

## OLD V NEW

1995-'03 HARLEY-DAVIDSON SPORTSTER 883 ★ 2004-'05 HARLEY-DAVIDSON SPORTSTER 883



PRE-'04 883 lets you feel that famous Harley rumble through your, er, chaps

**'95-'03**  
**HARLEY-DAVIDSON**  
**SPORTSTER 883**  
 ✓ Raw-edged Harley feel  
 X Heavy clutch, poor handling

**'04-'05**  
**HARLEY-DAVIDSON**  
**SPORTSTER 883**  
 ✓ Less vibes, better brakes  
 X Too refined for a Harley?



THE later model offers more refinements, including a rubber-mounted engine

# Harley-Davidson Sportster 883

It's been the entry-level Hog for decades, but are the 2004-05 883s the ultimate development of the Sportster concept?

## SPORTSTER 883 OWNERS' PANEL

### MARK JACKSON

MARK is from Auckland NZ, and is working in the UK as a valet/driver while travelling the world. The 35-year-old has ridden several examples of the 883 Sportster in the last 15 years.

### DEBBIE CROOK

DEBBIE is a 45-year-old process technician at Ilford Laboratories in Cheshire. She has demo-ridden the later 883s, but bought a 2002 model back in June 2005.

### MARK LIGGINS

MARK works as a sales advisor, is based in Sheffield and owned a 1999 Sportster 883, which he modified extensively. The 37-year-old has also demo-ridden the 2004 and 2005 Sportster.

### PERFORMANCE

Mark J: "The 2004 883 feels totally different to any Sportster before. The engine is smoother, makes a bit more power and torque – and the rubber mountings mean it doesn't vibrate as much as the older models.

"But my '91 Sportster had a really raw quality about it. The whole riding experience was involving, the bike shook at stop-lights and the mirrors vibrated.

"The 883 isn't a performance bike, but it has the type of performance you can use, especially on crowded British roads. Because it's an unfaired motorcycle, you feel like you're going fast enough most of the time."

Debbie: "I got into biking a few years ago and I'm definitely not your typical knee-down sports bike rider. My previous bike was a 250cc

Honda Superdream, so although I found the 2005 883 Sportster faster than the older 883 and with better brakes, the 2002 Custom I bought was a revelation in power, braking and handling. I'm more than happy with the 883's performance."

Mark L: "The older 883 had a sharper, more responsive feel than the later Sportsters. For me, the older bike has more guts, more kick to it. The later bikes aren't quite such raw fun to ride.

"If you modify the 883 – old or new model – it becomes a different animal. Mine had a Stage 1 kit on it – performance air filter, louder pipes, 42mm flat-slide carb. Fitting the carb totally transformed the bike. Every Sportster should have at least the Stage 1 kit on it to make it breathe better.

"The later models handle better overall; the frame and swingarm are

stiffer. A pre-2004 stock 883 can feel a bit heavy to ride. The Customs feel different because they have the wider rear wheel and kicked-out forks. The 2004-on 883s have superior brakes – you can ride the later 883s a bit harder on twisty roads."

### RIDING

Mark J: "The later 883 has an edge when it comes to handling and braking – the brakes on the '04/'05 models are in a different dimension.

"The later model also has a lighter clutch action, and a slicker gearbox. The 883C model also has a larger fuel tank, which is very handy."

Debbie: "My Custom model has the small fuel tank – I rarely go more than 100 miles between fill-ups. The fuel range might stop me touring abroad on the bike, but I

OLDER Sportsters offer a good-value introduction to Harley ownership





## MODEL GUIDE

### 1995

Although around since 1985, Harley-Davidson begins to market the Sportster 883 more vigorously in Europe with more and more bikes appearing on UK roads. The 1995 model costs £5500 OTR.

### 1998

883 Sportster Custom launched, featuring a range of accessories, and styling details, as standard.

### 2002

883R launched (£5800) with retro styling and more power for '02-'03 model years only.

### 2004

Major update: rubber-mounted engine, lighter clutch, stiffer frame, new brakes, 883 Custom adds a larger tank, lower seat, fatter rear wheel and revised fork geometry.

### 2005

Beefed-up swingarm, wire-spoked wheels, 883R returns to range.

