

## Dance With The Devil

Words & Pics: Rich King

**And ye the faithless recite together  
the ancient dogma: Behold, the  
Harley: Yea Verily. Ye shall not go.  
But if by some miracle thy do go, Ye  
shall not stop again and ye shall not  
go round corners either. Ye shall  
strew thine own parts across the  
highway like the bad seed cast into  
good furrow cuz thy vibrateth like a  
spaniel on hot coals ...**

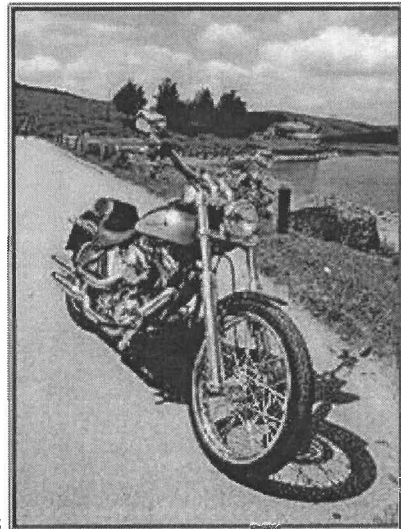
And ye shall cost too much...

Ah...

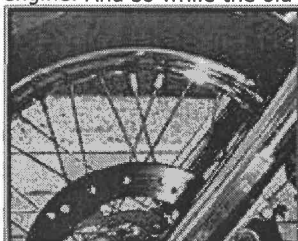
The sun was shining now, maybe just because I was picking up a Softail Deuce, Harley's latest addition to their Big Twin Softail range and the sun really does shine on the righteous, or maybe it shone because of an intricate interrelationship of sun, moon, air, sea and a revolving planet on the skew. Dunno. However I did know that riding the trusty and not too rusty XS1.1 down from Manchester to Northants had been an abysmal affair - a nasty combination of Motorway roadworks, irritable box pilots and that gawdawful semi-drizzle which sticks to the visor and slicks up the roadsurface, sucking up the diesel dregs from every pore. But yet, as I closed on Harley HQ in Brackley, Northamptonshire, the cloud cover was breaking, the road was drying and by the time I'd shoved the 22 year old Yamaha in-line four in amongst the shiny new vees in Harley UK's workshop, it was Summer again.

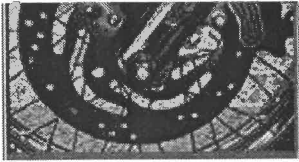
The Deuce was already outside glittering in the sunlight - the first time I'd seen one in the flesh, the usually stunning promotional photos I decided, definitely did not do this particular motorcycle justice. Its swooping lines from virtually any angle pleasing to my eye. And up close, I could also see just how different the Deuce was from the rest of the Harley range. A rare beast indeed, Harley-Davidson had obviously pushed the boat out on this one, bravely changing almost every single part.

In July 1998 (with much hullabaloo, because they don't do it very often... about every twenty years in fact) Harley-Davidson introduced a brand new motor, the Twin Cam 88. The Twin Cam immediately replaced the Evolution 1340 in two of the three Big Twin model families - the Touring FLs and the more sporty Dyna FXDs - but interestingly not the custom orientated Softail FXS range. We all - alright, me and my mates - assumed at the time that this was because Harley-D had problems shoe-horning the new, larger motor into the relatively compact Softail frame. That Evo continued to power Softails even through the 1999 range a year later certainly wasn't because Harley had a surplus of Evo Softails to clear. Harley have never, ever had a problem shifting Softails, they sell all they make, (in fact, they sell them before they've *made* them in the US market), so there had to be another reason. With the benefit of hindsight, I'd overlooked an obvious point: all the other Big Twins were rubber-mounted. When the TwinCam 88 finally was introduced last year into the 2000 Softail range, it came with a new prefix: 88B - the 'B' to denote 'balanced' - and a twin counter-balancing system inside the crankcase introduced to 'effectively cancel out vibrations' ... meaning, at least to cynical old me, that the reason the original Twin Cam 88 (still available in the Glides and Dynas) wasn't offered up to the existing solid mount Softail frame was because it actually vibrated like a git.



