



Black Night, or A Lighter Shade Of Pale

Words & Pics: **Andy Hornsby**
Second Opinion: **Rich King**

This is a tale of two Harleys.

Not just any old pair of Harleys, but two motorcycles from the current range.

Not just any range either: not only are they both Softails, but they are also Softail Customs.

They share a common engine – the Twin Cam 88B – and a common chassis – the Softail. They both have a 32-degree rake and an identical 126.9mm trail. They both have a disk rear wheel, they have identical overall length (well, 4mm isn't worth mentioning), weight and ground clearance.

So why?

Why do Harley-Davidson make two such similar bikes?

Why should one cost at least two and a half thousand of your English pounds more than the other – or as much as £3,100 extra with all the bells and whistles - which amounts to 2-tone paint and fuel-injection in common parlance.

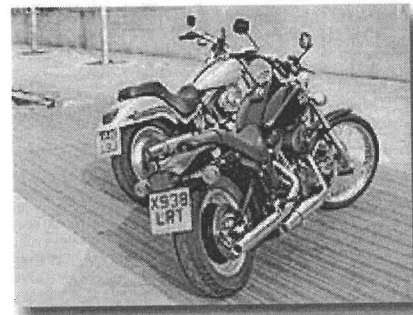
The biggest why of all, though, is why the hell are they so different? ... or is that how?

If ever a pair of bikes needed testing head-to-head it is these.

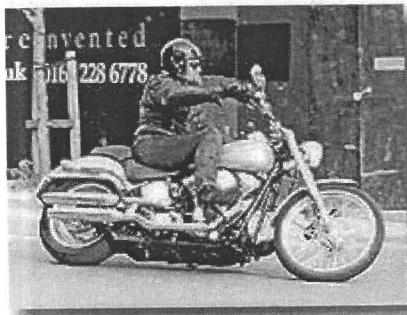
Rather than concentrating on the similarities we need to look at the differences to get to the story. Ignore the cosmetics for now because they're easy to spot and are entirely subjective. What we're interested in is the back wheel and tyre: the one that is fitted to the Deuce. Okay, so there will be those who'd class that as a cosmetic touch but they'd be wrong. Oh, so wrong. Fat back tyres look good, but to get a fatter back tyre you need to either compromise handling with a massive balloon tyre or else go low profile. Low profile tyres are making in-roads into the hearts and minds of the world's custom Harley builders but they have a smaller rolling radius – which lowers the overall gearing – and they also reduce the total height of the wheel, dropping the height of the back end and compromising ground clearance. Despite that, though, that's the way that Harley-Davidson's designers went ... and they got away with it. They did so by abandoning tradition and fitting a seventeen-inch rear wheel, which retained both the height of the wheel and the rolling radius. The wider tyre has shallower, stiffer sidewalls and offers greater lean angles for the same ground clearance. It also lends the whole frame with a more lively character making this by far the most flickable Softail yet.

Flickable Softails are not a concept known to many riders who are far more used to scraping a large percentage of their undercarriage around roundabouts and tight corners, but a flickable Softail is what the Deuce is.

But at what price?

