. My restoration 'to original' desire was, for the time being at least, under control but I found myself becoming engrossed in the cafe racer culture and the altruistic necessity to save Andy's old Cali from a fate worse than dust. And then one day it happened, my Eureka moment or perhaps looking back, my Ker-ching moment. A random email newsletter from

an insurance company contained an article on cafe racers. I read on; a few clicks further and I was looking at a photograph that epitomised all the best bits of the bikes on my pin-board.

This was a proper job, none of the homemade half-baked bolt on bits or the over enthusiastic amateur mistakes. This was a stripped down racer, single seat, minimalist Guzzi with seemingly no wiring loom or battery and a host of hand made features that looked fabulous. It was a Guzzi fresh out of an intensive training camp, simultaneously stripped down and beefed up, yet retaining traditional Guzzi good looks. I needed to know more. The designer, builder and racer turned out to be a German guy, Axel Budde from Hamburg. For his day job he is a 'precision driver' and photographer who gets the vehicle in the right place for the right shot. His company, [www.roll-it.org](http://www.roll-it.org), also make the clever photographic booms and paraphernalia required to house the camera equipment on the subject car.

His hobby is classic twin racing, for which he has made the stunning Guzzis I was now drooling over. An email to Hamburg was hastily composed, a reply received and a possibility emerged. I called Axel – he speaks perfect English and possesses a fine German sense of humour and told me all was possible. The usual two ingredients were required, money and time. One problem did strike me, the small detail of not actually owning the old lady. A few strong ales later and Andy had agreed to hand her over for a few more strong ales – at least that's what I told him later. A further call to Axel included the memorable statement from him that a 'custom built bike is a big step, think about it and if serious come and visit me.'

In no time at all we were knocking on the door of a Hamburg apartment and a smiling German chap appeared, dressed in a casual but immaculate rocker-billy style and sporting Guy Martin replica lamb chops. After coffee and cakes in his equally immaculate home, we were ushered into his garage to view two of his bikes – he termed them as his Street Bike and his Racer. Both were constructed from Le Mans 1000 donors (or substance, as Axel would say). Both were full of his hand built details and exquisite lines, and we spent the next couple of hours discussing all aspects of the bikes. By now my mind was made up, I was having one, so Axel pulled out his clipboard and we started to specify every single component from front to rear.

My objective was to combine the style of the racer with the road legality of the street bike, and Axel went about his business of assisting with the 'technic' and the 'optic' of our proposed build. Every detail was discussed, from bar and lever type, fuel cap, instrumentation, switch position, even frame paint texture. Five hours after knocking on his door, a custom built cafe racer from an old T3 Cali substance had been commissioned. I had entered the ga-



rage with my own pre-conceived ideas of build and style but had been gently shown the correct way to go about the build by the German perfectionist – every detail was given form and function, the technic complimenting the optic.

On our return to Blighty, the Cali engine was sent back to Nigel at NBS with the brief to 'Le Mans' her up and get her looking new. Nigel accepted the challenge in his usual calm and assured way and in no time at all I was in receipt of a shiny re-con engine with replacement pistons and barrels, new clutch, 36mm carbs and a 'good as new' assurance. The Borrani rims were sent off to Central Wheels but deemed not good enough for polishing, so new rims and spokes were added to existing hubs. Axel had told me what he needed from the Cali and all relevant parts were boxed up and made ready for despatch to Hamburg. I use Bike Movers UK to ferry my Stelvio to far away places – we like to fly out to our bikes and ride back – so they were entrusted with the special delivery to Axel's garage. All arrived on time and a confirmation email was sent from Hamburg.

Axel immediately let me know that the engine, gearbox and bevel drive units that I believed to be clean and ready to rebuild were in no way suitable for the bike he was about to create. They required further cleaning and bead-blasting so I gave him the nod to get them done. He got to work straight away on the frame and reduced the Tonti masterpiece by a further 2.5kg – a photo was sent with the amputated parts on a set of scales. Now all