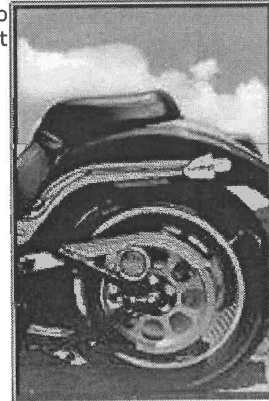
However, not only the engine is new. New too is the frame, subtly redesigned to accommodate the huge 1450 cc engine. And so while the old Softail favourites from Fat Boy to Night Train all look a little bit, well, cramped and stylistically stubby now, everything seems to flow on the Deuce. It can't be just that the Deuce has a longer tank than the rest of them, can it? Spooky. While the other Softail styles have been adapted to fit round the new motor and are all variations on a similar eighties custom theme, it is obvious that the Deuce has been designed from the ground up - taking its styling cues from nineties show winners from the Bay Area in California, from Bike Week in Daytona Beach and even further afield over into Europe, where the emphasis is more often on engineering, performance and line rather than just glitzy show. Harley have not, in the last 30 odd years, been shy to boldly swipe ideas from the custom scene: the very people who cut their precious bikes into pieces and rebuild them into something else. And to Harley's credit, they make no secret of it





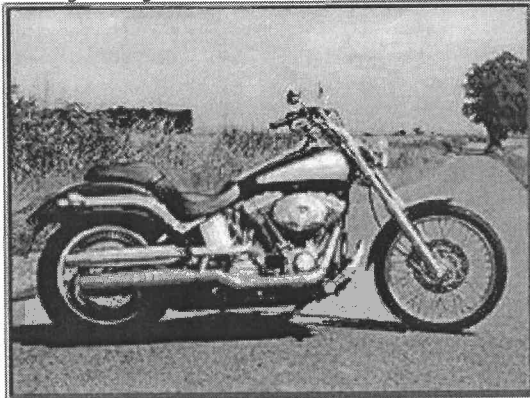
either, their designers are often seen stalking the ranks of stainless steel and polished alloy for more ideas and new solutions. The Deuce is a synthesis of modern custom thinking, sleek, powerful and dare I say even elegant, a word I thought I'd never use to describe a stock hog.

I won't bore you with a list of all the differences between the Deuce and the rest of the current range of Softails, but it is worth pointing out one or two items of particular interest. For example, the brand new front forks are truly a work of art, beautifully crafted they work supremely well too (but more of that later) and I was surprised that when the 2001 model range was announced recently that more Softails didn't sport them, but no, for the time being they are exclusively Deuce. As is the attractively machined 17inch solid rear wheel shod, again for the first time, with a big fat, but relatively low-profile 160/70 section, a staggering 70mm wider than any of the other standard Big Twins boast. And so, rather than adapt an existing style of mudguard to cover that rear wheel, Harley have designed a brand new one, with a frenched-in rear light and 'to die for' supporting struts cleaner than anything they've offered before. Impressed with the bold, adventurous yet surprisingly (for an American bike) tasteful styling, I couldn't wait to ride it away.



In some ways it's a shame that, when redesigning the smart new tank console Harley didn't redesign the ignition – oh, it works okay and is a nice solid piece of workmanship and everything but I just don't like putting the key in the ignition, unlocking it and then having to remove the key again and stashing it somewhere safe, only to have to repeat the whole procedure to disable it again every time I stop. The wicked temptation at petrol stations is always to merely switch off the motor and hope nobody watching knows anything about Harleys – but try explaining that one to Harley HQ if it disappears. I'd rather not thank you.

Gripe over and ignition on, you wait a few seconds while the electronic engine diagnostic thingy does its diagnosing (the little red 'Engine' idiot light on the console goes out if all is okay) pull out the choke which is still located on the left hand side between the cylinders and press the starter on the right hand handlebar and Bob's your Uncle, with a mighty kerchunk! the massive engine rumbles into life. Being a warm day now, I immediately went to half choke and the engine began to settle into the familiar (but not exclusive you understand) offbeat tick. Not loud though, even through the custom style dual shotgun pipes the engine shuffles rather than rumbles, the beautiful bass reluctantly left muffled for each potential owner to unleash... once the motorcycle isn't Harley's exclusive responsibility any more.

