

2008 Victory Vision *by Dave Searle*

VICTORY TOLD AN assembly of bike journalists almost a year ago about their plans to build the ultimate luxury tourer, even showing us a variety of design sketches—no cameras allowed. Knowing the efforts expended on the machines they intended to put themselves up against, and the capabilities of the much larger companies that built them, it was hard not to be a bit skeptical of their ambition. But after just riding the new Vision in both its Street and Tour forms more than 500 miles around Minnesota, visiting Victory's R&D center and the Spirit Lake factory, we're happy to report that the Vision is the real deal, a fresh concept thoroughly engineered from the ground up to challenge the best on the market.

To avoid trying to beat Harley at its own game—heritage styling—the Vision is a combination of the traditional and the modern, powered by a visceral 106 cubic-inch DOHC 16-valve V-twin, set off like “the jewel in a setting” (they loved that phrase) by very modern bodywork that's closer to the lines of a BMW.

The Honda Gold Wing 1800, BMW K1200LT and the Harley-Davidson Ultra Classic Electra Glide were both the targets and benchmarks. Focus groups were studiously consulted to refine the designs and requisite features. And this gamble was no small roll of the dice, even for a company with Polaris' credit rating. In fact, \$20 million went into the Vision's development. So it needs to win big to pay off.

On the road, it didn't take too long to realize—the first stop on our test ride, actually—that I wasn't the only journalist surprised by the competence it displayed. The Vision, unlike my fears, wasn't simply a lot of bodywork piled on top of a Victory cruiser chassis. Unlike some traditional V-twin tourers that struggle with stability at freeway speeds, as the rider fights to keep the bike's wheels under a pile of weight the chassis wasn't really designed for, the Vision is rock steady at speed, very reassuring.

Credit its unique cast aluminum chassis for the stiffness to make this possible, formed in two sections, the forward half supporting the steering head and doubling as the airbox for the fuel injected motor, bolted with steel plates to the rear section that forms the subframe (see the photo on the opposite page).

The cast alloy construction has other benefits besides strength and light weight. Because it can be drilled and threaded by CNC machine, rather than by welding attaching points to a steel tube chassis, its bodywork can be more accurately located, so that all the various panel gaps are kept to luxury car standards, flush and tight-fitting.

To provide the lowest seat height in the luxury touring game, 26.5" they say, the rider sits well behind the motor while the monoshock rear suspension is offset to the right and works through a clever transverse rocker linkage with air-assist preload adjustability (see a gas station for the air, a compressor is not built in). Seat padding was not compromised to get a low seat number, either—a full 4" of foam give cushy support for the rider and 3.5" is provided for the passenger.

And don't imagine that just because the seats are so low, that the new Victory is another boulevard bike that has minimal cornering clearance. Clearly aimed to satisfy the rider of a BMW



Victory Vision Tour



Victory Vision Street

K1200LT, the Vision will lean over much farther than a Harley and even more than a Gold Wing. Literally, none of our large group heard it touch during cornering in two days of riding. And a couple of us tried pretty hard to find the limit, taking unusual cornering lines just to see if we could dip it low enough to make it drag.

Given the size and length of the bike, (a 65.7" wheelbase and claimed dry weights of 804 lbs. for the Street and 849 lbs. for the Tour) it's necessary for the handlebars to sweep some 14" back from the steering head to find a comfortable position for the rider's hands, but their anti-vibration mounting thankfully doesn't interfere with precise

directional control as some others of this type do.

To balance the chassis, the aluminum gastank is placed well forward, where it wraps around either side of the steering head, giving a generous capacity of 6.0 gal. while keeping the bike very narrow at the knees. We were told the static weight distribution is 50/50 without the rider on board, which makes sense given the excellent front end feel the Vision delivers. Rake and trail are 29.0°/5.8" and the tires are Dunlop Elite 3 models in a 130/70R18 in front and a 180/60R16 rear, on both models. Interestingly, no centerstand is provided, or even optional, just a sidestand.

To accommodate the tastes of the both the traditional luxury V-twin rider, whose riding position was classed as “relaxed” (feet forward) as well as the more upright “ready” position favored by the GL1800 and K1200LT, Victory created extra long floorboards for the Vision, with controls in the forward position (the most forward in the class, we were told), so that it was possible to vary your foot position considerably on the go. We found this a very useful option to avoid fatigue. Incidentally, the rear portion of the floorboards, which are also hinged to fold on contact, are designed to be the first part of the bike to touch during cornering.