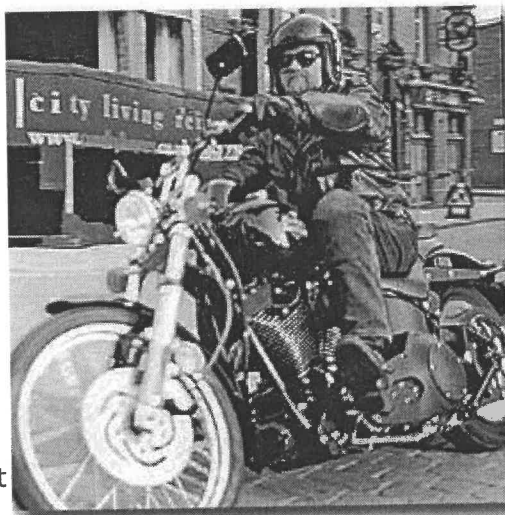


Well, financial considerations aside, none. The low profile tyre if anything gives it a smoother ride and, coupled with the forks that are currently only fitted to this model, most of the jarring from poor roads is absorbed in a most unSoftail-like fashion. I'd even go as far as to say this is a sophisticated Softail: more agile than the FatBoy, more refined than a Heritage and a world apart from the Night Train which feels like a radically different bike altogether in spite of the common heritage. Parts bin engineering was never so diverse. The only disappointment was that we didn't take the Softail Standard too which, as an unpainted Night Train saves another grand on the asking price for much the same package ... but is it? That's one for next year.



But what of the Night Train? The basic blacked-out bruiser of the range screams attitude and instils that attitude in you as you ride it. Rougher round the edges than the Deuce, the lower seat and bolt-upright handlebar risers put you in a different riding position which is reminiscent of Billy's bike back in Easyrider. It has less of a spine jarring ride than its hardtail forebear but it feels like one when you swap to it from the Deuce. The forks show their age with their greater tendency to clunk when taking up the slack under heavy braking (for those unfamiliar with the term, "heavy braking", you really do need to check out a post-2000 bike), and the bigger tyre, running a higher pressure absorbs less of the road surface's imperfections leaving you at the mercy of the underslung softail shocks alone. I always used to think that balloon tyres were major contributors to the ride quality of a bike, but switching between these two has opened my eyes.

Uncompromising in its stance, the Night Train is the bike that grabs the attention of bikers when parked alongside the Deuce, while its sibling gets the adoration of the rest of the motorcycling public, and the world at large. Park the two side-by-side in an up and coming town centre café district and you get the impression of the Night Train being dragged there by the Deuce for a lesson in manners. Put them both in a multi-storey car park at night and the Deuce looks like a victim, while the Night Train seems infinitely more at home, blending into the surroundings.



The comparisons are manifold: the Night Train is the prostitute to the Deuce's debutante; the Night Train is the blue-collar mechanic to the Deuce's white-collar technician. One is the hero while the other the villain, but those labels can be attached to either according to your sense of social justice. I'd be surprised if the same person would be torn between the two because there's a lot of self-image in both bikes, and the two styles are mutually exclusive.

As ever, with any Harley, there is the option of making your own machine, which is where the Softail Standard comes in: a blank canvas upon which to use your own crayons. In that context you get a straight-up choice between blank Softail and black Night Train: the Deuce doesn't figure in that calculation because you'd be forking out too much money for someone else's interpretation of the ultimate custom to consider throwing it away. What the Deuce does offer though is a wealth of information, and the first thing I'd be doing – given the basic Softail and a couple of grand to play with – would be a seventeen-inch rear wheel and low profile tyre, and I'd think about the forks ... and then I'd ride it to see what the next step should be. Surprisingly, while the Harley accessories catalogue offers the Deuce forks as a complete assembly, it doesn't



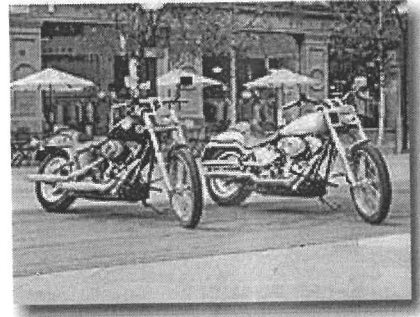


provide a selection of seventeen-inch rear wheels to bolt onto your Softail – or anything else for that matter which seems to be a major omission. PM do make a range of wheels that come in seventeen inch sizes, though, or you could revert to a laced wheel and a few rims are about if you look hard enough – unfortunately none are quite so lovely to my eye as the turbo billet wheel on the Deuce itself.

Back to the plot, however, and the stylistic treatment and this is very much a matter of tradition versus 21st century interpretation.

