



## Stuff the past. Let's Rock!

Words and pics: [Andy Hornsby](#)

Second Opinion: [Rich King](#)

**Okay, so it might not be a softail so steeped-in-history, but the Deuce offers so much more than the Hydra Glide-derived Harley-Davidson.**

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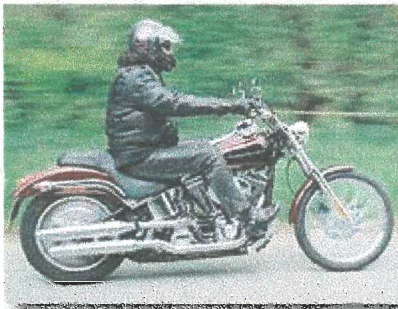
Just as Rich is warming to Dynas, I'm becoming less dismissive of Softails and this in spite of my reservations regarding the balanced motor, and if any one model has been the reason for this mellowing it is the Deuce.

It is Harley's most expensive custom bike, their the most expensive Softail, and to my mind, their most finished streetbike and most competent Softail. In fact, it comes pretty close to being their most competent motorcycle of any range.

If you've ever dismissed the idea of a Softail framed motorcycle as a styling exercise to produce a bike that is visually in the 1940s but technically in the present day, I would wholeheartedly recommend you take a Deuce out for a ride round city streets, highways and country lanes. What at first seems to be an engineering compromise to meet an aesthetic ideal is far from it. It is somewhat ironic that the styling cues of the Deuce have little or no retrospective reference any further back than the sixties, and that's only really the typeface used to spell out The Motor Company's name on the side of the tank, everything else has muted undertones that retain a hint of Harley's past, but which drags it kicking and screaming into the 21st Century.



I've been dismissive, myself, of the Deuce's appearance, and that is still my only niggling concern. I'd sooner have seen its styling applied to a Dyna which would better suit its horizontal line, but this year's test bike - deliberately selected as the carburetted version - came in a colour scheme that did far more justice to the overall image. It can't just be the two-tone finish because the first model we tested was blue and silver, and anyone who's seen the Deuce in black will know that it can take that single colour very well indeed. I reckon it has got to be the colour combination: in this case a very rich ensemble that exudes class. Oddly, it also says "steam train" to me,



and I'm sure there'll be a train spotter out there who'll tell me which pre-nationalised railway company's livery was that deep red and black combination. Odd, too, that we've long had our bikes derided as being from the steam age - Ironhead Sportster riders even get that from Evo Sportster riders - and while it has usually been said in a derogatory sense, there is a part of the Deuce that actually does seem to have taken some inspiration from the latter days of the steam train: the streamliners that broke speed records that are still impressive today.

Talking bollocks again?

Errr ... possibly. I'm almost certain that it wouldn't have been a conscious mental image in the mind of its designers -I doubt they would have been aware of the things, but take a proper look. The horizontal line that is so incongruous against the Softail frame is of a vehicle passing by. The serifs on the text



on the side of the tank - well, at least on the timing side - are extended to show movement; the forks are streamlined; the rear mudguard is streamlined; the tank-top nacelle is streamlined and the frontal area of the whole bike is reduced in comparison to the more common Fat Bob style. All shout "Speed".



And there's something else too.

Engineering.

Harking back to the days of massive engineering workshops throughout the industrialised nations, where time served, skilled craftsmen had the opportunity to do so much more than finish items that had been meticulously mass-produced. They were days when engineers were stylists and took pride in what they produced, resulting in timeless designs with an intrinsic beauty belying their functionality. We've always been able to see some of that in the traditionally engineered Harley-Davidsons of the last hundred years, but the Deuce seems to take it one stage further: that tank top dash is a work of sculpture; those forks are so much more than is required to be purely functional; the rear wheel is breathtakingly stunning, and in the middle of it all is the familiar power-plant that looks like it was hewn from solid.



So very much of the style is so right that it could have been engineered, and a deserved pat on the back for the designers, but ...ah ... an engineer would never have made that headlamp bracket, and I'm not sure the mudguard would have been quite that high.

But I still don't really understand why it didn't go in a Dyna. It would have needed a far less humpty-back seat in a Dyna chassis.