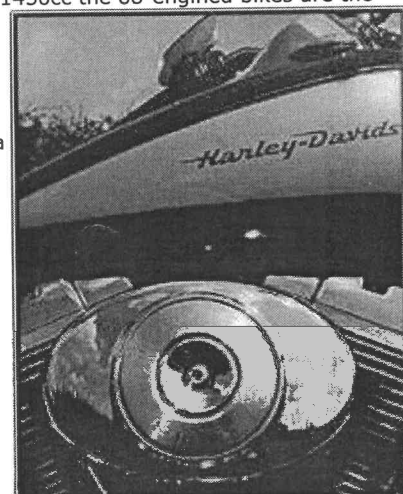


Settling into the stepped seat, I stretched my left leg out to the forward set front peg, selected first and feeding out the clutch, hooked the Deuce out of the Harley-Davidson compound and powered up the hill – destination: petrol station – and er, quickly by the look of the fuel gauge, which is mounted in the now-familiar dummy fuel cap on the left hand side of the petrol tank. By the High Street the choke was fully off and petrol station found, I poured in close to the 18.5 litres that the tank is capable of holding. Finally now I could relax, I hadn't stalled or dropped nearly £14,000 worth in full view of Harley-Davidson UK and I wasn't any longer just about to run out of petrol. Cool.

I opted, seeing as the sun was out and the bike would never be shinier, to stick to A and B roads back up to Manchester in the hope of finding a picturesque spot to take photos. A brilliant plan only marred by the fact that the Deuce turned out to be a fabulous motorcycle to ride and only after a good 60 miles or so did I finally and reluctantly get off to do some work on the road to Sheepy Parva.

For a start the 88B, even in stifled international trim, is a stonking motor. At 1450cc the 88-engined bikes are the biggest production motorcycle engines Harley have ever produced and rank among the biggest production motorcycle engines in the world. Featuring a significantly shorter 4inch stroke than previous Harley motors which actually allows it to feel – dare I say it – a bit revvy, the increased displacement means a snappier response too when you wind the throttle. Despite the vast mechanical improvements to the motor, you're still aware that you're riding a Harley, the feedback has not been engineered out, but you'll see still things in the mirrors at most speeds. And at most rpm, you won't suffer from the ancient Harley affliction of the dreaded white finger ... and rather importantly, things won't fall off – which will come as a bit of a novelty.

As with all Harleys, it pulls from nothing – the shovelfuls of torque allowing you to change up quickly through the gears into top, fifth, where, to be honest, you'll be staying for 98% of the time. The roll on, roll off throttle effect is very relaxing and rewarding but keep an eye on the speedo needle, you will be going a hell of a lot faster than you think: guaranteed. And whereas in the olden days of yore the relaxed beat of the engine also fooled the speed cops it won't fool the cold impartial electronic eye of the camera. Don't get me wrong though, the motor is no high strung Ducati or Suzuki vee, you will not be whisked past 100mph very often, and if you are, you'll



definitely know about it. No, the 88's beauty is that the power is exactly where you need it in regard to ordinary, everyday, y'know 10mph faster than the speed limit riding. From 0 to 90 it stomps bigtime and lays the power down between those figures in usable gobfulls.

Not long ago a mate of mine was following me over some twisty bits on Derbyshire's High Peaks. He was riding his nimble 750 Ducati SS while I was riding, of all things, the 1340 Springer Softail perhaps the nadir of Harley-Davidson impracticality – well, as far as most riders are concerned anyway. Pete was genuinely surprised, he'd had to work his Duke far harder than he'd expected to keep up – again I'm not saying that the Hog out-braked, out-

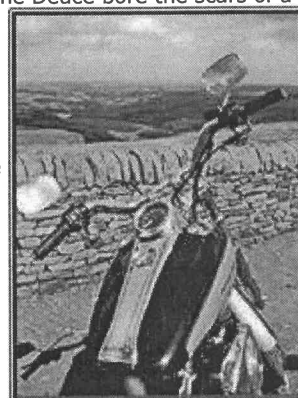


handled or was anything like as fast when used in anger, it was just that what power it did have was exactly in the right place. While he was fiddling round with gears and brakes and other unnecessary extras like that, I was rolling off the throttle as I chose my line and then rolling it on again. Lovely.

