

FXSTD Deuce vs Victory Vegas

Words: **Andy Hornsby**

Second Opinion: **Rich King**

Third Opinion: **Mark**

Moving Pics: **Derek Grimshaw**

Pics: **Andy and Rich**



Take a balanced Twin Cam 88 motor and stick it in a Softail frame; wrap wider, lower-profile rubber round a taller disk rear wheel and give it a stunning set of forks unique to the model. The result is the Deuce: the most sophisticated Softail that Harley-Davidson produce, and a significantly more modern motorcycle than you would credit. How would that compare to the new kid on the block?

[click here to reload full page](#)

The new kid on the block? What, the V-Rod? No, because the V-Rod is a different animal completely, although we might put that against a Dyna Sport one day for a laugh, and maybe a surprise. I'm talking about the Vegas. We've tested both bikes before but never in each other's company and it will make an interesting comparison – not least because both have been staged. Harley don't Stage their press fleet any more, but Robin Hood generously lent us their demo bike, and Victory's UK Product Manager surrendered his well run-in Vegas for a fortnight.

What about the VTX1800 Honda? Well, frankly what about it? We changed our minds. The fact that the Honda is an American made V-Twin doesn't necessarily make it relevant. It may indeed be a very competent bike that meets all our criteria, but in reality it would need to be 200% more American than a Harley-Davidson to sway people who want an American bike, and it can never be that. It doesn't matter how much more powerful it is, if indeed it is within the context of an American bike, or how much input Americans had in its development and styling: it says Honda on the side of the tank and that is a five letter word too far so we're sticking with the proper Americans for now.

On paper these two bikes are obvious candidates for the same type of rider: tall skinny front wheels, squat wide rears, heavily stylised and both embracing an element or two of modern technology.

In the metal, it's another story altogether, but the differences are nowhere near as marked as you might expect from the radically different technologies that the two companies have used.

Put them side by side, compare them component-by-component and the differences are manifold, and such significant differences would ordinarily signify the end of the contest, but strangely neither bike comes out the automatic winner. It doesn't even matter what your stylistic tastes are because there are a few weirdnesses in both if you're being brutally objective, but then a factory custom is an oxymoron, and no custom motorcycle can ever be to everyone's tastes.

The Deuce sits low, its stunning, willowy forks complementing perfectly the tall slender 21-inch front wheel and minimal mudguard. The deep dish of the headlamp starts off a horizontal theme that extends from its lens to the tip of its rear mudguard, intersecting the headstock to wheel-spindle line of that most traditional of frames. The seventeen-inch wheel that provides so much of the functionality of the model sits menacingly beneath the most contentious rear mudguard since the '71 FX boat-tail. In single-tone Rich Red, it works exceptionally well, looking classy, elegant, and making a significantly different statement to either of its stablemates: the brooding Night Train and the understated Softail Standard, that share a lot of its dimensions and components.

Alongside it, the previously svelte Vegas looks a little chunky. The triangular covers filling the gap at the top of the vee

disguise the proportions of the towering power plant, but there's no mistaking the extra height demanded of an overhead cam cylinder head topping-off a long stroke motor when it's sitting next to a pushrod lump, any more than when the 88's forebear replaced the side-valve. Its skinny 21-inch front wheel looks positively anorexic against so big a backdrop, beneath so substantial a set of yokes, and the mudguard that wraps around almost fifty-percent of the tyre's cross-section serves to make it look smaller still. A raised seam on top of the mudguard starts a line that follows through from nose to tail, even through the frenched taillight, but that is only a small part of the metal pressing in evidence on the Vegas. It is as nothing compared to the stunning sculpted, stretched tank into which the nose of the seat tucks, providing one sinuous line. The Vegas' even wider, lower profile tyre on its still-taller laced wheel wins the width wars, and its forty-spoke hub should keep the door open for further experimentation.

I expected the Vegas to dwarf the Deuce, not least because when Rich dropped by to pick it up, it made his Road King look quite compact, but with these two bikes side by side it became immediately obvious that it wasn't only Arlen Ness that had used the length of the bike to disguise its bulk. The Vegas' tank is broader, its seat lower and the shape formed by that combination, and the interface between them, is superb. The Deuce has always had quite a high, humpty-backed seat, with plenty of padding and a decent pillion for a more comfortable, and peaceful ride, but with the back of the tank sitting high, it makes the Deuce look that little bit taller.

