

THE GOOD

THE BAD

AND UGLY

2018 HARLEY-DAVIDSON FAT BOB

By Gary 'Koz' Mraz
Photos by Brian J. Nelson

The Dyna is discontinued, the V-Rod dissolved, while the new Softails are completely revamped. I am sure you've read all the scuttlebutt on blogs regarding the new Harley-Davidson 2018 line-up. Good, bad or indifferent, everybody's got an opinion, but not everyone has ridden these new Softails - not yet anyway. Quick Throttle featured a new product overview last month, so I will pick the bike that's probably the "Belle-of-the-Ball." First, I'll review the Fat Bob. Between its function and form, the Fat Bob is the motorcycle you'll be hearing a lot about. A radical departure from H-D's "Classic Design," the Fat Bob has been called everything from Steam Punk to a Mad Max Zombie Apocalypse motorcycle. Whatever you may think, what it looks like completely disappears once you ride this motorcycle. Knocking through the Angeles

Crest twisties at a spirited pace told the new Softail's story pretty clearly. As the bevy of journalists left to our own devices, the herd began to disappear far behind me as the real test riding began.

THE GOOD:

The all-new Softail models are the result of the most extensive research and development program in the company's history. The new bikes feature a stiffer and significantly lighter frame built to harness the massive torque of the new dual-counterbalanced Milwaukee-Eight 107 and 114 engines. With a high-performance dual-bending valve front suspension and an easily adjustable hidden rear mono-shock, stability and handling has been increased exponentially. Some models are up to 35 pounds lighter (33lbs for the Fat Bob), delivering an improved power-to-weight ratio that provides quicker acceleration, better braking and enhanced dynamic cornering capability



combined with increased lean angles. 2018 Softail models are faster, lighter and better handling than any of their Big Twin cruiser predecessors.

THE BAD:

All that's good about the new Harley Softails brought out all that's bad in me. After spending two full days

riding all the new Softails on the Angeles Crest Highway, it became immediately apparent that the new line is designed to inspire a bloodline of young, aggressive riders who love power and performance, and I am very proud of my performance award.



RECEIVING MY PERFORMANCE AWARD

A new high-stiffness carbon steel tubular frame forms the core of the 2018 Softail chassis. The completely redesigned frame and swingarm significantly increase the rigidity of the new chassis. The frame itself is 65 percent stiffer than the 2017 Softail frame, which leads to a 34 percent increase in overall chassis stiffness. The frame design achieves reduced complexity with a 50 percent reduction in component parts and a 22 percent reduction in welds. The chassis is 20 percent (18 pounds) lighter than the 2017 Softail frame. This ain't your Daddy's Harley. The Fat Bob rides like no other. I have always liked the fat 150 front tire and combined with the 180 rear tire, the Fat Bob devours the road confidently. Within minutes, I remembered why I began riding motorcycles in the first place.

75% front to rear tire, then leaning the bike over for first contact. Between the new suspension, exhaust pipe placement and riding position the Fat Bob is anything but fat in the corners. Secondly, the 28 degree inverted suspension of the front forks tucks in the tire just enough to add extra agility and flickability while cornering. Combined with the drag bars, there's just no stopping this beast. I can attest to that.

HIGH-PERFORMANCE SUSPENSION

All-new front and rear suspension components are calibrated to match the dynamics of the new chassis, wheels and tires to enhance the comfort, control and per-

Let's talk Fat Bob tech. You can toss lean angle degrees out the window on this bike. Published lean angles are a SAE standards derived by compressing a motorcycle suspension

formance of the 2018 Softail® motorcycles. The new high-performance dual-bending valve front suspension, which was first introduced on 2017 Touring models, delivers damping performance that is similar to a cartridge fork but with improved, more responsive damping characteristics. The suspension is optimized for both comfortable cruising and spirited riding with 130 mm of bump-devouring travel. Re-tuned and optimized rake-and-trail also enhance the motorcycles' handling performance.

Behind all the tire shredding power of the new Milwaukee-Eight 107/114 ci engines is muscular stopping-power of dual disc 4-piston fixed front brakes and 2-piston floating rear brakes.



