



Above: With bigger finning and a new primary cover, the 1200 is similar to Buell's XB12 design, but in polished chrome, you don't recognize it. The new 4.5 gal. gastank is very pretty in two-tone paint.

Below: See the black exhaust crossover pipe behind the mufflers, allowing an unobstructed view of the cylinders, but cornering clearance suffers badly.



Above: New brakes distinguish the 2004 Sportsters. Made by Nissin, the two-piston front and single piston rear stoppers replace the four-piston units used previously. They look better, but didn't stop as quickly.



Left: The new pop-up oil filler no longer fouls the rider's leg. But the seat isn't as clever. Its scoop shape feels like a wedge after 50 miles and the pillow portion is narrow and slopes backward—poor.

Below right: Instrumentation is basic, with no tachometer, but the finish is pure quality—flawless.



Below: The mirrors now have longer stalks to greatly improve the rear view. Smaller, 1 1/2" handgrips fit smaller hands and reduce the reach to the levers.



TESTERS' LOG

The 1200 Custom is now clearly the best choice in the Sportster lineup for my money. Its new motor still sounds and feels like a Sportster should, but you can now actually use all of its rev-range rather than be vibrated to pieces. Also, the Custom's seating position is the now most comfortable of the 1200s—which is not the same as to say it's actually comfortable. That's because the seat is basically U-shaped, but after 50 miles, starts to feel V-shaped, crushing your tailbone and crotch in a viselike grip. And the passenger portion of the seat is no better; it's too skinny and slopes to the rear, useless for passengers.

Plus, the short travel rear suspension is torture on rough roads, limiting the bike to just 75–80% of the speeds most machines could comfortably do. And on the freeway, your arms get so tired pulling against the wind, it limits your top speed to about 70 mph.

But short slow carefree rides are still good cycletherapy, and pride of Harley ownership is ensured with its beautiful paint, polishing and chrome. And if that's not enough, a better seat and an effective windshield would make a world of difference.

—Dave Searle

There's no question that Harley knows how to build a beautiful, well-finished motorcycle with plenty of chrome and great paint. But, like many Americans, the Sportster has gained a few pounds here and there and is now borderline obese—although, in this case, the advantage of rubber mounting certainly "outweighs" the weight increase. Imagine looking into the mirrors and actually being able to see a sharp image of what's following you; or holding handgrips that don't double in size as the revs increase. Real neat!

Now if Harley could just figure out how to make the Sportster comfortable, they would have a real winner. The shape of the seat, the reach to the bars and the reach to the pegs make that hard. And 100 miles at any one time takes more effort than I want to exert. The low seat height is nice, but the front suspension is quite soft, and doesn't leave much travel to soak up the bumps, and the short shocks have real stiff springs that make the ride more like a rigid. So, if you want a bike that works well in a straight line on smooth roads, complete with all the panache that the Sportster has to offer, then this bike is for you.

—Walt Fulton

2004 XL1200C Sportster

SPECIFICATIONS AND PERFORMANCE DATA



ENGINE

Type:45°, OHV, V-twin
 Valvetrain:pushrod OHV, hydraulic tappets, no adjusters required
 Size:1203cc (73.2 cu. in.)
 Bore/stroke:88.8mm x 96.8mm
 Comp. ratio:9.7:1
 Carburetion:single 40mm
 Exhaust:2 into 2 w/crossover

DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission:5-speed
 Final drive:belt
 RPM @ 65 mph/redline3200/6000

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase:60.0"
 Rake/trail30.1°/4.7"
 Ground clearance:5.25"
 Seat height28.0"
 GVWR:948.0 lbs.
 Wet weight:585.0 lbs.
 Carrying capacity:363 lbs.

SUSPENSION

Front:39mm telescopic travel 5.60"
 Rear:dual coil-over rear shocks travel 2.40"

BRAKES

Front:dual-piston, single-action caliper on 11.5" x .2" uniform expanding rotor
 Rear:dual-piston, single-action caliper on 11.5" x .23" uniform expanding rotor

TIRES & WHEELS

Front:Dunlop MH90-21 54H on 21" x 2.15" wheel
 Rear:Dunlop 150/80B16 71H on 16" x 3.00" wheel

ELECTRICS

Battery:12V, 12AH
 Ignition: H-D Ignition Control Module w/throttle position sensor
 Headlight:60/55W

