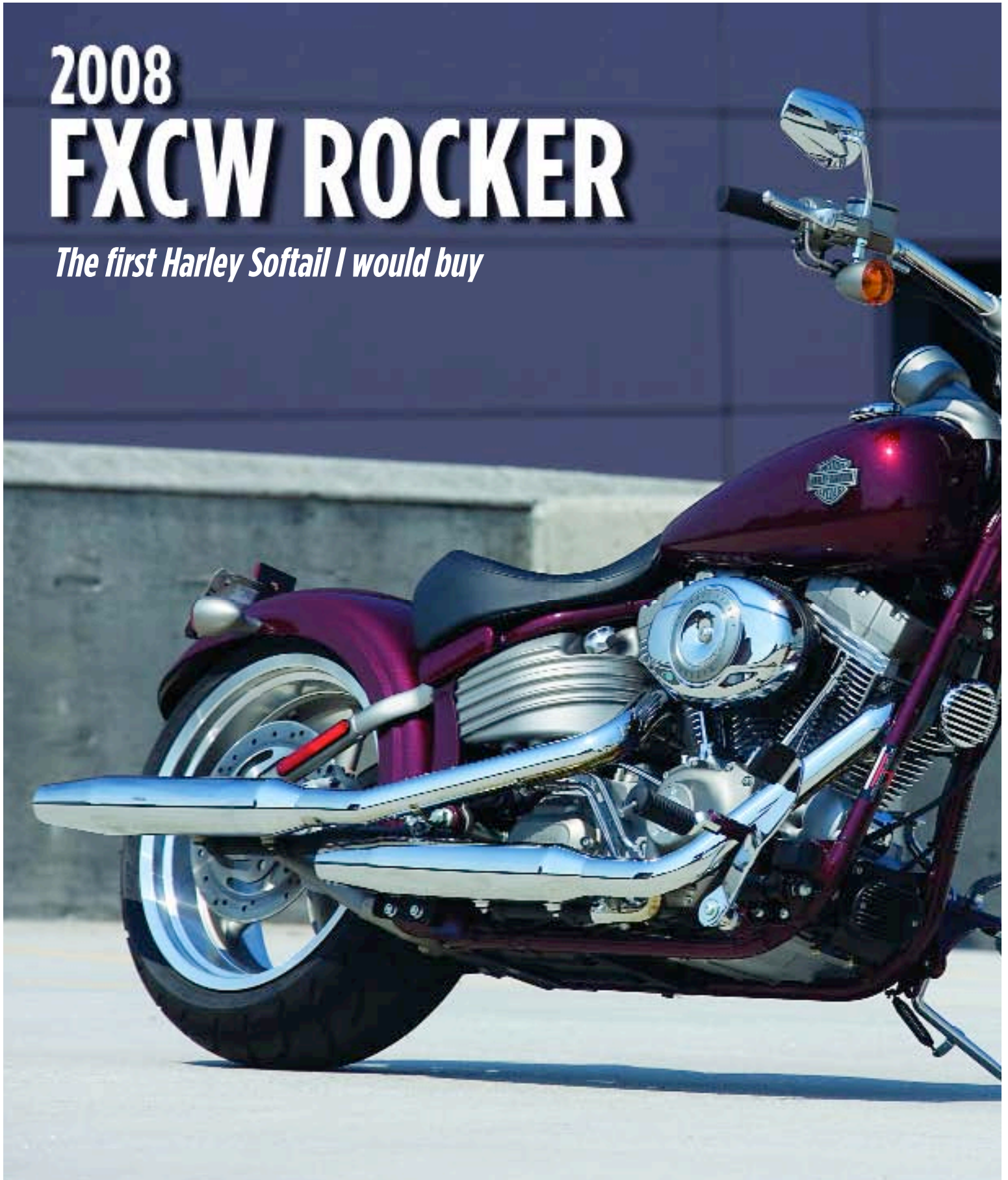


2008 FXCW ROCKER

The first Harley Softail I would buy





PHOTOS BY TOM RILES AND KEVIN WING

HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT THE SOFTAIL family of motorcycles put style before function. However, with the introduction of the new 2008 Rocker, it looks like that has changed. The Rocker (\$17,295-\$17,640) and its blinged-out sister, the Rocker C (\$19,840), have set a new precedent for Pro-Street Softails, and signaled a paradigm shift in both the styling and engineering departments of Harley-Davidson. Now that I have ridden the Rockers, it's clear to me that these bikes are the most significant evolution of the Softail line since it was redesigned in 2000.

