

Classic & **MOTORCYCLE MECHANICS**

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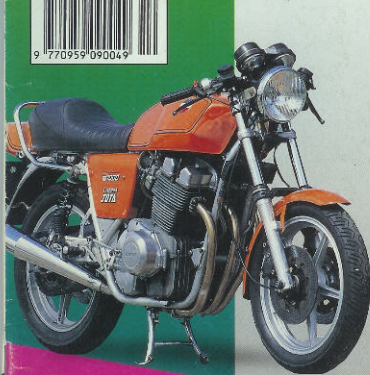
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# Disby Italians



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SHOW GUIDE INSIDE

Classic & **MOTORCYCLE MECHANICS**  
**SHOW 1995**  
Stafford County Showground,  
October 14-15

**A GOLDEN ERA**



The Classic & M...

## Suzuki's GT380

**FETTLING THIS MONTH:**  
BSA A65, Honda CJ250,  
Kawasaki GPz900R,  
Yamaha RD250LC, RD400E  
and Roberts flat-tracker.



Those six cylinders make the Jota instantly recognizable, though the Jota still one of the best-looking bikes around.

## LAVERDA JOTA

by John Nutting. Pictures by  
Phil Masters

**T**WENTY years ago the Japanese motorcycle manufacturers were reeling from the oil crisis. After their headlong rush into superbike launches over the previous five years with machines offering blistering performance (for 750cc and 900cc machines anyway) they suddenly felt they had to look responsible.

Engines were detuned as the factories responded to the perceived need for fuel saving. Performance flagged. Superbikes went soft.

But one small Italian factory carried the torch for performance and continued to produce hairy-arsed monsters — Laverda.

Led by the brothers Massimo and Pietro, whose main business was the manufacturing of combine harvesters in the town of Breganze, near Verona, Laverda developed a three-cylinder 981cc sports bike the like of which has never been equalled for its combination of looks, speed and, best of all, sound. It sent a two-fingered sign to the ecologists.

Laverda's first big bike was a 650cc twin introduced in the mid-Sixties that looked like scaled-up Honda CB72. The more stylish 744cc (80x74mm) 750SF followed and put Laverda on the map as the producer of machines with pedigree.

Next step was the 1000 triple, but the prototype which appeared at the 1969 Milan Show was little more than the overhead

camshaft twin with smaller 75mm bores and a third cylinder.

Unsatisfactory in many ways, it was replaced with a completely new double overhead camshaft design which was raced to a second place in the 1971 Bol d'Or 24-hour race at Le Mans.

For the new model the designer's master stroke was to ignore the normal three-cylinder practice of pitching the pistons at 120 degrees, thereby providing even firing intervals.

Instead, the cranks were set at 180 degrees, with the two outer pistons at top dead centre when the middle one was at bottom of the stroke. Although the 981cc engine produced some vibration it was nothing like the penetrating buzz of a Trident. But best of all, it had a distinctive barking exhaust note that's never been equalled.

Off-beat, it also had a top-end crackle quarantined to make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up.

When it first reached the UK market in September 1973, the 1000 (dubbed the 3C) came with massive, double-leading shoe brakes, alloy rims and rakish looks. Detailing was impressive with items like the same Nippon Denso instruments used by Honda for its CB750 four; a massive eight inch headlamp; and adjustable handlebars and footpegs.

In sharp contrast to Japanese bikes, engine castings were ruggedly stylish. The bike looked unburstable.

Unlike its relatively wobbly Japanese counterparts, the 1000 offered good handling in the sense that it was stable, with taut steering and stiff suspension. Like the 750cc Ducati vee-twins, the 1000 offered thrilling cornering speeds on good tyres, and all in a shorter 58.5 inch wheelbase. It was much faster too, with a top speed of 130mph.

The first 1000 I tested was one of these in April 1974. Fellow *Motor Cycle* staff man Stewart Boroughs and myself put PPU 40M through its paces at the MIRA test track near Nuneaton to clock a best one-way speed of 131.5mph and a mean of 128.5mph. Quarter-mile time was 13.05 seconds at 105.5mph.

In the UK, the importers were the Slater Brothers, Roger and Richard, who quickly

Classic  
**RIDE**

**BENELLI 750-6 &  
LAVERDA JOTA**



# A TASTE OF OLD ITALY

*We ride two thoroughbreds of the Seventies. The Benelli 750-6 is a rare beast indeed today, but the hunky Laverda Jota can still be spotted on the roads today.*



# A TASTE OF OLD ITALY

and successfully exploited the 1000's talents in production-bike racing during 1974 and 1975. But with a view to boosting sales, they wanted the 1000 to be acclaimed as the fastest road machine on the market.

They'd already built up a good relationship with the Laverda brothers and, taking advantage of more lax regulations, produced a number of specially tuned models for the British market with special camshafts and a less-restrictive exhaust system.

The camshafts had longer dwell, the exhaust collector box under the gearbox had a bigger bore and the pistons provided a 10:1 compression ratio. Disc brakes were now standard.