The Night Train retains the components that have been trademark Harley for the last couple of decades: fatbobs (even if it is now a fake one-piece affair), cast dash with the big speedo, bobbed rear mudguard and the lighting rig that has seen service on every custom since the Shovelhead Fatbob. The lines are known, the shape is classic Harley and nothing is out of place. They've put the Badlander-style seat on to keep the silhouette low, and to cause great discomfort to pillions, but this is really a rider's bike and stuff the rest. To be honest, I couldn't persuade my significant other from siting on the Night Train except when stationary ... with the engine off. She muttered something about her coccyx and went back to her beer.

The Deuce has taken a lead from the west coast custom scene and has traded convention for a stretched tank, deep seat, deep dish headlamp, frenched rear lamp in a more brutally hacked off rear guard. The stretched tank has demanded a new dash, and a thing of great beauty it is, although I can't say the same for the tank which is too horizontal for my taste and doesn't flow with the lines of the frame as it could – and I believe should. If H-D weren't being so conservative with their paint schemes, the Deuce would have benefited enormously from the optional "chameleon" flamed paintwork which breaks up that horizontal line beautifully, but we can only speculate on the impact that would have had on an already steep asking price. Another opportunity missed is a properly thought-out headlamp bracket rather than a bracket on the original bracket that allows the deeper dish of the headlamp shell, but which also compounds the tendency for the headlamp to bob around like a demented thing. I worry about this sort of detail because it does look, for all the world, as though you are constantly flashing oncoming traffic and the potential for a cock-up is too great. That doesn't mean that the Night Train's doesn't bob about too, just that it does so less. I'd be disappointed if I'd been unable to improve on such a feature had I built the bike myself. Two minor bugbears, but significant ones that aren't quite offset by the beautifully crafted rear indicators' union with the mudguard bracket, nor the stunning front forks. The seat is a vast improvement over the Night Train but at the expense of the line, and I had minor complaints about if from both pillions who were obliged to swing a leg over it.



One role that I imagine the Deuce playing is as a part-time tourer. The Harley catalogue for 2000 showed a line of hard luggage that was designed specifically it: a stylised update to the slantbag which complements the shape of the Deuce, and offers a soft touring alternative to the Heritage Softail. With a windshield that better suits the bike than the stock police screens and you've got yourself a Deuce Convertible that would be a great mile-eater as well as an excellent streetbike. For the record, said hard panniers (or at least very similar ones) are now called Softail Hard Saddlebags and are offered for all Softails, while a more bulbous version does the same for the Dynas.

On the road, the clear blue water separating the bikes becomes wider and deeper.

The Deuce is happy to be hustled anywhere and everywhere. Nothing touched down during my time with the bike and that covered a wide variety of roads and road surfaces over six hundred miles. The bars on their pullback risers allow a slight bend in the arms, and the chance to settle back against the almost vertical upright of the seatback. The



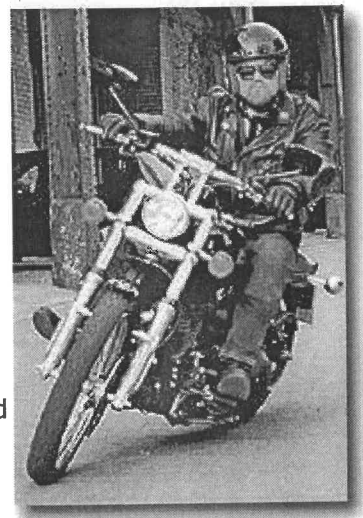
frame was taught, the brakes sharp and never once did it feel as though it was getting out of shape. A revelation. Well mannered, it gives you chance to settle back and enjoy the ride, almost as an onlooker which isn't to say that it isn't an involving ride, just that in normal mode it is very neutral. Push it and wake yourself up a little and the feedback is there, but it isn't a struggle even then.