FUEL

Tank capacity:4.5 gal.
 High/low/avg. mpg:46.6/40.4/44.2



PERFORMANCE

Measured top speed123.7 mph
 0–1/4 mile12.99 sec.
 @ 100.11 mph
 0–60 mph4.58 sec.
 0–100 mphna sec.
 60–0 mph123.7'
 Power to Weight Ratio1:10.10
 Speed @ 65 mph indicated63.5

M/C RATING SYSTEM

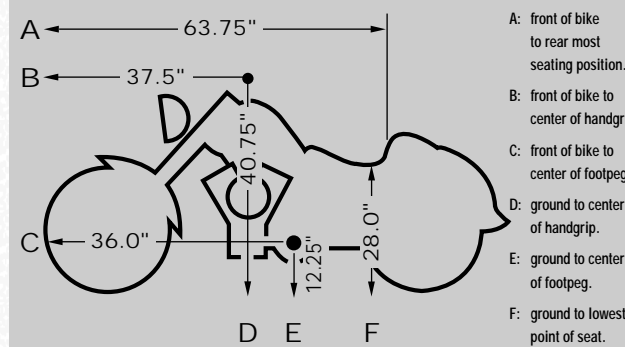


----- Heavyweight Cruiser -----

Engine	●●●●○
Transmission	●●●●○
Suspension	●●●○○
Brakes	●●●●○
Handling	●●●●○
Styling	●●●●●
Riding Impression	●●●●○
Instruments/Controls	●●●●○
Attention to Detail	●●●●○
Value	●●●●○

OVERALL RATING ●●●●○

ERGONOMICS TEMPLATE



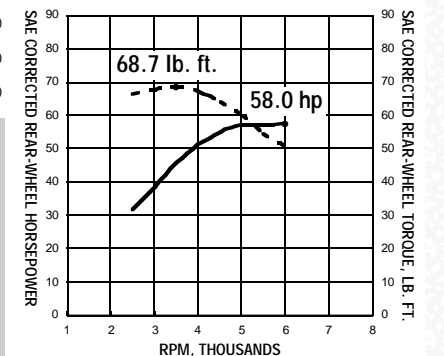
MISCELLANEOUS

Instruments: ..Speedo, odo, tripmeter
 Indicators: Oil pressure, neutral, check engine, turnsignals, high beam, battery, low fuel, diagnostic readout
 MSRP: ..(w/two-tone paint, as tested) \$10,040 (immobilizer standard)
 (Base price \$9,425, CA emissions \$120)
 Routine service interval:5000 mi.
 Valve adj. interval:not needed.
 Warranty:24 mo., unlimited miles.
 Colors:Vivid Black, Brilliant Silver Pearl, Sierra Red Pearl, Impact Blue Pearl, Luxury Blue Pearl, Glacier White Pearl, Lava Red Sunglo, Impact Blue Pearl/Vivid Black, Luxury Teal Pearl/Brilliant Silver Pearl, Sierra Red Pearl/Brilliant Silver Pearl, Smokey Gold Pearl/Vivid Black

DYNAMOMETER DATA

Low end ●●●●○
 Mid-range ●●●●○
 Top end ●●●●○

Compared to our last '99 Sportster Sport, the new 1200 has a smoother powerband and makes significantly more power especially below 4000 rpm. And because it's finally rubber mounted, the full rev range is now actually usable!



TEST NOTES

PICKS

- Rubber mounting transforms the Sportster experience
- Beautiful new 4.5 gallon tank adds range and style
- Greatly improved ergonomics

PANS

- "Improved" seat severely limits riding time between breaks
- Passenger seat is too narrow and slopes back—hang on
- Rear suspension travel is brutally short on rough roads

STANDARD MAINTENANCE

Item	Time	Parts	Labor
Oil & Filter	.....0.4	.....\$6.95 + \$13	\$24.00
Air Filter	.....0.1	.....\$32.00	.....\$6.00
Valve Adjust	.....n/a	.....	.....\$0.00
Battery Access	.....0.1	.....MF	.....\$6.00
Final Drive	.....0.2	.....	.....\$12.00
R/R Rear Whl.	.....0.5	.....	.....\$30.00
Change Plugs	.....0.1	.....\$5.00	.....\$6.00
Adjust Carb	.....0.1	.....	.....\$6.00
Totals	1.5	\$56.95	\$90.00

Note: MCN Labor rate changed to \$60/hr. from \$54/hr. in May 2002