I ran one of these more potent 3CE machines, HVJ 93N, through the MIRA test strip at a two-way average of 133.3mph in July 1975, and with a best one-way speed of 139.8mph it achieved the Slater brothers' objective: the fastest-ever motorcycle tested by *Motor Cycle*. It was also the quickest ever through the quarter mile at 12.7 seconds at a terminal speed of 108mph.

This didn't satisfy Roger Slater however. The increasingly important Avon-backed production race series in the UK demanded even more performance for success. So the Jota was born.

Produced at the factory, the new machine for 1976 was restyled with five-spoke alloy wheels, triple Brembo disc brakes and a hinged seat. Engine tune was the same as the 3CE with a bit of extra work which brought the peak power up to 90bhp at 7600rpm.

Keen that the Jota was going to be faster than the 3CE, Roger Slater wanted to ensure that the gearing was correct when I tested MFO 307F at MIRA in the August of that blisteringly hot summer of 1976.

He brought with him to MIRA a number of sprockets, and passing as *Motor Cycle*'s temporary mechanic for the day, set to work after each top-speed run to optimise the gearing.

We started with a 38-tooth rear but that was too high and the engine wasn't peaking the mean speed of 135mph. So Roger fitted a 40-tooth rear sprocket to lower the gearing.

The upshot was a two-way mean of 137.8mph and, with the engine buzzing



## Classic RIDE

### BENELLI 750-6 & LAVERDA JOTA

almost on the 8000rpm mark (500 short of the safe limit of 8500, and 900 up on the standard 3CE's peak), a best one-way speed of 140.04mph. The first time 140mph had been officially passed by a production road bike in the world.

Fans of modern bikes might scoff at this. After all, most 600cc sports machines will surpass it easily. But this pinnacle of speed was achieved on an unfaired bike weighing

522 pounds tanked up.

The test session wasn't all plain sailing though. Because the bike was the machine to be raced by Peter Davies, the gearbox ratios had been closed up by fitting an alternative layshaft return gear. This produced a very high bottom gear ratio of 9.5 to 1 giving 64mph but a slightly lower top gear.

Attempts at brisk quarter-mile times were thwarted by the grippiness of the Dunlop Endurance rear tyre and even careful clutch slipping cooked three sets of plates, which Slater was more than happy to replace.

Despite the problems of getting off the line smartly, which limited elapsed times to 13 seconds, the terminal speeds were still more than 110mph. Not bad for a retail price of 2195 Guineas.

General design problems in the early days of the triples included unreliable Bosch electronic ignition (which was mounted in the

- Factory repaired important Laverda valves and assemblies.
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- Fully fitted prepared used models for sale.
- Specialist services include:
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Saturday: 10.00am to 4.00pm





Above: The two outside pistons fire simultaneously.

Left: John Nutting at Brooklands on reader Steve Gibbs' 1962 Jota.

Below: The Jota stands tall but is still comfortable.

## LAVERDA International Owners Club

### JOIN US AND ENJOY A WHOLE NEW EXPERIENCE

The International Laverda Owners Club (ILOC) was founded in 1974, and numbers now exceed 1000. Full membership is open to all Laverda owners - enthusiastic non-owners are welcome to join as Associates, while wives and girlfriends may join as Joint members.

Club objectives are to promote interest in Laverda motorcycles, organise meetings and social events, encourage members' knowledge and enjoyment of Laverdas.

#### Benefits of membership are:

- Monthly magazine 'La Vera Vista'
- Continental race meetings and rallies
- Race track events
- Factory visits
- Laverda club recalls
- Regional monthly meetings
- Weekend events
- Technical advice
- Emergency contacts
- IOMT and IAG affiliation

Regional meetings are held at venues around the country. These provide an opportunity to meet club members and hear about future activities.

Prospective members are always welcome to attend and find out more about the ILOC.

'La Vera Vista' is a professionally produced club magazine. It fulfils the essential role of keeping members informed. It is also intended to be an entertaining and interesting read. Details of forthcoming events, reports on recent activities, new meeting venues, members' news and comments are just a few examples of content.

Membership runs from January to December and is renewable each January. If you order after July 1st a 50% reduction is made. The joining fee provides two quality ILOC decals. Annual subscription is £7.61 and Associate membership, £20. Laverda membership reducing to 50% and £10 respectively after July 1st in all cases a £2 joining fee is payable.

For enquiries & membership details, please contact:

SECRETARY: Alan Cuddey, 28 Claypath Road, Hutton-Le-Hole, Houghton-Le-Spring, Tyne and Wear, DA9 0EL  
MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY: David Fickling, Vale Cottage, Green Court, Mostyead, Kings Stanley, Glos.



# ITALIA Classics

LAVERDA DUCATI MOTO GUZZI CAGIVA

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750SS in stock	£8750 otr
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600 Monster in stock	£5450 otr
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#### CAGIVA

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# A TASTE OF OLD ITALY

same right-side cover as the 140-watt generator) and a handling deficiency resulting from the use of Certal forks which was sorted out by the use of Marzocchis in 1978.