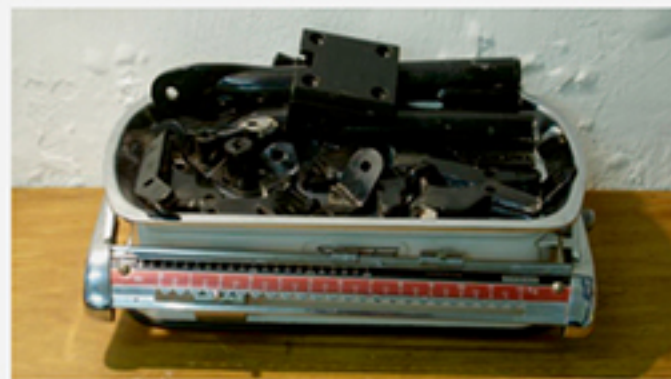


was ready for the frame to be cleaned, modified to suit and sprayed. I chose a tomato red from the specialist DuPont range of petrol/oil/acid resistant paint and Axel insisted on a silver grey for the lower frame rails and swing arm. "It will improve the frame optic against the engine" I was confidently assured.

My original thoughts of a red and white tank in S3 style had been rejected as too 'busy' in favour of his unique brushed metal tank with polished knee panel finish, but I held firm with my red frame against his suggested black. Axel has a tendency to be right about most



John (left) and Axel (in Ace teeshirt)



Surplus to requirements

things Guzzi but I am very pleased with my Telaio Rosso style end result. And so the build progressed. Regular photographs kept me up to date with developments. The engine returned from bead-blasting looking like a brand new unit. The red and silver frame looked great, and the two were re-united in spectacular fashion.

Three fuel tanks were required from two suppliers before the perfect fit was achieved. The front forks I supplied were not good enough so he sourced LM3 units. The hand-built seat unit was sent away to be covered in just the right grade of leather. My Motogadget speedo/rev counter was fitted with high quality hand crafted aluminium housings. Axel sourced the bespoke exhaust system via his 'tuning guru'. We agreed on a polished finish taking the view that a brushed steel or black enamel look could be chosen later if a change of image was ever desired. Rear-sets and brake/gear levers were hand built and a retro headlamp and tail light sourced. Axel designed a neat assembly to house the rear light and number plate and piece by piece, photo by photo, the dream Guzzi Café Racer came to be.

My first view of the completed project came in suitably spectacular surroundings. Sitting on a balcony overlooking The Grand Harbour in Valletta on holiday, beer in hand, I checked my phone for emails. One from Axel was waiting. There she was, in completion, the old T3 California transformed into a 180kg Le Mans spec engined, mean and lean Guzzi café racer. I was in shock. The bike looked immaculate, every detail considered and applied with Teutonic precision and perfectionism. Axel's final master stroke was to design a logo using my initials in a unique, retro badge that included the old Guzzi style wording in frame matching red.

Axel then produced a series of superb studio shots making the JP Guzzi look far better than I could have ever imagined. She was perfect – everything I had envisaged and more – with a little guidance from a German guy who knew his stuff. All that needed to be done was to get her home. But first I needed to visit Axel one more time to shake the hand of the man that had created my perfect Guzzi Café Racer ...

The Hamburg apartment felt familiar on this second visit along with Axel's ritual of providing his guests with hand ground coffee and cakes. We chatted about the bike, the build difficulties encountered and decisions made to overcome them. Eventually the anticipation



became too much and Axel led us to his garage for the unveiling. In typical style, he suggested I wait outside and view the bike in an open, uncluttered area in order to appreciate her proportions. As usual, he was correct; the first sight was both incredible and contradictory. She looked small and agile as well as large and stable. The newness of everything was somehow counter-balanced by the built in patina of components. Truly a beautiful machine regardless of personal taste. Andy summed her up by stating that he could think of no addition that could improve her – Axel had fulfilled his brief and

Axel Budde – Precision Rider

made less a whole lot more.

The whole process of idea, design and commission had been an incredible journey. Alex's bespoke service provides more than just a bike; the project becomes a very personal collaboration between client and engineer, indeed it becomes a lifetime experience that I cannot recommend highly enough. Axel and my bike can be seen at <http://www.kaffee-maschine.net>. As I sat astride her for the first time, engine idling in true Guzzi fashion, I considered what remained of Andy's old T3 California that I fondly remembered from 20 plus years ago. I was reminded of the classic Fools and Horses sketch – she was just like Trigger's broom – 14 new heads and 17 new handles – but still the original bike!



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