

Twistgrip

Cruising on heritage

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Cruisers are all about eye-grabbing style. Take Moto Guzzi's California Vintage for instance. To celebrate the company's 85th anniversary last year, it fashioned a big twin that flaunts an Italian flair for style.



The retro bagger proudly boasts such classic features as standard black and white livery, spoked rims, retro taillight, spotlights, hard saddlebags and a chrome luggage rack.

Behind a large windshield you'll find a simple and clean dash that incorporates a chromed analogue speedometer and tach. The speedo also encloses a mechanical odometer and tripmeter.

The Vintage derives its look from its heritage. Guzzi's California has been a staple in the brand's lineup since the early 1970s. It was based on the frame of the V7 Special and signature 90-degree V-Twin.

Originally adopted by the Los Angeles Police Department, it was gradually employed by police forces across the U.S.

The Cali Vintage is not just about fashion, but fit and function too.

Guzzi describes the seat as being comfy as an armchair, which I found to be the case. The riding position encourages long stints in the saddle. As for the gently stepped saddle, it sits low to keep your feet flat on the ground. That makes it easy to balance the bike's 263-kg dry weight when stopped.

There's room to spare around the generously spaced handlebars, even for lanky types, when cornering. Unlike Guzzi's Norge, the distance from my legs to the cylinders was much more accommodating. Just in case, a hefty rubber flap is situated to prevent your shins from hard contact with the twin-valve cylinder heads in a sudden stop.

Floating floorboards of ample size cushion the rider's feet from vibration. But the heel-and-toe shifter may pose a problem for those who've never been fond of them. I tried upshifting the usual way (with my toe) and there was not enough room under the shifter to comfortably fit my boot.

The heel-and-toe shifter works well otherwise, responding with a reassuring mechanical clank when swapping gear ratios. The five-speed gearbox is smooth, although it was sometimes tricky to find neutral. It's connected to a shaft final drive that doesn't exhibit any irritating clunkiness.

Depending on your inseam, you may find the side-mount kickstand a bit of a challenge. While it provides sufficient stability for the bike at rest, it was a stretch to toe the stand back into position despite my long reach.

The air-cooled, four-stroke 1064-cc V-Twin is based on Guzzi's Brevia 1100. The engine has gone through significant improvements that have reduced overall weight and improved efficiency.

There's plenty of mid-range torque available with a twist of the wrist. A phased sequential fuel injection system from Magneti Marelli helps deliver the goods.

When you really roll on the power, the mill responds with a strong pull and a bag of hammers clatter that tells those around you this cruiser is all business.

Dual megaphone-type exhaust pipes contain three-way catalytic converters to meet strict Euro III emission regulations. They hit just the right note, throaty but not too loud.

Typical of Guzzis, the Cali Vintage is outfitted with a linked braking system. The big twin is effectively stopped up front by Brembo ORO series four-piston calipers that clamp two 320-mm stainless-steel discs. Out back, a single 282-mm disc is squeezed by a Brembo twin-piston caliper.

The hydraulic suspension could stand some improvement. Rebound was a little on the stiff side, although the suspension ably supported the weight of rider and passenger. Overall, the Vintage handled well for a cruiser of its size and weight.

Guzzi's Cali Vintage is pure nostalgia, but with modern features and solid performance that's sure to capture your imagination.

Fact File

2007 Moto Guzzi California Vintage

As tested: \$18,995

Engine: 1064-cc, air-cooled, four-stroke 90° V-Twin,

Fuel system: Magneti Marelli sequential fuel injection

Transmission: 5-speed, shaft final drive

Horsepower: 72 hp @6,400 rpm

Torque: 69 lb.-ft. @5,000 rpm

Options: mini trunk, tank bag

Brake Front: dual 320-mm discs/Brembo four-piston caliper

Brake Rear: single 282-mm disc/Brembo twin-piston caliper

Seat height: 780 mm (30.7 in.)

Fuel capacity: 19 litres (5.0 gal.)

Dry weight: 263 kg (580 lbs.)

Basic warranty: 2-year/unlimited km

Competitors: Victory Kingpin Tour, H-D Heritage Softail Classic

Strengths: Style, character

Weaknesses: Suspension

National Moto Calendar

July 7-8 – Canadian Mini RoadRacing Championship Series, Calgary AB www.amra.ca

July 12-15 – Parts Canada Superbike Championship, Mosport ON

www.cdnsuperbike.com

July 12-15 – Pro Honda Women’s Cup Challenge, Mosport ON www.womenscup.ca

July 27-29 — Sou’Wester International Bike Rally, Yarmouth NS
www.souwestbikers.com