It is further emphasised by the very high bottom yoke and bullet headlamp, which creates the impression of very much longer forks and a higher headstock, making the similarly proportioned Vegas look a little stubby by comparison.



Riding both back-to-back, the differences really came through.

The previously super-luxurious Deuce was far more harshly sprung than the Vegas, using that firm ride to hold its line with confidence. For such a long bike, it has quite a compact riding position but a chunk of that is down to the seat. Pillions on Deuces to date have enjoyed a commanding view, riding high on a perch atop the steep escarpment that doubles as a rest for the rider's lower back. It's great for me, as I like the additional support, but it does lock you into a forward-set position – it remains to be seen how much different the 2004 Deuce with its new Badlander will compare. With the bars coming back to meet you on pullback risers, and with a few bends of their own, you are at the mercy of the ergonomics engineers, but for my six-foot-two frame everything was well placed. The seat felt lower than the spec sheet suggested it should but at least part of that was due to the relative height of the bars.

By comparison, the Vegas felt big, largely because the footrests were further forward, and feet slightly further apart. The softer springing of the Victory didn't make it any less taut on the fast twisting roads from Snake Pass down into Glossop, and it was happy to hold its line for as long as the ground clearance held – and it surprised me as it touched down way before the Deuce. On closer inspection, the hero pegs underneath both front footrests were well-scuffed and there were a few scrapes on the footrest hangers themselves, which is always encouraging, but touching either peg or hanger down is a disconcerting experience as it creates a more aggressive counter-reaction than on any Harley I've ridden. I'd put that down to a combination of the angle of the metal where it meets the road, and the weight difference between it and any Big Twin Harley. The rider's seat is firm, spacious and offers plenty of room for moving about, being relatively flat, with a low pillion squab that follows the contour of the mudguard faithfully. Pulled-back bars on pullback risers bring the bars back, just as on the Deuce, but they are much lower, giving a wholly different effect.

Switching between the two on the day we took the moving shots, every change in seats reinforced the differences, and introduced fresh ones.

Climb off the Vegas onto the Deuce and it feels small but solid; its throttle feels damped, almost as though the "cruise" screw was wound in a little, slowing the twistgrip and you feel you're sitting much lower in the saddle. Wind it on and the engine feels reluctant to rev, but it's only reluctant compared to the easy-spinning Vegas. With its free breathing Stage One

mods, it picked up the pace at a more than respectable rate but it was a power that was there on demand rather than offered, if that makes sense. Once acclimatised, you don't really think about it, only grit your teeth a little bit harder as you open her up.

Switching back and the Vegas gives you space to spread out, the width of the tank gives it its air of substance but it feels, and is massively lighter. The increased leverage at the bars helps its low speed manoeuvrability, although that is compromised by an unexpectedly restricted fork lock. Pulling away, the engine wants to rev, wants to deliver more: it can't wait to reach the open road and go play. If you want to partake of the legendary bottom end stomp of a long stroke motor, the Freedom engine delivers. It doesn't object if you short-shift and use the lower end of the rev range, and will pull strong and clean from 2k in top without significant transmission snatch. In the lower gears, it will dig in without complaint with just over a thousand revs showing on its clear tachometer.

Back on the Deuce again, it feels like you're skipping back a couple of generations, but it is familiar territory. You have to think a little harder about the braking, neither front or rear being as keen as the Victory's, but Harley have their braking sorted out now and there are no heart-stopping moments. Any difference can be levelled at the greater work involved in slowing the heavier bike. Swinging round the bends you are reminded of just how much clearance the Deuce gets from its tyre combination, and just how much has been achieved in producing a lively Softail.

And so it goes on.

There is one failing that can be levelled at both – if a failing it is: it's all well and good sticking a good wedge of rubber at the back to suggest performance, but it'd be a braver rider than I to explore its limits while there's so little rubber on the front handling so significant proportion of the braking. It looks more worrying on the Vegas but that's only because it looks so much narrower. An 120/70x21 has been available for twelve months now and it would be the very first thing on my shopping list for either bike, subject to the availability of a suitable rim. I'm uncertain as to whether it would fit under the Vegas' wrap-round 'guard but, if it didn't, I confess I'd consider sacrificing that for the comfort factor of the bigger footprint. In both cases, it would give greater confidence when grabbing a fistful of front brake, and while Harley's 4-pot will certainly stop the modestly-tyred front wheel quicker than its grip on the road will allow, the Victory's Brembo 4-pot would make the new broader tyre squeal in the dry, undoubtedly assisted by its standard use of braided steel hydraulic line and floating disk.

