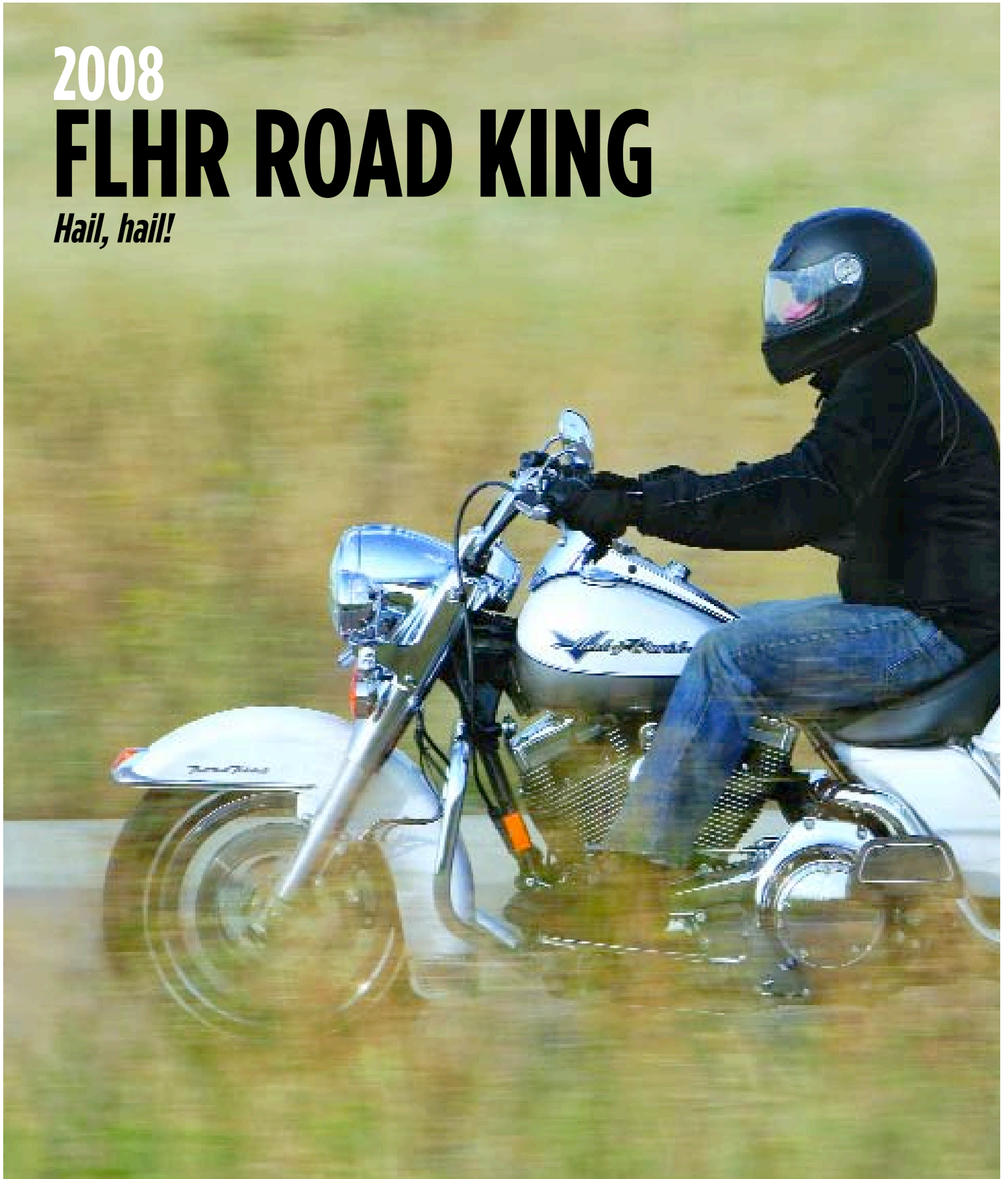


2008 FLHR ROAD KING

Hail, hail!





Of the many things that I'm sure you look for in *American Iron Magazine's* singular bike reviews, at the top of the list must be our travel itineraries.

I mean technical information is okay. It has its place. And an honest breakdown of the motorcycle and its specific ride quality is to be expected. But what you're really after is the dirt on how we get to and from the exotic locations where we pick up our test bikes. Fair enough. I won't keep you waiting any longer.

Some of you may recall my review of the excellent 2008 Road Glide in the December '07 issue. That dissertation found me tick-tacking around canyons, mountains, and deserts on my way from Sturgis back to Los Angeles. How, you must have wondered, did I get to Sturgis? Truth be told, I originally concocted a dicey scheme involving GPS and a hot-air balloon. But then duty called, and I was informed that instead I would be riding this immaculate '08 Road King to the party in the Black Hills. Imagine my relief.

I've said it before, but if there were such a thing as midride refueling, where the Harley mother ship would roll up at 70 or 80 mph, provide you with some relief and sustenance, and then top you off, I believe I could ride the King until the whole machine simply fell apart. It's that kind of a bike. Once you get on, you don't want to get off. I've always felt that way about Road Kings, and things have only gotten better for 2008.

Having put about 2,000 carefree miles on the King, I was a bit reluctant to turn it over to the H-D crew working Sturgis, or should I say Rapid City, their headquarters for the rally. The

PHOTOS BY BOB FEATHER



bike, as is often the case, had become my trusty friend. But it didn't slowly grow on me. I dug it the second I roared out of the Motor Company's fleet center in Los Angeles. I'd met up with Chris Maida that morning, moments before we picked up our bikes, his a Softail Custom, and mine, well, that's obvious.