Back on the Deuce after the photo session I was pleased to note that under fairly normal riding conditions, both on A-Roads and round town the engine was still, in the Harley tradition, pretty economical. Only when opened up past 80mph did it swallow the stuff rapidly... another reason, if necessary, not to go there very often. Bolted solidly to the frame like it is, the motor's new counterbalancing needs to be good and it is. Vibration was minimal below 90mph while the gearbox continues to improve, (shifting was slicker than any other 88s I'd so far ridden) but that's not to say it's anything like a Honda yet. Needs more work boys! Up through the box was fairly sweet, but it still needed the familiar Harley blip of the throttle to help the gears mesh neatly on the way down. To be fair though, if you're on a Yam, ride it like one, if you're on a Harley ride it like a Harley, it helps.

I came off the A444 at Burton, slipped onto the A50 for a while then, still needing the A-Road fix, took off towards Ashfield and some serious hills either side of Buxton before dropping down into Stockport. I knew what to expect with the motor more or less when I picked it up, but I was not expecting the Deuce to handle particularly well. However I was to be very surprised – it went over and it went over easily despite the wheelbase, the lean angle too (36.7° on the right for goodness sake) more akin to Sportsters than low slung Big Twins, making roundabouts an absolute hoot. Take a look at the tyres if you don't believe me, how many Sunday Sport FireBlades have you seen lately with the tyres scrubbed out to the edges? The suspension – despite the expected American preference of soft front, hard rear set up – kept things on track very well, even over unexpected bumps, and the new stiffened (by a claimed 34%) frame kept you feeling secure mid-bend. Though I wouldn't trust the 'long life' Goodyear front tyre too much in the wet and would change it at the first opportunity, the new fat 160 rear was actually pretty confidence inspiring and – seeing as you ride Harleys by throwing the back end into bends rather than the front – grip wasn't too much of an issue. Well, okay in the dry it wasn't. Stinking coward I may be but if you think I'm cranking over £14,000 in the wet to see what happens, think again... It was interesting to note that the Deuce bore the scars of a previous test ride – telltale scuffing on the twin shotgun exhaust and forks told of another surprised hack finding out about the Deuce, lean angles taken to the max and presumably, roundabout photo-sessions.

Another very welcome surprise was the new improved braking system. Harley have introduced nothing fancy as you would expect, but it's still very good nevertheless. The single front and single rear discs capable of hauling up well over 350kg of laden motorbike with little fuss and plenty of feel. A real shock for everybody; stock Harley brakes that work, even in the wet. Admittedly, you still won't be pulling stoppies outside the disco to impress the ravers, but neither will you be pulling out quite so many lumps of Volvo from your teeth next time one pulls out on you.



As I negotiated the Stockport traffic on the way through to Ashton and home I still felt fresh. Riding the Deuce hadn't been a painful affair at all. Many cruiser riders begin to suffer after the first tank of fuel, but, as with many other Harleys the more miles you put on, the better. The fuel gauge warned of imminent reserve tap juggling so I pulled up at a cheap garage with 127 miles on the clock since Brackley and the last fuel stop. Stepping up out of the bike, I didn't creak, I didn't groan and my bum didn't feel flat. Even the forward set pegs hadn't caused any strain – at least for me it hadn't, with a 33-inch inside leg, the stretch around the air filter had been comfortable, and the brake and gear change felt in the right place. I could imagine though, that those with very much shorter pins might start to have problems. Mounted on the magnificent swept back risers, the fairly flat and wide handlebars were incredibly comfortable: as you sat into the machine they were there, just about exactly where you wanted them to be, the width too helping you to lever the front end at low speed trickling, where a dab of the rear brake, the ultra low centre of gravity and low revving engine response made for a surprisingly nimble and balanced package. Many people fearful of the sheer bulk and weight of Harleys are surprised if they are persuaded to sit in the machine and take it off the stand. Because the centre of gravity is well below the wheel spindles, up the bike comes with minimal effort and just feels planted on the ground. A feeling you also really come to appreciate on the motorway when the crosswinds are giving the vast majority of other road users real gip and you just keep ploughing forward.