Perhaps it is so that Harley-Davidson could demonstrate once and for all that the Softail chassis is one to be reckoned with.

Because it is.

And they have.

You don't associate long wheelbases and forward controls with a handling prowess of any magnitude, but apart from a lazy steering that was always going to result from the 34-degree rake, this is a Softail that'll hustle through the bends, and will do so without scraping much. I managed to get the side-stand to touch, but that was two-up on a dodgy roundabout and I reckoned I deserved a T-Shirt for that at the time. I'd been trying for a week to overcome the tendency to take it as far as normal Softails go, and then some more. I'd even taken to putting my feet on the footrest like you would on any other bike and I'd scuffed the back of my heels ... just.



I thought I'd done well until chatting with Mark at Wayside Harley-Davidson, who told me you can get both footrests down if you go for it, as he'd had to while shepherding a Buell ride-out on a Deuce a few years ago. Impressive? You'd better believe it. And to be fair, I was only really aware of the slow steering when I switched from the Deuce to a Buell M2 and found myself over-steering massively.



I've already gone into raptures over the rear wheel, and the contribution I believe it has made to the handling,



so rather than repeating myself, I'll point you at the 2001 test and repeat an interest in lacing a seventeen-inch hoop to the back hub of a SuperGlide. Suffice to say, it is a stunning piece of hardware, slotting nicely between the built-up from billet presence of the FatBoy's and the lathe-turned beauty of the V-Rod, and in this case suffering none of the consequences of matching it to a similar front. Whether the front would be better with a bit more width or rubber is a matter for

conjecture, but I never found it wanting on this or previous models despite my best efforts to throw it about and find its limits. I would add though that I've always been fortunate to have the Deuce in good weather on dry roads. My only concern really would be heavy braking in the wet.



Sticking with the front end, I have found something good to say about the headlamp: you can tell when the Deuce rider behind you has stopped for traffic lights or similar because the headlamp stops bobbing around. I'd love to say that when it pulls away again it flashes "deuce coming" in Morse code, but my knowledge of Morse isn't good enough, and that would be too spooky. Be cool though, eh?



Humpty-back seat, flashing headlamp and a couple of aesthetics apart, the Deuce just never fails to impress.

As mentioned already, we took the carburetted version this time, just to lose some of the sophistication offered by the injected models we'd ridden previously, and there was just the merest suggestion of fork clash on heavy braking pointing to a minor post-PDI adjustment being required. Small potatoes, but they brought back memories of the Night Train that we had on test last year and which felt crude and agricultural alongside the

Deuce, but this bike still oozed class and confidence. I don't know how, it just did and while fiddling with a choke seemed incongruous on a bike with the sophistication of the Deuce, that it didn't detract from the overall experience was both a pleasant surprise and a bonus.

It is possible to over-emphasise the costs savings on a carburetted model over its fuel injected sibling: it does represent a cost saving, but with the plain black carburetted Deuce offering only a saving of £500 compared to the top-of-the-shop £13,995 two-tone EFI model it doesn't add up to much of one. That said, it is worth making a conscious decision early on as to what you anticipate doing with the bike in the long term. If you're going to be happy with a stage one conversion, or are even planning to drop a pair of hot cams in, either induction method will be fine, but if you want to go that bit further, the carburettor is the sensible option. Also worth knowing is that Screamin' Eagle have now brought out a stroker kit for the 88Bs, but as far as we are aware they have still not brought out an injection system with a bigger throat to accompany it, so you're going to have to suck air rather than inject it for now, if you plan to take that route. Just to finish off, just as the carburetted version will cost you



less off the showroom floor, so too will the tuning mods.