The rest of it, aesthetically-speaking, is really very subjective. It doesn't matter much what I like, although I've been known to use that to illustrate what can be achieved between models in the past, but I'm not going to do that this time because there is so much else to cover. We normally pitch Harley against Harley and in mechanical terms we might get the freedom to separate the EFI from the carburetted, or the balanced from the bouncing.

Not so here. We have got two completely different visions of how to make an American motorcycle.

The Harley-Davidson Twin Cam 88 has the benefit of a hundred years of evolution if we're being romantic, sixty-eight years since the Knucklehead if we're being fair. An overhead-valve, air cooled 45-degree V-twin motor with a recirculating oil system, exposed pushrod tubes and a gearbox in a separate housing behind the motor – the Knucklehead, that is ... or is it? Actually it's both. Only when you mention the capacity, the number of cams or materials can you tell which, because it now has almost 50% more capacity, and twice as many cams, casting iron aside and embracing aluminium en route.

For the Softails, Harley produce the 88B – where B means balanced, not Mark 2, black or anything else for that matter – and it arrived a year after the straight 88 was introduced on the Dyna and Tourers models. That was because they determined that they couldn't rubber-mount the Softail, and the thought of solid-mounting the raw 88 wasn't taken seriously. They'd got away with it with the Evo for fifteen years, but the Evo was still a lumbering, traditional type of engine, and the vibrations were low-pitch, but the 88 had a shorter stroke, generated power at higher revs, and the vibes at those revs were not only intrusive, and also

less pleasant. The solution was to mount a pair of balance shafts, chain-driven from the crank, to soak up the secondary vibration. Primary vibration isn't so much of a problem because the alternate firing strokes on a 360-degree crank sort out a large chunk of that.

You can argue among yourselves as to whether the 88B represents a sanitised version of a traditional motor, or a more comfortable ride, but personally I feel they've gone too far and removed a lot of the soul of the motor ... on every bike except the Deuce. It isn't that mechanical feedback is any more prevalent on the Deuce, it's that the Deuce is so much more sophisticated than its running mates, and it really suits its character. Like all twin cams, if you want a few more ponies they are available: the 1450cc motor was designed with the 1550 upgrade in mind, and if you want to push it that little bit further, there is a 1700cc stroker option just waiting for your £4k+.

The Victory hasn't quite got that heritage. Parent company, Polaris, has a not-inconsiderable fifty years under its belt, but Victory has just ten since motorcycle development began, and six since production started. That might be seen as a bad thing in the heritage stakes, but it's a good thing in technology terms because it means they aren't held hostage to the past. Victory hasn't got a long-established customer base clamouring for them to carry on making the bikes they've always made, and so it has the freedom to look and learn. The resulting engine from the development years was built to meet the perceived requirement for a true American motorcycle while taking on-board a number of technical advances from Europe and the far east. It could have been a clone, but it wasn't. Not a clone of a Harley, nor a cynical attempt to mimic Japanese cruisers and sell that with a slice of apple-pie and a "Made in the USA" badge. Victory learned from everyone and the V92 was the result. Its continued evolution has resolved its clunky gearbox, toned down the vibes and gone some way towards making it prettier, and in its latest incarnation, the "Freedom", it is a damn good engine.

Just as I expected the Vegas to dwarf the Deuce, I expected it to trounce it in the performance stakes, and again I was surprised.

I expected it to trounce it because it should have done. It did have the edge, but the edge was not as defined as I expected it to be. It would be markedly different if both bikes were stock, but with Stage One mods the improvement for the Deuce was markedly more noticeable. There is a good reason for that, in that the Harley is in so soft a state of tune to begin with that there is lots of potential just below the surface.

Meantime, the Vegas is less strangled out of the box, and in Stage One form gets a less restricted exhaust note and freer-breathing airbox to get a relatively modest power hike.

Having gone through the bullet points of the Harley motor, it's worth mentioning the Victory's: single overhead cam, 4-valve, 50-degree v-twin with oil-cooling. It too has a 360-degree crank - which is to say that the con-rods share the same big end journal, but they sit side-by-side rather than using Harley's knife and fork arrangement, which results in a slight offset between the front and rear pots. It too is a long-stroke motor although slightly more square than the stock Twin Cam, with a 102mm stroke and 97mm bore, compared to the Harley's 101.6 and 95.3 respectively, giving it the additional 58cc, or 4 cubic inches and remarkably similar characteristics. Just as the 88B can go large, so too can the Vegas with its Stage Two kit - another hundred cee cees, another 8hp and another 10ft/lbs of torque across the rev range above the Stage One increases.