The Night Train is another matter entirely, for better or worse. From the first time you snick the gearbox into second gear, you and the bike are inextricably linked. The power from the identical engine seems to be more raw, and the vibration more tangible. You stretch to reach the bars atop straight risers and that sets your back upright. Your smile turns to a grimace though nothing other than the spirit of the bike. Gone is that "hello, nice to see you" bonhomie fostered by the Deuce, replaced by a "get out of the way, I'm coming though" that really should be reinforced by a louder rasping exhaust note. You're the same person, but your attitude has changed and that is entirely down to the inheritance of the Night Train: I get a similar red mist on my ZL900 Eliminator which shares arms straight-out, back upright riding position. It sounds as though you might be more dangerous in this state, but I think the opposite is true: you are more alert, more involved and better able to deal with what comes. You're also less likely to be messed about with by your fellow road users.

It isn't without its downside, and the primary one for me is the oh-so beautifully shaped Badlander seat, which had me shifting from cheek to cheek after a hundred mixed riding miles. I didn't attempt to talk Marie into taking the pillion perch because life is too short ... and I knew how easily the bike grounded when solo. The lesser lean angles mean it is all too easy to drag the right hand side of the bike when circumnavigating roundabouts. Not that the left hand side is immune to contacting terra firma when ridden in a spirited fashion, but we've lived with that for a long time now and there's an awful lot of metal to get through before it becomes an issue.

The other strangeness is that the handling of the Night Train feels more ponderous. It isn't that it is more ponderous, it's actually that it feels like a bike running a 34-degree rake and a sixty-six inch wheelbase, while the Deuce doesn't. Doing the moving shots I almost ran Rich down a couple of time waiting for the thing to tuck under and turn, and I overshot any sort of mental marks I'd set myself. A couple of miles later and I was happier, but that first ten minutes of cone dodging manoeuvres brought up more questions than answers, having literally just climbed off the Deuce doing similar stuff. A marked understeer continued to haunt me for the rest of the week, which was unsettling for its very existence when the Deuce displayed no such tendency, but with the familiarity of ownership it can be accounted for.

Lastly, in this comparison, is the fact that the Deuce was injected whereas the Night Train, and all Night Trains, was carburetted. Other than changes in the cold-starting procedures there should be few differences, but I have noticed before that the injected models seem to have a sweeter running temperament about them, and this could have accounted for some of the sophisticated feeling of the Deuce, but I don't believe all of it.



The feeling of crudeness in the Night Train's engineering remained throughout the course of the test, which was a surprise as I initially thought it was the Deuce's sophistication that showed it up. The forks clashed on the rebound more often than I expected of a new bike, the rear suspension jarred on all but the smoothest of surfaces and, in spite of all improvements to both callipers and disks, the brakes seemed less keen than on the Deuce.

There is an underlying question surrounding the Night Train, and that is whether it is engineered to be crude, or whether it is crudely engineered. With the age of the machine – and it is not an old donkey that has run its course – I prefer to think the former and I'll tell you why. It's because there are people out there who will be reading this who do not want the sophistication of the Deuce, who rue the passing of the Shovel, and the Evo with their long-stroke vibrations reaching through solid engine mounts to massage the rider. People for who the high speed vibes of the 88B are not desirable in their pitch and intensity. People who will point an accusing finger at the balanced Twin Cam motor, which has sanitised the Softail: that last bastion of traditional Harley-Davidson engineering. The bad news is, if that is the case, that the Twin Cam 88B has created a dilemma in the Night Train insofar as the crudity of the cycle parts are in stark contrast to the smooth running engine. I will go as far as to suggest that the natural home for such riders who have a passion for new metal is the Dyna Wide Glide, for while it damps its vibration through the rubber mounting system it does provide sensory feedback at low revs while allowing comfortable cruising at speeds where the last vestiges of the balanced engine's vibrations are making a nuisance of themselves. Either that or the price of second-hand Evo Softails will rise.