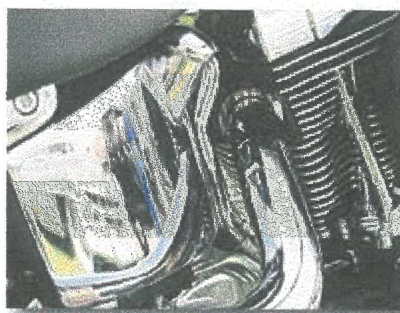
It's also worth pointing out that while it is the most expensive of the Softails, it is by a smaller margin compared to the FL Softails: £200 more than the FatBoy or Springer - both of which are only £500 more than the Heritage Softail. The major differences are against its two unidentical FX twins: the Night Train is a significant



£2,200 cheaper, while the Softail Standard comes in at a massive £3,200 less - all prices based on single colour carburetted models. It wasn't always so but it didn't

warrant a press release to tell us that Deuces were reduced by £300 across the board for 2002 while the rest of the prices remained static.

In the FX context, the Deuce still looks expensive, but my resolve is weakening: I desperately need to find out how a Standard would behave laced to a seventeen-inch rear rim and tyre, because I can't see anything else in the equation that can provide so significant a shift in character. And that would have been the end of it, as the Fat Bob tank and bobbed rear mudguard would be the preferred components to my traditional mind, but I have to confess that the style is growing on me.



It'd have to be a black 'un, or in the two-tone red and black of the schemes that I've seen - and I think that's all of them now - to crank my handle, because it sets it off a treat for me ... but then £3,200 is a lot more than the Standard, and that £3,200 would pay for a lot of things that I'd want to do to a bike, and that, I think, is where the decision lies. A re-laced wheel, and even the Deuce forks out of the P&A catalogue would barely dent that surplus, leaving plenty in the coffers for bars, paint, twin disks, seat, staged motor and a bike that was genuinely my own. But we don't all want that. We don't all have the time, or the patience, or the vision for that. There are some of us out there who want to buy a good-looking, traffic-stopping, comfortable, sophisticated bike and ride it. For the first group there is the Softail Standard, for the second there's the Deuce.



Don't knock it 'til you've tried it.

## Second Opinion:

Words: Rich



There is something very special about the Deuce, an aura of real class that other machines, even if they too have Harley-Davidson written on the tank, struggle to match. The Deuce is expensive, sure, but there's a lot more to its aura than the exclusivity of price.

The Deuce is distinctly different than other Harleys, even the other Softails it shares a frame with. While the other Softails share common similarities, a casual observer would be hard pushed to realise that the Deuce too shares many of their characteristics. The

Deuce seems longer, narrower and lower. The styling cues, borrowed from modern custom motorcycles work to present a modern looking machine rather than a chopped older one. Rather than being a mere variation on a theme, the Deuce appears to have been born straight from the design studio, a whole new exercise, the brief: 'Here's the frame and motor - do something new with it'. Whether that was indeed the case I cannot possibly know unless Willie G pops round for tea, but the Deuce just gives that impression.



It is a fine looking motorcycle that's for sure, the one we were lucky enough to pick up from Wayside H-D looking particularly tasty in two-tone black and red. Funnily enough, some Deuce colour schemes don't work at all, the machine looks angular and ungainly in many paler tones: the clumsy meeting of tank to seat jumps out at you for instance. But in dark tones you hardly notice that, the whole appears just right and you forgive the odd

styling trespass.



But the differences between the Deuce and other Harley 88s don't stop at mere appearances. The Deuce rides different too. First impressions are that the Deuce is indeed another Softail, feeling very similar, but it only takes one roundabout to change your mind. No other standard Softail has ever handled this well, the w-i-d-e low profile rear tyre shod on a beautifully sculpted solid alloy rear wheel rolls over all the way to the edge. And while you might expect a few issues with the narrow 21-inch laced front wheel and the tiny footprint of its

thin Dunlop tyre, not so - at least, not in the dry. Instead the front end too feels very secure and confidence-inspiring, perhaps those gorgeous 'new' front forks, kicked out at 34 degrees aren't just a pretty face. Sat secure in an incredibly comfy seat, those wide bars exactly where you'd want them, feet up on the forwards you'd expect to be grounding something out on the tight bends, this IS a custom after all. But nope, the Deuce never seems to run out of lean angle - look at the spec - she goes over further than ANY other current Twin Cam and that includes the Dyna Super Glide Sport! So allied to a quite adequate single front and single rear brake all this means that the Deuce can confidently be ridden fast, damn fast.