On paper, Victory show a 10ft/lb torque increase from 3000rpm onwards and an 8hp peak increase, topping out at 100ft/lbs and 90hp respectively, leaving the Deuce floundering at 82ft/lbs and 71hp in Stage One form: that's knocking on the door of 20%. I have to say it didn't feel anywhere near as marked as that, though in hindsight I think we gave the Deuce the easier ride of the two, letting it take the lead and seeing how well the Vegas could keep pace. In those circumstances the Vegas worked harder than I expected it would need to, but I reckon that if the Vegas had take the lead, the Deuce would have struggled to keep pace.

Beyond the motor there's the powertrain in its entirety. Both engines have the appearance or pre-unit construction, but in reality neither are.

We tend to think of the Sportster as the unit construction Harley, but the big twins are now

damned close, albeit relying on bolts to create the single rigid power train which then behaves as a single unit.

The Victory, as a ground-up build, might allude externally to traditional techniques but its crank and gearbox share a single chamber above its sump. Their relative positions are familiar enough, but the space between has been used to house the single balance shaft, which in turn drives the oil pump.

Both primary drives run down the left-hand side of the motors, but while the Harley's chaincase is an evolution of their production practice since they first bolted a gearbox behind the seat tube, and needs to be removable to gain access behind the clutch to the final drive pulley, the Victory's is little more than a cover that hides not a chain but an intermediate gear linking the crank and gearbox input shaft. There's little point in just running a jockey shaft when there's so much to do, so it forms the tuned balance shaft – tuned to allow just enough feedback, in terms of vibration, which seems to be less than on the original V92. The final drive exits on the timing side of the motor, Sportster-style, so the inner primary doesn't need to be removable, and isn't.

With such different approaches to the engineering solution, you'd expect there to be a yawning chasm between their functionality but the difference is negligible. Whether that is a testament to how Harley have managed to slot twenty-first century engineering into their mid-twentieth century machine, or an achievement on Victory's part in producing a traditional feel from modern production and design techniques depends on which side of the fence you're sitting.

Both solutions have their advantages and disadvantages.

I doubt you'll get an aftermarket six-speed for a Vegas – not that you'd need one – though you'll never need to adjust your primary chain.

But then, I'd sooner experience a snapped belt on a Vegas than any Big Twin, because there's an awful lot of drive-train to strip down to get to the final drive pulley to let you fit a new one, but that's not common fault. Go too far down that route though, and you'll come to the list of things that you can't fix at the side of the road on a new bike, and you'll be scanning the classifieds for a Panhead or pre-78 Shovel.



And then you've got the frame, and the wheels, and the forks, and the brakes, and the electrics – I could go on, almost indefinitely about the detail, but most of that is obvious to the naked eye, or mentioned already elsewhere.

Diametrically different but close enough to be cousins in so many other ways. Let's be straight here: the Victory has got significantly more in common with a Japanese cruiser in terms of its technology, but I'm delighted to say that it is nothing like a Jap cruiser to ride. To ride it is to see where Harley might have ended up if they'd been less radical with

the VR: every inch an American motorcycle. It develops its power like an American bike, it rides like a modern American bike, it has the weight bias of an American bike, and the build quality of an American bike.

If the Japanese had paid more attention, they could have built the Vegas. They have the wherewithal, and they have the technology. What they don't have is the desire to build an American bike. A traditional-looking bike that conjures up the image of an American bike, yes, but they've stripped it of its soul as they've attempted to fix those bits that aren't necessarily broken. Having seen what Victory have achieved might they try another American classic? It's doubtful because the mentality is different. Create something that is timeless, and you automatically remove the need for an annual upgrade, and that is a large part of their business model, as is its lifespan. A large percentage of the Harleys that have been made are still around somewhere, in one form or another. The vast majority of Japanese bikes end up in the breakers.

Even if the Japanese did attempt to repeat Victory's development it is unlikely they would arrive in the same place, and my reasons for saying that are borne of the miles that we rode these two bikes side-by-side. For all their differences they are very comfortable in each other's company, and run together very happily. Following Rich on the Deuce, the Victory beneath me matched it for pace, and very closely for revs too. The Vegas was the louder of the two and even running in second position, I could hear my own pipes as well as the Deuce in front, both throaty under load and almost in harmony. When Rich shifted, I shifted, and when he rolled off the throttle, I did too without closing the gap. The deep booming roar of two bikes making good progress back past Featherbed Top and down through reservoir country to Manchester's industrial belt resonated in my ears as I took the Deuce further south. I was surprised, but reassured that the two bikes were well matched in so very many respects, and wondered how I'd decide which would be my preferred ride if the choice was mine – an interesting exercise in this case.