STEVE Gibbs, a 25 year-old who runs a bathroom supplies shop in Hastings, bought his low-mileage 1982 Jota through a small ad for £3000 in early 1994.

"We had an art teacher at school in Rye who had one," Steve told me when we met at Goodwood's former grand prix track. "The sound was great. Everyone said don't bother, but I had to have one."

It had followed a motley series of machines: a YPVS 350cc Yamaha, an ex-army BSA B40 and Slingshot GSX-R750 Suzuki. Says Matt Moore, Steve's colleague at Goodwood who rebuilds classic cars, "It was a real love hate relationship."

The bike was running fine when Steve brought it back from its previous owner in Leicester. But he soon wanted to take it on a Laverda day in Sheffield, so had it serviced by a London dealer.

"After that it was rough, it was terrible," said Steve. "It was so temperamental I didn't take it back." It was then that he took it along



Brembo brakes were the best on the market.

to Richard Slater at his shop near Bromyard in Herefordshire, who suggested running the bike on nine-grade plugs rather than eight-grade, which would run less hot.

"It's okay now but you have to be careful warming it up. It needs a five mile run before it will clear out."

Steve finds that he can't be as carefree on the Jota as he was on the Slingshot Suzuki, which you could just stuff into corners. The Jota's good to ride, but you have to ride it half sensible.

In the modest 500 miles that Steve has ridden the bike, he's had Pirelli Match radials fitted in the stock 100/90V18 and 120/90V18 sizes. He runs it on Penzoll multigrade which he will be changing at every 1500 miles. It takes three litres; more than a Cortina! he says.

He was right about the bike needing careful warming up. Fortunately the massive 32 amp-hour battery spins the engine over easily, because the cold plugs wet readily and take ages to catch. Steve knows when to abandon the process and switch to the hotter eight plugs when the bike fires up immediately and emits the staccato crackle that is bound to attract anyone within half a mile.

Slater motors are one of the few items that are difficult to obtain for Jotas, says Steve, who has had to pay £150 to have his re-wound. Original Jota silencers, which have a larger outlet diameter, are also rare.

Steve's bike has a pattern replacement on the right which includes a stiffening plate at the front where it joins the collector box and a visible weld where the taper finishes.

Those used to modern machines will be surprised at how tall the Jota is. A 32.5-inch seat height means that most riders will be on tiptoes at a standstill, and the later models such as Steve's even more so.

But because there's plenty of room between the seat and the rear-set pegs, and the seat is fairly narrow, the Jota is comfortable. You don't have to be a contortionist to get into it as on many race replicas, neither



## What John Nutting said in 1976

From Motor Cycle Weekly, August 21st, 1976

PETER beamed as he came into the office. "You should've seen the cop's face when he stopped me. Said I'd been doing 106 for over ten and a half miles along the motorway... What a fantastic bike!"

Laverda's 981cc three cylinder Jota is fantastic indeed, a machine virtually hand built by dedicated enthusiasts to satisfy a single function - performance.

Almost uncanny is the ease with which the Jota can warp time and space. But I can almost hear the critical comments from here. Surely, a motor cycle which can go twice as fast as the legal limit is as pointless as using an axe for chopping matchsticks?

Strictly speaking, yes, but the Jota is built for more than road use. Laverda and British importer Roger Slater wanted a machine standard which was almost unobtainable in straight production racing.

What is amazing about the Jota is that this sort of 'go' is achieved without sacrificing the manners expected of a normal roadster. The engine runs happily on four star fuel despite the 10:1 compression ratio and, being so big, has adequate torque for quick getaways.

To many riders, such performance might make the list price of £2300, currently the highest in Britain, very reasonable, but Laverda make it more so by not losing sight of the need for a quality of finish and detail that puts all the other Italian bikes to shame.

do you need to wrap yourself around the bulk of the frame. The Jota is slim if gangly.

On Goodwood's open sweepers, I found it a shock to find the bike a handful and in constant wonder at how people got away with racing on such relatively skinny tyres. "You feel as if you're miles away from the tarmac (which in fact you are) and it never fails to amaze me that really hot riders were able to touch down the generator cover, even when the ignition was moved over to the left side.

Steve's bike had been fitted with rear-set footrests but the right-side gearchange had been retained.

The rather agricultural five-speed gearbox needed a firm toe when changing up to prevent it slipping out of gear.

This may have had something to do with the crankcases being parted for some checks at Slater's the previous week and Steve had been forced to adjust the lever throw. It probably needed

another slight tweak on the eccentric that controls the lever's position.

This particular Jota didn't quite have the same cheek feel as the earlier models, no doubt because the suspension travel is longer. A brace had been fitted above the short mudguard but the fork would still flutter under acceleration as I crested a rise.

Raw though Steve's Jota is compared to bikes of today, it is nevertheless more refined compared to the original machines which go to meet their owners' expectations for having *wrestlers' wrists*.

That, and the superb style of the machine, makes the Jota for all time as the ultimate classic Italian sports bike.