The new mono-shock rear suspension preserves the classic hard tail look, while the revamped geometry improves ride quality, traction and control. The new easily adjustable mono-shock enables a 240 pound range of payload capacity for increased passenger comfort and enhanced dynamic handling compared to 2017 Softail models.

From the aluminum risers, fat tapered drag bar to the technical markings in the handlebar window, the attention to detail on the Fat Bob truly looks custom. Even the paint is a first for the Motor Company. It's the very first tank paint scheme that's not identically mirrored. The tanks left side sports a bold racing stripe and the Harley-Davidson name, while the right ride has a blank Bar-and-Shield...another first. In fact, branding is very discreet on the Fat Bob, such as passenger pegs embossed with the Bar-and-Shield visible only in the UP position. All the new bikes feature a keyless ignition and a USB port built into the frame steering head neck.





DUAL FRONT DISC BRAKES

2-1-2 PERFORMANCE EXHAUST

A DEEP DISH SEAT IS COMFORTABLE AND KEEPS YOU SNUG WHILE HOLDING TIGHT THE DRAG BARS.

Harley-Davidson has a ten-year goal of attracting two million new riders to the fold, and I believe they will hit the mark. There is a motorcycle in the Softail line for everyone. I had the honor of riding with Karen Mayberry, Consumer Experience and Public Relations Lead of Canada. We switched bikes throughout the day. With her 5'6", 120lb frame, I could see that these bikes are not only more manageable via reduced weight, but the center of gravity and seat height allowed her to easily flow through tight corners at high speed, handle slow speed maneuvers and offered firm footing at stops.

THE UGLY:

If "ugly is as ugly does," then this is a beautiful motorcycle. If you want to bitch about the great handling of the long-lost Dyna's, get on a Fat Bob. Guess what? You get all the modern technology married to raw muscle and downright remarkable handling. Personally, I forecast that this will be one of Harley-Davidson's best-selling bikes ever. Either you're a rider looking for the ultimate in power/performance from The Motor Company, or you're happy with wrenchin' whatcha got. There's no shame in that. Riding a Harley-Davidson is a powerful, totally American experience. Whether it's a vintage Road King or the brand new Fat Bob, life is a road, the soul is a motorcycle.



STREET BOB

A beautiful marriage of modern technology merged with the HD soul of classic design. A modern Bobber that's simply a joy to ride.

SOFTAIL SLIM

Again, a beautiful marriage of modern technology merged with the H-D soul of classic design.

POST SCRIPT:

Each new Softail spins its own story, and I rode them all for days and will pontificate in future issues, but for now...the elevator pitches:

HERITAGE CLASSIC AND DELUXE

The unbelievably smooth ride of these bikes was astounding. I sought out potholes and ditches to verify my findings. These are long distance cruisers with 5 gallon tanks. Knowing that all the Softails have virtually the same rear suspension I must surmise, it's ALL in the adjustments.

BREAKOUT

I forgot this motorcycle had fat 240 rear tire and the big 21inch front

wheel and took this bike to the mat in the twisties. I love, love, love the long lean chopper stance. The Breakout looks good on me. I did not like the kickstand though and was told there were some adjustments in the works.

LOW RIDER

Way too cramped for me with the midish controls. Named the "Low Rider" for a reason.

FAT BOY

Fat Boy is what should be a rear tire, on the front and a huge 240mm tire on the rear. A Bad-ass solid brushed aluminum rims and nacelle all on a fire breathing 114ci from hell. Grab your leathers, shotgun and shades and get the %#! outta my way!

2018 Harley-Davidson Fat Bob 114	
Engine:	New Milwaukee-Eight 114
Displacement:	114 cu. in./1868cc
Transmission:	6-Speed Cruise Drive
Torque:	119 lb.-ft. @ 3000 RPM
Fuel Economy:	47 mpg
Overall Length:	92.1 in.
Overall Width:	37.8 in.
Seat Height:	27.7 in.
Ground Clearance:	4.7 in.
Lean Angle (left/right):	31/32 deg.
Wheelbase:	63.6 in.
Wheel Size Front:	16 in.
Wheel Size Rear:	16 in.
Fuel Capacity:	3.5 gal.
Running Weight:	676 lb.
GVWR:	1160 lb.

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