We will see what lessons Harley learn from the Deuce experiment, and to be honest I expected more Deuce derived technology hitting the rest of the range for 2001: notably the low-profile tyres on bigger wheels on anything with a sports tag – and I'm thinking Dyna Superglides here – and the custom forks migrating to the WideGlide and other custom Softails if only because production in greater numbers has got to bring down units costs. Whether that will bring down the price of the Deuce over time is anyone's guess, but I hope it does because while price brings exclusivity, it also puts it

beyond the reach of some who really should be looking at this bike to meet their needs.

And there you have it. Two similar bikes that are completely different in so many ways. To look at them in the catalogue suggests a styling exercise but to get properly acquainted with them in the metal brings out a plethora of detail changes that give them wholly different characters and I would venture to suggest that if you like one, you'll barely tolerate the other. There is only one question that remains, in my mind, and that is why, when a bike like the Night Train makes such a point of being black, is it offered in Jade Sunglo Pearl as well? Jade Sunglo Pearl, in case you were wondering, has more than a suggestion of British Racing Green but richer.

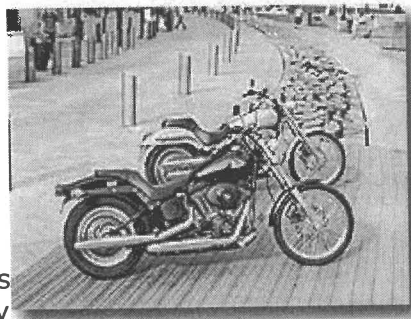
For my part, in closing, I'm pleased to report that Rich volunteered to take the Night Train back to the nice folks at Harley-Davidson UK and give me the Deuce back for that final journey: the two hundred mile round trip to Leeds knocked any final affection I had for the Night Train out of me. I love to look at it, but I would only buy one if I have a grand to spend sorting out its shortcomings for my type of riding, and then I'd be looking at the Softail Standard as a blank canvas instead probably - and that would give me my thousand quid to play with. He thinks he's got the better deal, I think I have, but then we agree on so little which is why we get on ... and which is the reason why we do all of these tests as double-headers.

Vive la difference!

Second Opinion

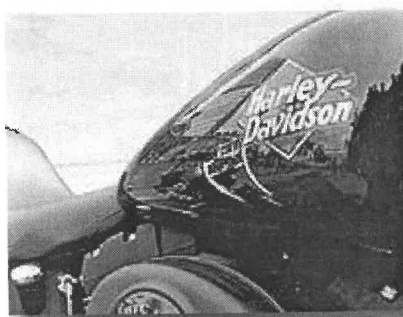
Words: Rich King

Ridden back to back, the very, very first thing that impresses is how very different these two motorcycles are. Not a particularly surprising opening to a head-to-head road test if, say, I was comparing an RS125 and a V-Max but when you consider I'm rattling on about two 2001 Harley-Davidson big twins both of which are Softails that statement starts to sound really quite odd. Especially since both share identical frames, identical weight and ground clearances, identical motors displacing identical amounts of fuel and air of course, with nigh-on identical power outputs: one's got a black painted carburetted motor and the other's got a chromed-up lekky squirter – and er, that's about it – apart from the 'pipes).



So the obvious question that begs is 'Why?'

Why, and maybe even 'How?' ... but hang on, no, soddit, I don't honestly care why and how – that's more Andy's bag – they are different and that's that. The only real question here for me is 'Which one did I like best?' And the answer is ever so easy – even though it shouldn't be:



The Night Train.

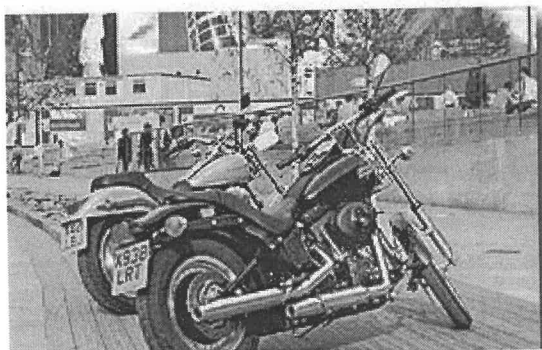
Without the slightest shadow of a doubt.