The Vegas is by far the better bike for the money but there is still something about the Deuce which still has massive appeal. Seeing the two bikes side-by-side gives you an insight into the way production has evolved over generations, but it was only brought home to me a couple of weeks later when I happened upon an old Bentley open top tourer, for the scale of the Bentley made it all more obvious. Both the Bentley and the Harley were a mass of brackets holding everything together, but brackets that were attractive in their own right, using materials that last well, and its designer made a virtue of its existence rather than hiding it. Everything on show was meant to be seen: you can see the same attention to detail in architecture, and things like flying buttresses which are more attractive than they have any right to be in view of their role.

It lends an elegance, even if it makes it look a little "bitty". For all its incongruity of line, the Deuce is just stunning in its realisation. Whether you love or hate the rear mudguard doesn't matter, a Deuce in the right colour has something about it, and how much work is there in changing a rear mudguard anyway?

I've said before that the Victory is engineered rather than designed, and seeing the two side-by-side reinforces that. There is an enormous amount of attention to detail too in the sculpted bodywork, but things like the tank mounting bolt covers grate, an oversized exhaust clamp is clumsy, and while I understand the engineering advantage of keeping the steering head bearings as far apart as possible to spread the load, the bottom yoke looks too low on the Vegas, making it look chunky when viewed head-on, which is at odds with the sleek elegance of its profile.

It's small potatoes. It is serious nit picking and yes, I am ashamed of myself. After all, the first thing I'd do with either is change them: front tyres, then switch the handlebars for a pair of drags ... oh, and give the Vegas an audible warning device that I could hear above the exhaust.

Would any such nitpicking stop me buying a Vegas over a Deuce?

No. Not at all. In fact, I would leave the Deuce on the showroom floor and would be sitting outside on the Vegas with a four figure sum in my back pocket to spend on making it mine. Our Deuce was a carburetted example which would have saved us £300 in the first place, but at £13,695 it is still a sizable chunk of money. The Vegas, in EFI-only form, will give you a fiver back out of £12k, or a full two grand less than an injected Deuce.

The \$65,000 question, however, is whether it is enough. Whether the desire to have a Harley is actually that, or whether it is the desire to have everything that a Harley embodies within a motorcycle. It isn't a Harley but it is no less an American bike for all that. Is it more? I have to say that for me, yes it is, but bear in mind that I ran my first Harley without any badges at all, on the basis it didn't matter what it was called but what it did that secured its place in the shed, and my affections.

Only you can tell whether it is for you.

Second Opinion:

Words: Rich

Victory Vegas

I have given a lot of thought on how to open this review on the Stage One Victory Vegas and I reckon a simple subjective illustration is the best way:

I picked the machine up from American-V central and rode it fifty miles to Oldham – I didn't go straight home. I couldn't, I was shaking so much I needed a beer and I needed to talk to people who would understand. The last machine I'd ridden that had had such a profound affect on me was also American – a Stage Two Buell White Lightning!

No kidding, the Victory Vegas is, quite literally, a breathtaking ride. Why waste time and money queuing up at a thrill ride in Blackpool or Alton Towers when you can own a Victory Vegas? Just doesn't make sense.

This Vegas was black, a good start, though Victory do offer an option of blue with a tribal-styled sunburst flame job, which looks absolutely stunning. However, the single colour (or lack of it, if you're being a Plaine Aire school impressionist, beret wearing, artisté about it) made the most of the lines of the machine. While everything seems ... well, large, the black, stock Vegas hung together much better than the silver tricked up one we'd tested previously. No great fan of wire wheels myself, I had to agree they were a vast improvement on the after market billet bonkers that graced the factory 'custom'. Overall the finish over this machine was superb, I've not seen better stock finish on an American motorcycle since Excelsior-Henderson's Super X, and very rarely on any other marque worldwide. There is a definite aura of care and quality about the Vegas, which the Harley-Davidson Deuce didn't quite have. The Deuce is no shoddy machine by any stretch of the imagination, it's very, very well finished itself, but the Vegas just edged it, which maybe says more about numbers produced and length of time in production than anything else.