## AN EXPERT SAYS:

**Steve Webb, sales manager, Manchester Harley-Davidson**

"The later 883s are very popular with lady riders and first-time bikers who want something they can feel confident on. The 2004 Sportster is an all-new design, and much easier to ride than the older bikes. That said, we have customers who come into the shop, demo ride a few machines, then choose a used model with a load of accessories already on it - owning any Harley is an individualistic thing."

wouldn't want to fit the larger fuel tank which the Custom is supposed to have - it spoils the bike's lines."

Mark L: "You don't have to go insanely fast to have fun on a Sportster."

"When it came to my 883, I fitted standard Harley-issue Continental tyres, which were fine. To me, tyres weren't that important on a Sportster because I wasn't riding it like an R6."

### OWNING

Mark J: "In the 13 years I've owned a Sportster, I think it's shaken a couple of nuts loose, but otherwise it's been 100% reliable. It's a tough, well-made bike, but Sportsters do respond well to some owner maintenance. Newer ones are arguably easier to take care of, but the Harley experience is definitely different from owning any other motorcycle. You have to get more involved with the bike - riding it, looking after it, cleaning it - and love the unfaired, gutsy, V-twin experience."

Debbie: "My bike has been 100% reliable. I initially thought the insurance was quite high for the

883, at about £300 fully comp, but I have since heard some mates saying they paid lots more to insure their first 'proper' big bike.

Mark L: "I've ridden sports bikes in the past, but I like the take-it-easy type of riding you can do on the Sportster. The other great thing about owning a Harley is the HOG groups. There's things to do almost every week: ride-outs, barbecues, rallies, etc. It might not be everyone's cup of tea, but there's no denying that the H-D owner can have a really big social life alongside owning the actual motorbike."

"Plus there's hardly any depreciation on an 883 - a bit of a change from owning a Japanese bike, eh?"

### VERDICT

Mark J: "Now that's a tough call. I really like the older Sportsters, mainly because they're more raw, vibey and just an all-round basic motorbike. If you buy an older Sportster, most of the depreciation will have already occurred, plus it's likely the owner will have added all kind of bits, too. That said, the newer Sportsters have great

brakes, go better, handle sweeter and some - like the 883R - look really cool, too. What a decision... can I cop out and say that I need the extra grunt of a 1200 Sportster instead?"

Debbie: "If you buy an older bike they still hold their value very well, so you wouldn't be saving thousands by buying used - maybe just hundreds. For me, the main reason I bought an '02 model was that the Custom fitted me perfectly; I felt right at home from the moment I sat on it. I know the later 883s are smoother and brake better, but that doesn't matter as much to me as feeling 100% at home on the bike."

Mark L: "Rigid versus rubber-mounted engine? Hmm, that's really hard to call because it depends on what kind of rider you are and what you want from the bike. On balance, I like the old-fashioned feel you get from the pre-2004 Sportsters, but for an extra 500 quid you can get a brand new 883, with a stack of improvements. You'd have to ride the bikes yourself to be 100% sure either way."

WIRE-SPOKED wheels replaced the 883's standard cast items in 2004



### 1995-2003 SPORTSTER 883

COST NEW IN 1995: £5500  
USED PRICES:  
1995-2000 £2100-3400  
2001-2003 £3100-3675

Insurance group: 11 (of 17)  
Servicing: £90 minor, £230 main

#### TECHNICAL SPEC

Engine: V-twin, four-stroke, 883cc  
Power: 50bhp  
Chassis: Steel cradle  
Weight: 255kg  
Top speed: 105mph  
MPG/Range: 50/120 miles

### 2004-2005 SPORTSTER 883

COST NEW: £5195  
USED PRICES:  
2004 £3600-4475  
2005 £4100-4795

Insurance group: 11 (of 17)  
Servicing: £90 minor, £230 main

#### TECHNICAL SPEC

Engine: V-twin, four-stroke, 883cc  
Power: 55bhp  
Chassis: Steel cradle  
Weight: 251kg  
Top speed: 110mph  
MPG/Range: 50/120 miles

## ONE DAY WITH... MOTO TWIN TRIUMPH THRUXTON

MOTO TWIN have bestowed some of their tastiest bolt-ons on the ThruXTon - at least it looks like it'll get to the cafe first



GARETH HARRISON

# Plodder gets the retro racer treatment

### WHAT IS IT?

MOTO Twin's 'retro racer' take on Triumph's ThruXTon Bonneville. Performance and aesthetics are improved beyond recognition from the standard version (Moto Twin specialise in top-quality aftermarket bolt-on goodies for all the Hinckley Triumph twins). This bike showcases all their popular bits and makes you wonder why Triumph couldn't do something so simply sexy.