I do feel guilty about it though, I loved that 2000 Deuce last year and this 2001 model is no worse – except for a gopping paint-job perhaps. The Deuce *is* a fabulous motorcycle; you know it as soon as you sit on it, the seating position is spot on, the wide bars allowing plenty of purchase and road presence. If anything, it had more

stock grunt than the Night Train and the road holding, handling and brakes are nothing short of superb.

The Deuce too is a real show-stopper in the looks department. Oozing class and unarguably impressive – bikers respect it for sure – but it's especially attractive to the General Public: well, a gert big, shiny chopper with a Harley logo on it, the GP's *got* to love it. In comparison to all that conspicuous showmanship the Night Train comes across as a bit of a utilitarian workhorse, and quite a small horse at that.

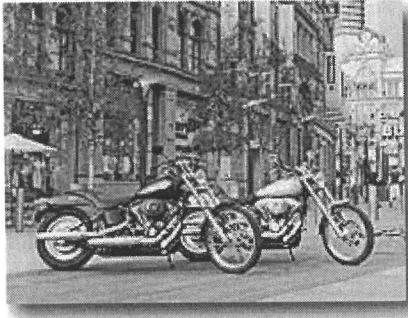
Because it's mad; even side by side the Deuce seems to dwarf a now seemingly spindly and dowdy Night Train. The only reason for it as far as I can make out is almost purely optical – the Deuce is a piffling 4 mm longer than the Night Train – just 4 mil – that's even smaller than that teeny screw you spent ages trying to find after you started fiddling with your Mikuni's jetting yesterday. And while the Deuce does boast an extra three inches in saddle height (76mm if we're being precise) – which is heading for Sportster Sport and T-Sport country – overall size wise there really isn't that much in it. In fact the wheel base of the Night Train is *longer*! But yet the Deuce's chrome and light livery, along with its solidly filled aspect lend it more substance than your basic, all over black Night Train ... the fashion pundits must have it right then, if you're a fatty, wear lots of black and look smaller.



Never worked for me.

Certainly too, this Deuce's single colour silvery grey scheme makes it look a lot bulkier, even than the dual coloured Blue and White 2000 Deuce American-V tested last year – compare the pictures – it's surprising how much difference a paint job makes isn't it. Last year I was using words like 'elegant' and 'long and low-slung' to describe *that* Deuce, I'd be very hesitant to use such expressions to describe this one ... and all because of the paint job! £200 extra it is, to opt for the dual colour options on many of Harley's offerings; and for once I'd be sorely tempted to cough-up the extra dosh because I feel it makes such a startling difference.

The injection Deuce is simply no-worries riding from cold. The engine management does away with any fiddling with choke and engine blipping while the Night Train offers only the carburetted option. Not that *I* mind terribly, at least a rider is fully aware when their engine has reached optimum working temperature and the range of after-market carbs is breathtaking. However, the standard carb has a few potentially worrying habits when temperature and/or atmospheric pressure drop, like icing. Yeah true, many riders do not opt to ride in winter, or take their pride and joy up many mountains, but the problem can rear its head on those slightly higher hills, especially with a colder motor ... and weather conditions can change up there fast, even on the best days. Just be aware is all.

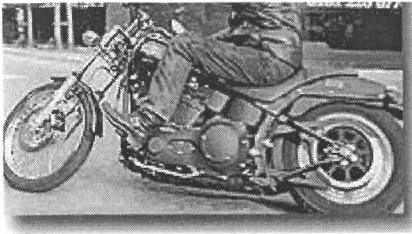


The Deuce seemed to get hot fast, and get a lot hotter when road conditions were more congested. Possibly exacerbated by the injector, I'd put the extra heat generation mainly down to the amply applied chrome-smothered motor, and smothered is the right word in this case – chromed engines simply cannot disperse as much heat as their less flashy un-chromed brethren – while looking triffic, chrome is not a particularly impressive high-performance modification. The black painted Night Train motor in comparison, travelling alongside the Deuce both on short city trips or long distance, full to empty tank runs, ran very noticeably cooler. Again though, if you visualise only using your machine on fairly short hops on high days and holidays, a motor which tends to run hot isn't really going to be a big issue. In fact you could argue, over those short distances the extra heat generated may even be beneficial for the motor, allowing it to warm up properly, quicker, and again arguably, look better doing it.