Outside the pub my mates came flooding out. Normally, if I'm lucky, they'd stick their noses to the window briefly and mutter something along the lines of 'another bloody test bike' but the Vegas had these hardened bikers outside within seconds. Taking turns, all first surveyed the machine top to toe, asked me what it was, whether they all came like that, wasn't it related to that 'ugly yellow thing you were on last year' and could they sit on it. This would closely be followed by a resounding 'Oh, yesssss!' immediately after they'd thumbed the starter.

Because boy, does the Stage One Victory Vegas sound right. The machine sounded wonderful, and the vibration transmitted through arms and bum caused huge, fierce grins all round.

Under power the Vegas is a delight to ride. I had been expecting quite a lot of handling issues given its physical size – particularly at low speed – but other than making the rider fully aware of its length and the very slightest hesitation into a turn, the Victory was a doddle, even in town. Even though I had ridden a Vegas before, I was ever so slightly intimidated at first, I think everyone is to be honest, but within seconds of getting my feet up I was happy, safe and secure. It is a big bike, but nothing you can't handle.

Unlike the Deuce, the Vegas seemed to have immediate punch on tap. A slight twist of the throttle and it would leap forward with a bark, quickly overtaking a car or truck with efficiency and not a little style. Having not ridden the Vegas as much as Andy, I was more circumspect around roundabouts and interesting bends, the Vegas to me not feeling quite so willing to lean over as the Deuce. I am more than willing to concede that it is purely the amount of miles I've got under my belt on Harley-Davidsons, I know how they handle, I know how they feel. So I won't suggest the Vegas handles worse than the Deuce, it's just different, and perhaps I need a few more miles to fully get my confidence up with it. Either that, or I am just not as happy personally with the way the Vegas handles compared to the neutral steering Deuce. The Vegas is fun. It's secure, it's stable but I think I could push a Deuce faster through a series of well known bends – at this moment in time at least.



The suspension seems very well set up, this is no bouncy, boingy cruiser of old, but neither is it harsh and unforgiving, I certainly had no complaints about road holding or ride nor heard any comfort complaints from my girlfriend. Incidentally, she was full of praise for the rather minimal looking pillion perch, an experience which surprised us both as it looked a lot less comfortable than it actually was – good ergonomics there somebody! On the other hand the front seat isn't quite as comfortable as it appears, so swings and roundabouts there, and a complete reversal of the usual Harley experience. I'd certainly be willing to ride a Vegas a few hundred miles at the drop of a hat, but that is purely because it is such an exhilarating machine to ride and very little to do with wanting to get anywhere in a great deal of comfort. Slightly numb bum, huge smile. Fair trade is no robbery.

Out on the open roads the Vegas really flies. The 92cu (1500cc) SOHC Freedom motor is an instant classic and the development engineers have done their fine tuning to perfection. Somebody at Victory really, really enjoys their motorcycles and knows exactly how to make a bike that is involving to ride. It revs harder and higher and faster than a 1450cc Harley Twin Cam 88B ... or at least it seems to, and that 'seems to' is actually very important. Whether or not the Freedom actually does is more or less irrelevant, it's the experience that counts. The 88B feels refined, civilised and lazy, the Freedom feels one step removed from utterly bananas, a snarling beast with just the right amount of dialled-in vibration and devilish noise to make a rider's heart pump faster.

Make no mistake about it, the feel of the Freedom has been as artificially created as it would have been if the development engineers had removed every nuance of vibration, and made the engine run as smooth as a Gold Wing Aspencade. Modern engine design is not just about reliability and fuel economy, the process is so sophisticated that a team of engineers can more or less dial in any characteristic that the client requires. While that may have the slightly grey, slightly unethical edge to it, no one can deny it works in the real world. Harley could as easily produce a big twin as exciting, if it were not for their perception of the market, their need to produce a civilised range of machines that aren't quite so 'scary' to attract the maximum amount of customers.

It's a fine line between scary and fun, as any thrill ride addict will tell you.

While the Deuce is civilised, the Vegas goes out of its way to seem a bit more challenging, a bit more involving and is, I guess, aimed at a slightly different 'demographic'. I'd guess those people would be experienced, perhaps jaded, riders who still want to get a kick out of riding a big, fast, sexy looking, noisy motorcycle. And the Vegas delivers that in bucket loads. I really do not know whether the Vegas will hold its value as well as a Harley, my guess is that it will if it holds together. To be absolutely truthful, if you're worried about that type of thing then the Victory Vegas may not be the machine for you.

