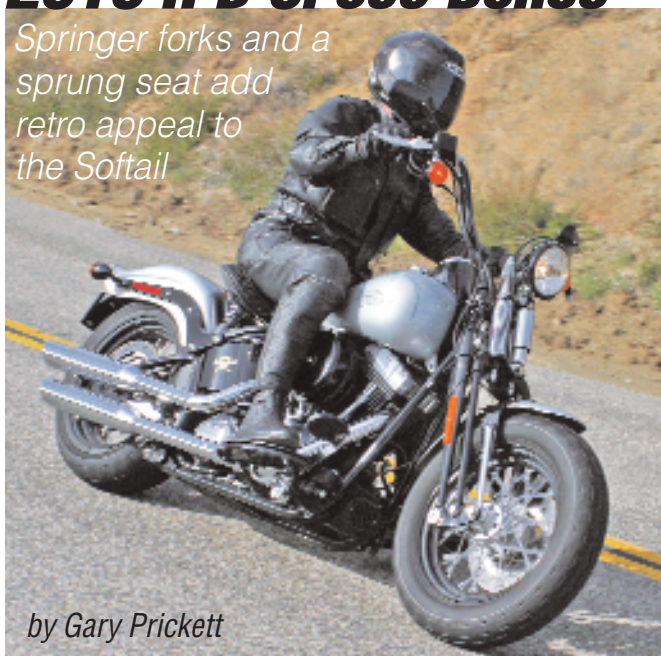


# First Impression

## 2010 H-D Cross Bones

Springer forks and a sprung seat add retro appeal to the Softail



by Gary Prickett

**H**ARLEY-DAVIDSON'S PENCHANT for employing retro styling as a dominant design trait is a time-honored tradition. Although the V-Rod is evidence that Harley can build a "modern" motorcycle, the majority of the Motor Company's zealously loyal customers prefer the familiar look and feel of motorcycles that are stylistically linked to the first half of the 20th Century. The 2010 Cross Bones is the latest variation of that familiar theme. As part of Harley's youth market-oriented Dark Custom series, it magnifies the company's old-school tough-guy image. Pricing starts at \$16,999 painted in Vivid Black, and at \$17,374 for Black Denim, Black Ice Pearl and Brilliant Silver Pearl paint schemes.

### Engine & Transmission

Powered by Harley's 96B motor that displaces 96 cu. in. (1584 cc), the big V-Twin is capable of 64.25 hp @ 4800 rpm and 79.18 lb. ft. of torque @ 3000 rpm measured at the rear wheel. The "B" in the engine designation denotes the presence of twin counter-balance shafts that effectively eliminate vibration in the rigidly mounted engine. In fact, the engine is so free of vibration that one has to wonder why Harley doesn't use it in all models in addition to those in the Softail lineup. A light clutch pull and precisely metered EFI provide for smooth starts and seamless acceleration, with a pleasing rumble from the staggered slash cut pipes. Power is delivered through a six-speed transmission that while not providing butter-smooth gear changes, shifts positively and is free of false neutrals. New for 2010 is a helical-cut fifth gear that eliminates the whining noise of previous 6-speed models that was a source of irritation to many owners.

### Brakes, Wheels & Tires

Although the powertrain of the Cross Bones is modern in every respect, its braking components adhere too closely to the vintage theme. Single 11.5" discs are located on each wheel with an old-style single-piston caliper operating on the front, and a dual piston caliper at the back. The brakes have a wooden feel, and stopping power is disappointing. The 2009 CVO Softail Springer features an updated four-piston caliper in the front

that delivers superior braking performance. We wonder why this caliper is not included on the Cross Bones.

Big fat Dunlop tires add to the vintage appearance of the Cross Bones with a 135/90XB16 in the front and a whopping 200/55XR17 at the rear. As designated, the rear tire is a radial ply while the front is a bias ply, something to keep in mind if replacing the stock tires with some other brand. Wheels are black painted steel rims laced with chromed spokes. Interestingly, the front wheel has a right side mounted filler valve, even though there is no obstruction on that side of the wheel which would impede access to a center mounted valve stem. On the other hand, the rear wheel's valve stem is mounted in the center of the rim, where access is restricted by the brake disc on one side and the rear drive belt pulley on the other.

### Styling & Ergonomics

By far, the most impressive feature of the Cross Bones is the tastefully if incompletely executed vintage appearance of the bike. The blacked-out Springer front end with chromed springs and shock damper is the center piece for its retro appearance. Topped off by a 6" diameter headlamp in a black nacelle followed by a set of black mini-ape-hanger bars, this bike displays an attitude that says, "Bad." Its leather covered tractor-style sprung seat not only looks right, but is ergonomically about as perfect as a motorcycle seat can be. It seems a shame that modern styling demands have moved away from this shape, in favor of the elongated yet comfort-compromised narrowed seats that adorn many of today's bikes.

Behind the seat is a fender that is aesthetically at odds with the rest of the bike. Instead of a rounded fender that follows the smooth contour of the rear wheel, it strikes out rearward on a horizontal path. This '70s styling touch looks out of place on a bike that is otherwise faithful to the look of the '30s & '40s and just begs for modification. Fortunately, like most of its siblings, the Cross Bones is a blank canvas on which the owner can expend hours of creative energy and buckets of cash to make the bike his or her own. In this instance, the factory has provided a head start on creating a rolling period piece of Americana.

### Riding Impression

If the pleasure of looking at a motorcycle is exceeded only by riding it, the Cross Bones is a mixed bag. If one is not used to a heel/toe shifter, it takes a bit of familiarization to avoid an unintended up-shift while attempting to place the left boot on the floor board. With an upright seating position atop the excellent saddle, feet positioned slightly forward resting on appropriately sized floorboards, and arms extended forward to the moderately raised handlebars, this is a bike that can be comfortably ridden for prolonged periods of time at moderate speeds. However, speeds above 60 mph require a firm grasp on the handgrips to overcome the wind blast against the rider's splayed-out upper body.

Suspension travel is limited to 3.8" in the front and 3.6" in the rear, so the Cross Bones is best enjoyed on relatively smooth roads. However, the Springer front end does a reasonable job of soaking up bumps, although rebound damping could be increased somewhat to further smooth fork action. The dual horizontally mounted rear shocks are often overwhelmed by road irregularities but are ably assisted by the sprung seat, which keeps sharp jolts from reaching the rider. Also, the Cross Bones' floorboards drag at even moderate lean angles.

### Bottom Line

The Cross Bones is not designed for conquering long distances at a rapid rate of speed. But within the limits of its performance envelope, it provides a satisfying riding experience. ■