Both the Deuce and the Night Train score bigstyle as totty magnets, however they attract slightly different types of fluff. The Deuce loudly shouts 'I'm dead expensive me!' and attracts those people that like that sort of thing. While the Night Train, excreting menace like a hung-over cobra and forcing the rider to adopt an aggressive posture just to ride it normally, snarls 'Me and this rider are seriously bad-ass!' and attract that type. The Deuce at least gives both the attached and unattached owner a fighting chance to hold on to a relationship though: while not overly user friendly, the pillion of the Deuce is tolerable, at least over a moderate distance. But the Night Train's fast-back gunfighter 'pillion' perch really does require a hard-arse as seriously bad as the image. Funnily enough though I found that the roles are reversed up front. The Deuce's front seat looks like it should be supremely comfortable, but it isn't *quite* as comfy as it looks over distance, while the sleek, minimally padded and plain hard Night Train's rider seat was a superb piece of design, causing me no discomfort whatsoever. Just goes to show.





Ever since the Night Train was introduced in 1998 I've wanted to ride one and as Editor of SuperTwins, a then-new Harley magazine I figured I had a pretty good chance. However Maz Harris, bless 'im, bloody got in first and nobody else got a look in – even Harley-Davidson had a job getting it back!

Specifications

Make & Model	Harley-Davidson FXSTB Night Train	Harley Davidson FXSTDI Deuce
Engine:	Twin Cam 88B (balanced). Air-cooled 45° V-twin.	Twin Cam 88B (balanced). Air-cooled 45° V-twin.
Displacement:	1449cc (88 ci)	1449cc (88ci)
Compression Ratio:	8.81	8.8:1
Bore & Stroke:	95.3 x 101.6	95.3 x 101.6
Torque:	106.0Nm @ 3500rpm	105@ @ 3000 on injection
Fuel System:	40mm Keihin Carburettor	FLSTCI Sequential Port Electronic Fuel Injected (SPEFI) model tested. FXSTD Deuce also available with Keihin 40mm Carburettor
Exhaust System:	Staggered shorty duals duals	Over/Under Shotgun Duals
Oil Capacity:	3.3 litres	3.3 litres
Fuel Capacity:	18.9 litres (includes reserve)	18.5 litres (includes reserve on carb model)
Primary Drive:	Double-row (duplex) chain	Double-row (duplex) chain
Final Drive:	Kevlar belt	Kevlar belt
Overall Length:	2420mm	2424mm
Seat Height:	643mm	719mm
Ground clearance:	140.9mm	140.9mm
Rake/Trail:	34 degrees / 126.9mm	34 degrees / 126.9mm
Wheelbase:	1697.9mm	1690.3mm
Dry Weight:	305kg	305kg
Lean Angles:	30° left / 31° right	33.2° left / 36.7° right
Instruments:	Electronic speedo with odometer and resettable trip meter. Fuel gauge, oil pressure light, engine diagnostic light.	Electronic speedo with odometer and resettable trip meter. Fuel gauge, low fuel light, oil pressure light, engine diagnostic light.
Colour Options:	Vivid black, jade sunglo pearl	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:	FXSTB Carb only £11,195	FXSTDI EFI Models: £14,095 single colour

· fxstb v fxstd

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

~~£17,295 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 bikes kindly Harley-Davidson UK.
supplied by: High St, Brackley, Northamptonshire NN13 7DT
Tel: 01280 706752