FXSTD Deuce

Once upon a time the Devil was a nice guy. Or at least, like everybody else, he had his good days and his bad days. When the Aryans invaded Northwest India around 1500BC they brought with them their belief in their creator and heavenly Father, the sky god Dyaus, represented as a huge red bull or a jewel covered black stallion. Back in the colder climes of Northern Europe from where most people now think the Aryans originated, he was also known as 'Tiw' or Tue and still has a day named after him. On their great migration east the Aryans passed through pre-classical Greece, leaving tales of him there and he became Zeus, the father god of the Greek pantheon. Later again the Romans picked up on the name and his name in Latin simply meant god, any god – deus.

The point I'm getting at is Deuce doesn't necessarily mean the Devil. Deuce was the god of thunder and lightning, sunshine and blue skies – his fabled sword the golden beam of sunlight that strikes the ground through a storm cloud n' stuff.

Now that is a proper name to live up to! Luckily, the motorcycle that bears the name doesn't disappoint.

I wasn't destined to get a whole lot of time on this Stage One Deuce, but it was a lot of fun while it lasted. The wonderful Snake Pass through the top of the Derbyshire Peak District,

virtually deserted on a gloriously hot Summer's day and one hell of a bike to throw about. Truth to tell, after living with the Vegas for a few days, I did honestly look at having to put the Deuce through its paces as a bit of a chore (and I moan about blasé bloody hacks ...) and sat sullenly at Ladybower Lake, gazing alternately at beautiful scenery and a jet black Vegas I'd probably never ride again.

However, Andy arrived on the Deuce with a flourish and parking right alongside the Vegas and we both had our first of many shocks. The Deuce, contrary to all our expectations and preparations, was not at all dwarfed by the Vegas. We both had fully expected the Harley-Davidson to be much smaller than the flashy Polaris upstart. So much so we'd spent a good deal of time beforehand discussing how best to photograph the dinky little hog next to the towering Vegas showstopper, after all the Vegas had dwarfed my Road King. The reality, when the two machines were actually side by side told us! The Deuce really wasn't that much smaller at all, obviously carrying its weight better.

But as we all know size isn't that important – it's performance that counts.

And, of course, the looks, and price, and exclusivity, and dealer back up, and whether your legs reach the floor etc etc.

So, after belting along the Snake Pass on the Vegas, I got to ride the Deuce back. Again both Andy and I knowing exactly what to expect; proper procedure, slower bike goes first – rah rah rah, therefore I took the lead.



By the time Andy had realised he was going to actually have to work the Vegas pretty hard, my frown had transformed itself into a devilish grin. The Deuce had certainly benefited from the Stage One work – the already hot 88B Twin Cam motor was responsive and pulled hard. The air-cooled, carburetted Harley didn't feel anywhere near as aggressive as the Vegas, but those lazy beats were deceptive and to be honest, given my job description, I should've known better really. Whereas with the Vegas I knew damn well I was stonking along – 'Big revs, big noise, going dead fast me', the Deuce was much more of a glance at the speedo and 'Oh blimey-heck, am I

really going that fast?'

To accompany that welcome power was the Deuce's handling: it is, bar none – and I apologise if we keep repeating it – simply the best handling stock Softail there is. Again we'd expected the Vegas to be all over the rear of the Deuce, but instead it kept a respectable distance. Compared to the Vegas the Deuce felt more neutral, not so big, hefty and 'long' and just as able to go right down securely on either side. If I had to choose one over the other in the handling department, I would opt for the Vegas but it's a very close call – surprisingly close. That super wide, low-profile tyre on the rear of the Deuce doesn't just look cool, that and those gorgeous forks help transform the Deuce into something well out of the ordinary.

The brakes on the Deuce were confidence inspiring too, there if needed, checking speed efficiently and with little or no shimmy or shake. In partnership with a responsive throttle, which made the very most of the engine's characteristics, I found that both tight and sweeping bends were equally enjoyable. Wind down, nip and tuck if necessary, choose the line and then roll open the throttle to bring you up and out.