To minimize damage during simple tipovers, the bike also offers cleverly stylized “hard points” fore and aft, to keep the bodywork from touching the ground—something insurance companies should reward.

Power comes from an enlarged version of the Victory 100/6 V-twin, a very powerful motor in its own right. Stroked to give 106 cubic inches (101mm x 106mm bore/stroke), the Vision's modern DOHC four-valve heads use hydraulic lifters to eliminate valve adjustment maintenance, use separate intake tracts for superior breathing and produce a claimed 90 hp with 109 lb./ft. of torque @ 3250 rpm. In fact, 90% of peak torque is available at just 2000 rpm we were told.



Above: The Vision's cockpit is very attractive and fully equipped. Its long tiller-style handlebars take some wrestling to get the bike up off the sidestand, but the steering is light thereafter. Right: The engine is framed 'like a jewel in a setting' by the bodywork.

At 70 mph, sixth gear gives 2650 rpm and returns excellent gas mileage. Judging by the bike's own trip computer, an average of nearly 50 mpg should be possible during cross-country touring.

A counterbalancer quells engine shake so effectively that noise, vibration and harshness are non-issues, and allows the engine to be used as a chassis stiffening stressed member.

Visteon (a supplier to Ford) builds the bike's fuel injection system and it works beautifully, smooth and responsive with nary a hiccup. Traditional air and oil provides the engine cooling, and the large fairing opening directs plenty of cooling air to the motor.

On the road, my seat-of-the-pants impression is that the big motor makes significantly more horsepower than a stock 96 cubic inch Harley. But it runs very quietly at cruise, so as not to interfere with the music coming from its standard-equipment deluxe sound system. Tricks like a primary cover massively reinforced on the inside to prevent sound transmission and revised first and sixth gear ratios to eliminate harmonic overlaps between the gear sets have seen to that concern.

Linked brakes are standard equipment. Victory's arrangement has the Vision's front lever working independently of the rear brakes, while the rear pedal is linked to the center of the three pistons in each front caliper. For optimum control and a more level chassis attitude during linked braking, a delay valve in the line from the rear to the fronts allows the rear caliper to operate first during heavy braking, but during lighter rear brake operation, only the rear disc will be used.

However, ABS will not be an option. This was puzzling, since it's so popular among Gold Wing purchasers and is standard on the K1200LT. The focus groups didn't care about it, they said. Did they ask Harley Ultra owners, who haven't been able to purchase ABS in the past, but who will be able to order it in 2008?

The Vision is available in two models, either the Street or Tour variations (the stylish top trunk is the only difference). The Street model has just half the carrying capacity (11 gal.), but its look is sleeker, more like the traditional bagger, and the lack of extra weight up high gives it a slightly more nimble riding feel. Actually, the top trunk can easily be added later if the owner desired, as the mounting holes are already in place.



The Vision's naked chassis.

Several different levels of options are also offered: The standard Victory Vision Street included a halogen headlight, attractive cast wheels, cruise control, a premium audio system, and a manually adjustable windshield. Its MSRP is \$18,999. There are three color options that are the same throughout the line: Cruiser Black, Super Steel Gray and Midnight Cherry.

The Street can also be had with the Premium Package for \$20,499. It includes an HID headlight, trick lit logo badges (a special luminous film provides the light source), electrically adjustable windshield, heated grips, heated seats with individual front and rear controls and a premium chrome package: Hand controls, handlebars, foot controls, tipover protection and front forks.

The Tour model is available in three different configurations: The standard Tour is \$19,999 with all the same equipment as the standard Street model.

The Comfort Package: Electrically adjustable windshield, heated grips and heated seats for \$20,499.

The Premium Package: Includes two extra speakers in the trunk, as well as all the Premium package accessories included on the Street Premium Package, for \$21,499.

A full range of accessories are also ready for delivery at the time of bike purchase. These are in three groups: Style, Comfort and Performance. These include chrome accessories, back rests, things like trunk mirrors, optional exhausts, etc.

Clothing designed specifically for luxury touring is also offered: Bluetooth enabled helmets, textile jackets, etc.

To order, Victory arranged for a priority reservation process online May 15–July 15 (now passed). Buyers could chose the models, packages and colors they desire from the web site, print it out and take the purchase order to a dealer with a deposit to reserve the bikes for first delivery. Victory has also planned demo tours in various major cities so that riders can try out the new bikes (these will be held between July and October).

With all the long distance comfort, carrying capacity, power and amenities touring riders demand, plus that elusive V-twin character that seemingly resonates in America's DNA, if you're into luxury touring, the Vision deserves your attention. 🍷