For the record, it was at the Motor Company's 2008 model launch in Baltimore that I came to the above conclusions. During the launch, the moto-press had unprecedented access to the engineers and stylists that brought this bike to fruition. Like the rest of its family, the Rocker's shock absorbers are hidden underneath the frame, and the powertrain consists of a rigid-mount, 1584cc Twin Cam 96B balanced engine and six-speed Cruise Drive transmission. But that's where the similarities stop.

The model name is derived from the all-new Rockertail rear end that uses elliptical tubes and no visible rear fender supports to mount the rear fender directly to the swingarm. Thus the sheet metal is able to hug the 240-18" rear tire, the largest used by Harley in a production Softail to date. Even cooler is the fact that this design allows the two to move together, giving the Rocker a modern, custom look.

The many engineering and styling firsts on this bike prove that when both departments work together they come up with some great things. New LED stop/turn/taillights incorporate the stop and taillight functions with the rear turn indicators, eliminating the need for a traditional taillight on the rear fender. The finned, cast aluminum horseshoe oil tank was designed for style not function — although I was told it does provide 3 percent more cooling — pretty neat since the plan here was to simply make it look like part of the powertrain instead of the frame.



Obvious styling is found in the color-matched frame, as well as a new Satin Stainless Metallic powder-coat finish on the fork lowers, triple clamps, headlight, handlebar riser, tank console, swingarm, turn signal housings, hand controls, belt

guard, and oil tank. The engine is silver powder-coated and features covers that have the same powder-coat finish mentioned above. A chrome Shorty Dual exhaust with a new slash bend adds to the styling look.

Overall, I found this bike well balanced and extremely stable on the road, making it surprisingly comfortable to ride. The forward controls are positioned wide apart, just how I like them. The pegs feature replaceable feelers at the ends, which is smart because they will wear quickly as they're the first to touch the ground when leaning into a turn. Combine this with the new, slightly adjustable independent V-bar handlebars on 5" curved risers and I think the Rocker would provide me with all-day comfort, although I don't know this for sure, as I came nowhere close to spending a 500-mile day in the solo saddle. The only shortcoming I could see on long hauls may come from the low seat (26.2" unladen) but it's probably just right. And then there is the lack of storage space ...

The suspension (front and rear) seems to be the correct stiffness, making it compliant and ready to absorb all but the biggest bumps. It definitely does the job of keeping the Rocker stable and planted when leaning over in a turn. Single discs and a four-piston caliper up front provide ample stopping power. The long, stretched 5-gallon fuel tank features a recessed bar and shield medallion, and the console-mounted Speed Shop speedometer and idiot lights fit nicely on top. They're also positioned to be easily read with just a quick glance down.

Honestly, when I saw the first photos of the Rocker I did not think I would like this bike, but after riding it I can now say that it handles better than any other Harley-Davidson Softail I have experienced. I believe it's the combination of a 69.2" wheelbase (longest of any Big Twin), 240-18" rear/90-19" front tires and the 36.5-degree rake (with a total fork angle of 37.5 degrees) that makes this Softail work. If you don't believe me, I strongly suggest you take one for a ride and find out for yourself. Odds are this bike will rock you, too. **AIM**

RIDING IMPRESSIONS



Genevieve Schmitt (5' 7")
Riding 17 years

THE ROCKER IS MY NEW favorite motorcycle. This could be a problem for me, however. Ergonomically, the Rocker rocks with my body size. Sometimes forward controls can be too

forward for my leg length, like they are on Harley's new Fat Bob. The Rocker's controls are perfectly placed, as are the handlebars. My butt also fits nice and snug in the smallish solo seat, though I'm not sure how comfortable bigger butts will feel. You might forget about that when you realize how low the seat is. Smaller riders will love being able to shuffle the Rocker around with ease. I can't believe this is a Softail with a rear tire and fender that moves to the beat of the road. There's minimal vibration here, and the bike is well-balanced (with no flop factor in the extended front end). It also features the easiest clutch effort I've ever felt on a Harley, along with minimal bling, which I like. Just when I resigned myself to a life of luxury (I'm putting down a deposit on a 2008 Street Glide this fall), the Rocker comes along. Now, I'm all confused!