On most of our cross-country expeditions I end up the pack mule, and this time was no different. However, when summoned, the King is extremely capable carrying a massive load. Its weather-resistant and lockable GTX hardbags are ample enough to take most, if not all, of your gear. Those with more gluttonous tendencies (that would be me) can slap a huge bag on the back and easily strap it down to a variety of secure points that won't endanger your paint or your person.

Fully packed, I mounted up, sunk into the subtly studded and plush, yet not over-padded, seat and reached for the bars. Something was different. Then I remembered that the factory had treated the King to a new handlebar design that places the bars a little closer to you. I can't say how this would affect a taller rider, but for me, at a stunning 5'8", it made a nice difference. Gone was the slightly forward slouch that's plagued me when long-haul cranking Kings of yore.

Thundering swiftly down the highway, more or less in a straight line, is definitely where the King reigns. That's not to say that it isn't adept swinging around town or even getting a bit (and not much more than a bit) aggressive in the twisties. Given its stout size and the fact that it weighs in at 721 pounds, the bike's nimble handling and remarkably lightweight feel

constantly come as a surprise. What also comes as a surprise is something H-D would do well to rectify in 2009. For all the King's glory, its front end often feels vague and a bit mushy when eating up sweepers at speeds over, say, 70 mph. It's not terrifying by any means, but it doesn't inspire you to gun harder. By comparison, the heavier Road Glide is famous for being planted in such situations. But we're not here to talk about the Glide. And besides, that's my only complaint about the otherwise most worthy and regal King.

When gazing upon the King, one can't help but be entranced by its majestic looks. Unquestionably the most stylish and unencumbered of Harley's touring models, the King is classic in every sense of the word, from its monster Hiawatha headlight and chrome nacelle to its handsome (and new), full-length console topped off with a simple speedo that now includes a fuel range indicator. No radio, CD player, CB, or other excessive gadgets. Those distractions weren't around back in the day anyway. Perfect. Adding to the nostalgic style, my King was fitted with optional chrome aluminum profile laced wheels that set off the sled's elegant White Gold Pearl/Pewter Pearl hue. If laced rollers aren't your thing, the bike comes standard with black nine-spoke, cast-aluminum numbers.

Like every other Big Twin in the Harley family, last year the King was treated to the factory's gutsy 1584cc Twin Cam 96" motor with Electronic Sequential Port Fuel Injection and H-D's six-speed Cruise Drive trans. The powerful setup exhales through a completely redesigned exhaust system that

allows the mufflers to flow more air while remaining within EPA noise regulations. What a difference it all makes — at any altitude, and I got way high.

There are other royal improvements to this year's King. Everyone will have his favorite, but the wise money is on the new Br embo triple-disc brake system featuring optional ABS. Yes, optional means you don't have to get it, but if you scrimp and then ever happen to really need ABS you'll be — well, you get the picture. It works. Don't scrimp. Next on the list is the beefed-up, 6-gallon fuel tank, always handy when pounding out the long miles. Just remember that your pals might not be carrying as much juice as you. Or you can simply blow them off.

Running down the line,

the '08 King has optional Electronic Cruise Control that encourages, among other things, hands-free riding. However, it won't lock in above 80 mph so you might not catch the 3:10 to Yuma. The bike has also been equipped with an Electronic Throttle Control, which makes the cables disappear. If I understand this correctly (which I probably don't) a sensor in the throttle assembly electronically relays information to a motor that tells the fuel injection system when to open and close the butterfly. Whew. Got that? Helping the Electronic Throttle Control is a new Isolated Drive System located in the rear sprocket. Its point is to virtually eliminate drive belt slack and deaden noise while accelerating, shifting, and cruising. The whole game seems to work beautifully. Those seeking further information on the King's many fea-



tures should contact my secretary.

A number of people on American Iron's web forum (www.AIMag.com) recently bristled that they "already know Sam doesn't like windshields." Not to scratch open wounds, but it should be noted that the King does come with a full detachable windshield — detachable being the operative word. Someday I'll grow up. I promise.

The most powerful and refined version of one of Harley's all-around greatest bikes, the 2008 Road King rules. Period. I'd love to say more about the bike, but, unfortunately, I've now even run out of space to regale you with tales of our flight from LA back to New York. Oh, well. Something to look forward to. **AIM**

TECH SHEET

FLHR Road King

Length:	93.7" (238cm)
Unladen seat height:	29.9" (75.9cm)
Ground clearance:	5.1" (12.9cm)
Rake:	26 degrees
Trail:	6.2" (15.7cm)
Wheelbase:	63.5" (161.2cm)
Engine:	Rubber-mounted Twin Cam 96 (1584cc)
Compression:	9.2:1
Fuel system:	Electronic Sequential Port Fuel Injection (ESPFI)
Transmission:	Six-speed Cruise Drive
Front tire:	Dunlop Harley-Davidson Series D402F MT90B-16" 72H
Rear tire:	Dunlop Harley-Davidson Series D402 MU85B-16" 77H
Fuel capacity:	6.0 gallons (22.7L)

Oil capacity:	4.0 quarts (3.8L)
Shipped weight:	740 pounds (335kg)
Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR):	1,259 pounds (572kg)
Front brake:	Dual four-piston calipers, 11.5" x .20"
Rear brake:	Four-piston caliper, 11.5" x .28"
Exhaust system:	Chrome crossover duals with slash-up end caps
Front fork:	41.3mm, telescopic
Rear shocks:	Air-adjustable
Wheels:	16" nine-spoke, black cast aluminum (laced option)
Handlebars:	Stainless steel Buffalo
Colors:	Vivid Black, Black Pearl, White Gold Pearl, Dark Blue Pearl, Crimson Red Sunglo, Suede Blue Pearl/Vivid Black, Olive Pearl/Vivid Black, White Gold Pearl/Pewter Pearl, Crimson Red Sunglo/Candy Red Sunglo
MSRP:	\$17,595-\$18,325