

Twistgrip

Bobbing along

By: Adrian Blake

With all the chopping and bobbing going on in the custom bike building industry, it was only a matter of time before the Motor Company came up with a minimalist design of its own and released the FXDBI Street Bob to industry fanfare late last year.



The Street Bob gets its name from the style of motorcycle that became popular among servicemen returning from World War II who lopped off -- bobbed -- everything on their own motorcycles that could be legally discarded. The bobbers of the '40s and '50s eventually evolved into choppers in the 1960s.

The retro FXDBI boasts many of the features typical of its early stripped-down brethren, perhaps most noticeably its solo seat, mini-apex handlebars, wire spoke wheels and a classic Fat Bob gas tank. Styling highlights also include a 29-degree steering head and fork angle and chromed staggered exhaust with shorty dual mufflers.

The bare bones console atop the gas tank is dominated by an electronic speedo with odometer and resettable tripmeter. There's a faux gas cap to the left that houses a gauge to indicate when it's time to top up the 17.8-litre tank. Directly below is a very simple LED readout for turn signals and oil.

Adding to its back-to-basics theme are four paint choices including the no-frills matte black (Black Denim) finish of the bike I rode. The console, battery box, belt guard and the engine's cylinders and heads are all powdercoated black. It all adds up to a very cool look.

I'd been impressed by Harley's factory bobber since reading about it in a world exclusive in American Iron magazine back in September 2005, and finally got my chance to ride it recently. Suffice to say, I was not disappointed, although there are a few things I'd change in a minor way.

For one, trying to put the kickstand down was an exercise in contortion. The problem is that it retracts tightly to the bottom of the primary with only the tip protruding to hook your toe onto and swing out. It took me more than one attempt at times to succeed, having to

first twist my ankle at an odd angle. Once the kickstand is down, though, it's very stable.

The integrated front fork/steering head lock/ignition switch is a good idea. But I found I couldn't leave the key in the ignition. On more than one occasion after I shut off the motor, the key and heavier H-D fob just fell to the pavement, usually inconveniently between the frame and front wheel.

Another slight irritation occurred whenever I came to a stop at an intersection, for example, and tried to plant my feet on the pavement. I have long legs and with the mid-mount position of the footpegs, I invariably found they got in my way -- especially when I had to make an unexpected stop and scraped my shin -- until I learned to avoid them.

Otherwise, riding the bike was a pleasure. I thought the bobber benefitted from changes to the chassis to enhance handling, like a stiffer frame and wider swingarm. The beefy 49-mm forks offer greater stability and twin coil-over shocks combine with a fat rear tire for excellent comfort at highway speeds.

The bike rolls on Dunlops, with a 160/ 70B-17-in. out back and a 100/90-19-in. leading the way. Stopping duties are adequately handled by four-piston calipers on both front and rear single discs.

As for forward power, the Street Bob rumbles down the road with a 1450-cc air-cooled Twin Cam 88 mill. The motor is rubber-mounted to isolate rider from vibration and succeeds admirably at doing so. For the first time in Dyna history (the FXDBI is a member of Harley's Dyna family), the motor is equipped with an electronic sequential port fuel injection system instead of carbs and affords smooth, reliable access to horsepower at the twist of the wrist.

I appreciated upgrades on the powertrain side, too. According to specs, the clutch requires 35% less effort to pull. I certainly found it easy enough to work. Also new this year for all Dynas is a six-speed Cruise Drive transmission. The taller top gear drops the rpms down significantly, I noticed, which made highway riding almost effortless.

I say almost because the 26-in. dished seat and mini-apes are more compatible with laid-back cruising up to, say, about 100 km/h than for hotrodding. I also discovered that the detachable windshield was a bit of an obstacle since I had to either look above the top of it or below it because of my six-foot-plus height. In the end I elected to leave it on the bike because it afforded relatively good protection at speed.

Like they say, less can be more and, in this case, Harley's 2006 FXDBI Street Bob fits the bill.

2006 HARLEY-DAVIDSON FXDBI STREET BOB

Engine: Twin Cam 88

Displacement: 1450cc

Fuel System: Electronic Sequential Port Fuel Injection (ESPFI)

Transmission: 6-speed

Brakes: 4-piston single disc

Seat height: 655.3 mm (26.8")

Fuel Capacity: 17.8 litres (4.7 gal.)

Dry Weight: 288.0 kg (634 lb.)

MSRP: \$17,099 (solid);

\$17,474 (colour)

EVENTS

VETERANS HONOUR RIDE

JULY 22

Don't miss this ride to pay tribute to Canada's war veterans sponsored by the Veterans Honour Ride Foundation. The VHRF was founded in 2002 to develop community and youth awareness, respect, dignity and "a little fun" for aging Canadian war veterans. It is the major sponsor of Sunnybrook Hospital's Veteran Grant a Wish Program and provides financial assistance to help support operations of The Tony Stacey Centre. Monies are generated via corporate sponsorship and an annual motorcycle tribute ride to the respective veteran long-term care facilities. The ride this year will be limited to 500 bikes.

WWW.VHRF.COM

2006 CANADIAN BIKER BUILDOFF

JULY 28-30

See custom bikes by the best builders in Canada during this three-day rally. Check out two custom bike shows, celebrities, celebrity bikes, concerts, fashion show and more. This second annual event is on the waterfront at Port Dalhousie.

WWW.CANADIANBIKERBUILDOFF.COM