The wide riders seat is well designed to complement the overall riding position but, again, I wouldn't have liked to try with sub 28-inch legs, while the rear seat remained practically unused except for a couple of shortish runs

ferrying my girlfriend back from the pub and two crash mats rolled round a tent who went with me to the Rock n' Blues – neither my girlfriend or the camping gear complained incidentally. But that's the way of it nowadays, unless you intend to cruise the city centre with a spare helmet desperately trying to impress top totty (and I mean male and female before you get started, I'm a modern guy) your partner will most likely have their own bike anyway. Rear seat comfort wasn't really tested to the full is what I'm saying ... Mandie's knees weren't in her ears, okay.

Rather than go straight home I rode down my local haunt for a quick one and yeah, alright, a bit of a pose (which let's face it you can do properly astride the Deuce). However many of my mates – grizzled bikers to the core and hateful of Harley (at least in a group) – rather unkindly suggested that Harley's latest addition to their custom cruiser fleet looked to them more like a Universal Japanese Cruiser than well, your average Universal Japanese Cruiser does. Was this in fact a backhanded compliment? I can't say really ... I wasn't expecting anybody to say they liked it, perish the thought. But, I think to Harley's credit, the Deuce doesn't immediately scream 'I'm a Harley!' anyway, the graphics are low key and the stance and line is definitely different.

I think, to be honest, bless their para-boots, my mates had been knocked sideways by the new styling; long, low and fairly lean for a Big Twin, the Deuce doesn't conform to their preconceived ideas of what a Milwaukee Monster should look like – the Deuce is clean and purposeful goddammit – Harleys should be sort of messy and mechanically Massey-Fergusson shouldn't they? All this conspicuously-sorted show and go seemed suspiciously Japanese. But the Japanese are concentrating their efforts to produce cruisers which look increasingly more like, well, Harleys – or at least, what everybody thinks Harleys look like – bobbed Glides in other words, and getting rather good at it too. So rather than again misguidedly attempting to reclaim Harley-esque styling, Harley have struck out in an exciting new direction, redefining the production cruiser, much as European manufacturers like BMW, Moto-Guzzi and Triumph have.

The Deuce is a brave move from an increasingly confident manufacturer. The whole package works, Harley are finally producing glitch free motorcycles and with the Deuce they are starting to strike out from their traditional styles with a whole new concept. The new chop challenger throws a shiny gauntlet down to the increasingly popular, but stylistically stagnant Japanese cruiser market. Harley-Davidson seem to be saying, 'Well, you copied everything else, copy this!'



## Specifications

**Make & Model** Harley-Davidson FXSTD (FXSTDI) Softail Deuce - specs for 2001

**Engine:** Twin Cam 88B (balanced). Air-cooled 45° V-twin.

**Displacement:** 1449cc (88 ci)

**Compression Ratio:** 8.81

**Bore & Stroke:** 95.3 x 101.6

**Torque:** 106.0Nm @ 3500rpm (105@ @ 3000 on injection)

**Fuel System:** Single Keihin 40mm Carburettor.  
Fuel Injected FLSTDI Deuce is also available.

**Exhaust System:** Over/under shotgun duals

**Oil Capacity:** 3.3litres

**Fuel Capacity:** 18.5 litres (includes reserve on carb version)

**Primary Drive:** Double-row (duplex) chain

**Final Drive:** Kevlar belt

**Overall Length:** 2424mm

**Seat Height:** 719mm

**Ground clearance:** 140.9mm

**Rake/Trail:** 34/126.9mm

**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, oil pressure light, engine diagnostic light (injection model).

**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:** £13,795 single Colour  
£13,995 two tone  
(SPEFI models are £14,095 single colour / £14,295 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

**Test bike kindly supplied by:** Harley-Davidson UK.  
High St,  
Brackley,  
Northamptonshire  
NN13 7DT  
Tel: 01280 706752