

Star Stryker1300

A Mid-Size Custom Cruiser
That Hits The Mark



by Dave Searle

STAR'S NEW STRYKER fills a gap in its cruiser lineup beneath the 1854cc Raider S custom. While it may be hard to imagine that an engine displacement of 1304cc makes it a "mid-size" cruiser, that's the reality of today's market. And speaking of markets, cruisers still account for the lion's share of the motorcycle business, capturing roughly 48% of total sales at last count, and the "custom" segment is responsible for 73% of that. Honda's new Sabre custom is the Stryker's obvious competition, and if our first impressions reflect how it fares in upcoming head-to-head testing, it should give buyers moving up from older or smaller cruisers an excellent alternative.

Value counts, too, and never more so than during an economic downturn. And Star has worked hard to make its offerings wallet-friendly. Priced at just \$10,990 in Raven Black (shown above) or \$11,240 in either Impact Blue or Reddish Copper with contrasting flames, it's likely to be almost a grand cheaper than the Sabre (\$11,799 base price in 2010) on America's showroom floors.

Powered by the tried-and-true 80 cubic-inch (1304cc), single overhead cam, four-valve, 60° V-twin that's propelled a number of Star Cruisers, its performance is totally satisfying. The fuel injection system is a twin-barrel type (separate 40mm intakes for each cylinder) that uses 12-hole injectors for optimum fuel atomization and response, and its rideability is near perfect. Off-idle, the engine never stumbles, it responds without abruptness and pulls hard all across the rev range with a listed 6600 rpm redline.

"Pulse character" is Star's term for an engine's throbbing feel, and the R&D group in the US tried five different crankshaft and counterbalancer arrangements to arrive at the chosen design. A single-pin crank, like a Harley's, it delivers the synopated rumble that V-twins are famous for, while individual counterbalancers spin on either side at the bottom front of the motor to eliminate excessive vibration so the engine can be mounted as a stressed member in its steel-tube chassis for more responsive handling.

Unlike the Raider's massive air-cooled, overhead valve motor, the Stryker's V-twin uses liquid cooling, its radiator very thin and tucked discretely between the frame's front downtubes behind a black louvered screen. The necessary hoses are also out of sight, the upper ones hidden beneath the gastank and running through the cylinder head covers, and the bottom hoses routed internally behind the crankcase covers. Even the spin-on oil filter is hidden away under the engine.

The engine's power in no way feels like it's undersized for the job. Performance is strong, and the transmission's five ratios are nicely staged to get the most performance from its powerband. Weighing a claimed 646 lbs. wet, the Stryker is nearly 100 lbs. lighter than the Raider S, which scaled 738.5 lbs. in our October 2009 comparison test, so its power-to-weight ratio should be virtually equal to the Raider S.

The exhaust system sweeps down at the rear to help create the "leaping cat" line the designers that Long Beach, CA-based GKDI worked so hard to achieve, and the sound they produce is equally rich.

Final drive is via a narrow carbon fiber reinforced belt, which eliminates the chassis jacking effects of a shaft drive and also reduces unsprung weight at the rear for more compliant suspension action. Star gives suspension travel figures of 5.3" at the front and 3.9" at the rear. While the suspension's spring and damping rates are well-matched and deliver very good

ride quality most of the time, we did experience one bump that escaped full control at the back, giving us a hard shot to the spine.

"Custom" styling dictates an extreme rake, and the Stryker's is a class-leading 40°, achieved via a 34° steering head with an additional 6° built into the triple clamps. But just like its big brother, the Raider S, this doesn't make the bike's handling weird. Adjusted to give a moderate 106mm of trail, the steering is surprisingly neutral and easy to handle. However, given its long wheelbase of 68.9" and relatively low-slung, forward mounted footpegs, its ground clearance is a bit less than we'd prefer and we had to be careful on occasion not to enter corners faster than allowed by the available lean angle.

The ergonomic layout is slightly more aggressive than the Raider's as well, its bars and pegs a bit more forward and the seat slightly lower. At a claimed 26.4" off the ground, it has the lowest seat in Star's lineup, we were told. And although the seat's shape is very good, the upholstery is relatively thin, and about 80 miles of uninterrupted travel struck the editorial posterior as far enough between breaks.

Overall fit and finish is excellent, with plating and polishing to rival the best from Harley-Davidson. The instrument panel is very nicely done, attached to a brace welded between 1" diameter handlebars that dive straight into the upper triple clamp. A selector switch on the right handlebar allows toggling between tripmeters, the odometer, a clock and a fuel gauge (the last of which is rare on cruisers). Detailing is likewise well-developed, and an interesting touch is the use of fluted surfaces that are meant to evoke the look of the grooves in the cylinder of a revolver (what could be more macho than that?).

The brakes use a single oversized 320mm floating front disc gripped by a four-piston caliper and the rear is a 310mm unit. Stopping power is excellent and very controllable. The low-profile tires and wheels are the same sizes used on the Raider S, a grippy 120/70-21 in front and fat 210/40-18 at the rear. Real steel fenders wrap the rubber tightly for a clean integrated profile.

We really couldn't find a single major flaw in the Stryker. It's an attractive bike that goes, shifts, handles and stops with a feel of real quality and refinement. If its style suits your personality, Star is ready with a wealth of goodies to create your perfect ride.

Introduced in Austin, Texas, the "live music capital of America," the Stryker seemed to suit the Sixth Street vibe perfectly. Rowdy and ready to rumble, with a signature sound of its own, you might call it righteously *Austin-taceous!* ■