The Harley-Davidson FXSTD Deuce still remains one of the most comfortable Softails too, while not everyone is enamoured with the slightly 'broken back' look of the Deuce when viewed from side on, I don't think I've met anyone who'd complain about the comfort of the Deuce's ample, yet well integrated seat. Plus, from any other angle the Deuce is an absolute winner, truly a classy looking and well thought out machine ... even to people who aren't your usual Harley/cruiser lovers. It wears those forks and that rear wheel with pride, and from clock to tail the perception is of being as holistically designed as the Vegas. Harley have invested a lot in producing the Deuce, it boasts many, many parts not to be found on any other Harley; at least not yet. Could the Deuce be a ground breaker, the next cautious step forward? Will more of the Softails pick up parts originally designed for the Deuce? Well, there

is no doubt that the Deuce is selling. It must be, I've seen them about, so Harley must be encouraged. And I can understand why the Deuce is selling too – it's definitely not just the looks, it is a seriously competent and well made motorcycle from Harley-Davidson, worthy of the name and worthy of my ultimate accolade; a proper bike.

Third Opinion:

Words: Mark

I'd ridden a standard tune Vegas a few weeks previously and was really looking forward to riding a Stage One version. I'd been very impressed with the standard bike; it steered, braked and went extremely well, but with a few more horsepower on tap this was going to be a whole lot of fun. I was also curious about the Deuce. The last new generation Harley I'd ridden for any distance was a 1988 Sportster Sport, the last Big Twin Softail a Softail Springer from the same year, so this would be the first time that I'd ridden a Fuel Injected Twin Cam 88, and a Deuce in particular.

The first thing I noticed about the Vegas was just how well it looks in black, and with spoked wheels too. I'm not a huge fan of the Ness-styled bodywork in silver paint, but in black it makes a lot more sense. Black is always a good colour for a bike, and cruiser style machines in particular, but, for my money, the black Victory has more presence than the silver bike, even though it is more understated. It looks slightly more menacing – rather apt for a tuned-up bike. Thumb the starter and the beast wakes from its slumber with an angry rumble from the less restricted exhausts, opening the throttle turns that rumble into a bark. It all feels promising, but does it perform as well as it sounds?

When riding the Victory the first thing that strikes you is just how well it all hangs together. The controls are all in the right places; the switchgear, pedals, levers, foot rests and handlebars all feel instantly familiar, and all work with a beautifully engineered, precise feel. Once you start to throw the bike about a bit, you are amazed at the amount of feedback the bike gives you. The Victory is incredibly well-balanced and well-mannered. It is incredibly stable, and comfortable. The brakes are very good, the suspension taut yet with enough travel to soak up the nastiest of potholes. Then you crack open the throttle and the amount of torquey American V-twin power from the Stage One Freedom engine takes your breath away. It just wants to go. Loads of bottom end grunt coupled with impressive mid-range power makes for a bike that is an absolute blast to ride, the incredible chassis making it a real pleasure through town or out on the open road, the noise from the exhausts making you grin from ear to ear.

Guess what? I really, really liked it.

Now where's the key for the Deuce?

Having not ridden a Big Twin Harley for a few years, I couldn't wait to get aboard the Deuce. Personally, I find the Deuce's styling a little strange, but not unpleasant. It certainly looks the business when in motion, probably because with rider aboard the abrupt lines of the rear mudguard sit lower over the beautiful solid rear wheel. Despite being new to the 88, getting acquainted with the Deuce wasn't unfamiliar territory. Straight away you know you are riding a Harley, and it's not just the fact that the air filter is in the way of your right knee (tee hee), it's the whole feel of the bike. In comparison to the Harleys of just a few years ago, the Deuce feels incredibly smooth, handles surprisingly well, and even has acceptable brakes. Plus, with the addition of the Stage One kit, the Deuce has awesome power delivery. Yet, it is still a Harley-Davidson. It still has a raw edge. It is the real deal; it feels, for want of a better word, badass. There's stuff I'd want to change straight away, I'd imagine that would be the same for most riders, which is all part of the appeal, perhaps. Number One on my shopping list after the Stage One kit would be a pair of progressive fork springs, followed by a set of super sticky tyres. There'd be quite a few sportsbike riders embarrassed by a well set-up Deuce, and what a blast that would be. Harley-Davidson, nice to meet you again.



The Vegas and the Deuce are both stunning motorcycles. The Victory handles better for me, uses superior engineering and has more power. Rationally, with sensible head on, it is the better motorcycle. If the Vegas didn't exist, I would be absolutely raving about the Deuce, but it does and for all practical considerations (except resale value – potentially – but time will tell) it blows the Harley away. But for all its attributes, the Vegas is the more sanitised of the pair, and while it is a pure American motorcycle, it doesn't have the heritage, tradition and style of the Harley. It all depends on whether the Harley stirs up your soul enough to stump up the extra two grand.