### WHAT'S DIFFERENT?

PERFORMANCE improvements centre on the chassis. The suspension is upgraded with Hagon progressive fork springs and Maxton shocks, (the latter specially built to suit you personally) producing a much tauter, sharper-steering machine.

Braking is also improved with EBC sintered pads and braided steel lines, but the standard single floating disc is retained. Lever feel is better, but the brakes still lack the bite of most modern bikes.

The 865cc, 69bhp ThruXTon's engine internals are standard but Moto Twin's free-flowing SS mufflers (mated to '60s-style swept-back headers) and re-jetted carbs unleash 10bhp in the mid-range and 6bhp on top. The Norton Commando-style reverse-cone megaphones deliver an awesome braap.

### WHAT ABOUT THE STYLING?

THERE'S a ton of cool touches that help make this baby stand out in crowd.

The screaming red paint with its off-centre stripe



IT'S fast enough to be fun for gentlemen of a certain age

on the tank, complete with Monza filler cap, really hit you when you first see the bike. But there's other neat stuff, like the white rocker and sprocket covers to match the fibreglass mudguards. German-made LSL Tourmatch 50mm raised clip-ons (higher than stock) and cafe racer headlight brackets are pure class, as are the Italian Road Racing mirrors, which just offer enough rear view to be acceptable.

Stripping the paint off the fork legs and polishing (a Moto Twin service) adds a whole new dimension to the front end - but it would be so much nicer to see a chunky AP Lockheed or Brembo four-pot caliper hung off the left stanchion.

Stylish single seat is Moto Twin's own and means there's no need to stop for a rest between the mandatory 100-mile refuelling stops.

### WILL YOU END UP BUYING THE COFFEES?

A SPORTS bike it ain't, but performance isn't half bad, as the original bike is a bit of an old plodder. The bigger ThruXTon engine has a lot

more go compared to the original 790cc Bonnie and top speed is over 125mph.

It's no rocketship, but that doesn't mean you can't have fun on the way to the cafe. It handles well, has a free-revving motor and the really great thing about it, like any naked bike, is that anything over 90mph feels fast.

### HOW DO I GET A BIKE LIKE THIS?

BUY a standard ThruXTon (£5999 new; from £5000 used) and Moto Twin can supply the rest: retro racer seat, retro racer swept-back pipes, Moto Twin SS silencers, air injection elimination kit, retro seat, black GRP front and rear mudguard, Monza filler cap, footpeg eliminator bolts, cafe racer headlight brackets, Ikon shocks, stainless steel bar-end weights.

The full kit (to fit yourself) costs £1348 or buy the parts individually and mix and match them to create your own style. Alternatively, Moto Twin can fit all the kit and paint the bike in a colour of your choosing for £2500.

They also do a similar kit for the Bonneville, priced at £1334.

### MOTO TWIN TRIUMPH THRUXTON

★★★★★  
COST: £7347 (DIY)  
£8500 (fitted)  
POWER: 76bhp  
TORQUE: 72ftlb  
WEIGHT: 205kg

Available: New  
Colours: To customer spec  
New for 2005: To customer spec  
Insurance group: 9 (of 17)  
Info: www.mototwin.com

**TECHNICAL SPEC**  
Engine: Air-cooled 865cc (90mm x 68mm) dohc four-stroke parallel twin. Five gears. Twin carbs.  
Chassis: Tubular steel cradle frame. 41mm forks with adjustable pre-load. Twin shocks adjustable for pre-load and rebound damping. Brakes: 320mm front disc with twin-piston caliper. 255mm rear disc with twin-piston caliper. Tyres: Bridgestone Battlax BT45 100/90 x 18 front, 150/80 x R17 rear.

### MCN SAYS:

- ✓ Much improved suspension
- ✓ Great looks thanks to quality bolt-ons
- ✓ Incredibly evocative sound of the '70s
- ✗ Typically poor Bonneville front brake