The Deuce is also the most comfortable Softail bar none. While your average bottom may twitch a bit in anticipation of riding a Heritage, Fat Boy or Night Train a few hundred miles. It fair smiles at a long trip on a Deuce - don't think about it too much. A comfortable Softail that handles? Goodness, you'd want your money back, there's something wrong with this one. And talking of money, Deuces actually cost less this year than they did last year. Which is terrific news ... unless of course you actually bought one in 2001. In which case the word 'Arse!' springs to mind.



So far, so good. However there's one area where I think the Deuce is at a slight disadvantage and that's owner customisation. The machine, like any other Harley will certainly benefit from performance modifications and that the Deuce handles so well, the owner won't immediately have to shop around for decent shocks and forks to handle any increase in power output. But the Deuce is so 'designed', hangs together so well as a whole, it is extremely difficult to see what an owner could add or indeed, subtract, to make a Deuce, 'my' Deuce if you get my drift. A rack? Panniers? A screen? A sissy bar and pad? Mmm, well it's the owners' call but short of Supertrapps and perhaps a single seat for posing on your own what would you add? I can't think of much I would want or need to add to a Deuce except performance wise. An advantage or a disadvantage depending on which way you're going to look at it.



This particular Deuce is the £300 'cheaper' version in that it has a carb (and £200 more expensive in that it has a two-tone paint job). What was a surprise was that I didn't miss the injection, at no point during the week that I had with the machine did the single carb behave anything other than perfectly. It warmed quickly and

never spat back, chuffed or coughed once. That's what you want and that also includes cruddy wet days too, I am talking mostly Lancashire, England here - not Spain or Texas. Very impressive.

The first time I threw a leg over the Deuce I was very impressed by it, that impression has not changed now I've ridden another. It is a supremely competent motorcycle and if you really like the look of the machine as it is, I

honestly think you will be more than happy with one. If you are looking to change the look of it perhaps the Deuce is not the best choice. But that's about it really. Cannot say fairer than that.

Deuce? Good.

Rich



## Specifications

- Engine:** Twin Cam 88B (balanced).  
Air-cooled 45° V-twin.
- Displacement:** 1449cc (88ci)
- Compression Ratio:** 8.8:1
- Bore & Stroke:** 95.3 x 101.6
- Torque:** 105@ @ 3000 on injection
- Fuel System:** FLSTCI Sequential Port Electronic Fuel Injected (SPEFI)  
model tested.  
FXSTD Deuce also available with Keihin 40mm Carburettor
- Exhaust System:** Over/Under Shotgun Duals
- Oil Capacity:** 3.3 litres
- Fuel Capacity:** 18.5 litres (includes reserve on carb model)
- Wheels:** Front: 21 x 2.15 laced; Rear: 17 x 4.50 DOT disc
- Tyres:** Front: MH 90-21 56H; Rear: 160/70 B17 67V
- Brakes:** Front: 292mm disc; Rear: 292mm disc
- Primary Drive:** Double-row (duplex) chain
- Final Drive:** Kevlar belt
- Overall Length:** 2424mm
- Seat Height:** 719mm
- Ground clearance:** 140.9mm
- Rake/Trail:** 34 degrees / 126.9mm
- Wheelbase:** 1690.3mm
- Dry Weight:** 305kg
- Lean Angles:** 33.2° left / 36.7° right
- Instruments:** Electronic speedo with odometer and resettable trip meter.  
Fuel gauge, low fuel light, oil pressure light, engine diagnostic light.
- Colour Options:** Vivid black, luxury blue pearl, diamond ice pearl, real teal pearl, luxury rich red pearl, concord purple pearl. Two Tone schemes: Luxury blue and diamond ice, luxury rich red and black, concord purple and diamond ice
- Price:** **FXSTDI EFI Models:**  
£14,095 single colour  
£14,295 two-tone  
**FXSTD Carb models:**  
£13,795 single colour £13,995 two-tone

Prices include usual otr inc. PDI, full tank of fuel, 12-months tax, first service, 12 months membership of Harley Owners Group (HOG) including their European roadside recovery

**Test bike kindly supplied by:** Harley-Davidson UK.  
High St,  
Brackley,  
Northamptonshire  
NN13 7DT  
Tel: 01280 700101

