

August 1982

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# Two Wheels



**KAWASAKI'S  
RED-HOT  
550!**

**TURBOS:  
DO WE  
NEED  
THEM?**

*Plus:*

**HARLEY  
FXRS and  
YAMAHA  
IT465**

*Also:*

**RIDING  
HONDA'S  
SENSATIONAL  
VT 250**



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August 1982

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Vicks cough drops afterwards.

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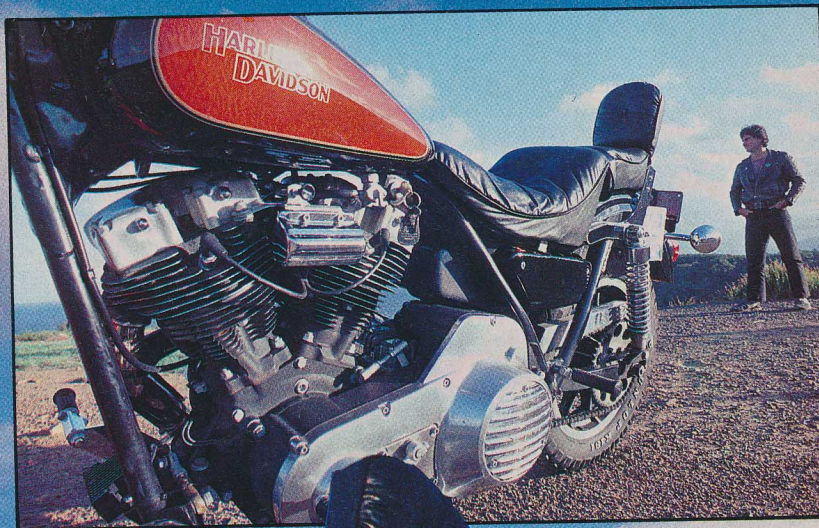
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# Road Test

Sixteenth Century essayist and judge Francis Bacon is supposed to have once sentenced a man named Hogg with the deft line that a hog isn't bacon until it's well and truly hung! In that light, Harley-Davidson's FXRS could be bacon for the masses, or . . .

# A





# Well-Hung Hog!

So what's this latest Hog like? Still traditionally Milwaukee macho, still laidback and think-of-eagles, but what about this new welded double-cradle frame, the rubber mountings for the 1340 cm<sup>3</sup> mountainmover, the uprated suspension and five-speed gearbox? Our verdict is – a big improvement:

This Hog has sporting capabilities and is actually a delight on winding roads!

**B**ETTER your sister in a whorehouse than your brother on a Honda. So goes one T-shirt popular among Harley riders. At least a hundred others voice similar sentiments on the cult of two-wheeling Milwaukee style.

So idiosyncratic are the big V-twins that their riders take a stance decidedly removed from the mainstream of motorcycling. Severe limitations in handling, braking and cornering have denied Harley riders the chance of sampling a significant part of motorcycling's experiences. By choosing to accept these limitations, they've put themselves into a minority.

With the advent of the 1340 cm<sup>3</sup> FXRS Superglide II, the numbers of potential Harley-Davidson converts has suddenly





swelled, while already-committed fans of Milwaukee "iron" have had their choices extended further. A combination of a new frame, uprated suspension and a five-speed transmission have given the bike the sporting capabilities of no previous Harley, particularly in 1340 cm<sup>3</sup> guise.

But despite all the changes in the FXRS, the new bike is as much a Harley as any of its illustrious forebears. The company has completely modernised its range flagship without losing any of the loping twin's charm, for it would have been all too easy for H-D to allow some of the character of its laid-back V-twins to slip away in the redesign.

Chief among the changes is the new frame, designed to preserve the long, low and lean look which has been part of non-tourer Harleys for decades. Gone is the old chassis with its cast iron lugs and joints. In its place is a modern, welded, double-cradle unit with a massive backbone and plenty of steering head support. H-D engineers claim it is five times stiffer than the vintage frame it superseded. However, in true Harley fashion the new frame is still no lightweight — it weighs over 27 kg.

To improve cornering clearance and provide a minimum clear space around the engine of 10 mm (necessary to allow the big mill to jump around in its rubber mountings), some increase in seat height was unavoidable. Nonetheless

the FXRS hits the streets with its generously padded saddle-type rider's perch a mere 75 cm off the deck, slightly higher than the 71 cm of the belt-driven Sturgis, but enough to put both feet firmly on the ground any time the rider chooses.

Next on the list of gigantic steps forward is the new, vibration-killing engine mounting system. A trio of rubber mounts replace the solid bolted connections of old, and allow the powerplant/transmission assembly (the separate gearbox bolts directly to the rear of the V-twin's compact crankcase) to shake away to its heart's content without intruding on the rider. Each mounting has its own sturdy heim-joint stabilizer which limits the engine's movement to the vertical plane (up and down and front/rear). Any sideways movement would be disastrous for handling as the box section swinging arm attaches directly to the rear of the transmission.

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#### **Vibromassage no longer**

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On test, the whole setup worked well: The frame proved perfectly rigid when traversing our usual wobble-testing midcorner dips and bumps at a fair clip, while the traditional Harley vibromassage at engine speeds above 3500 rpm failed to materialise. As it is now possible to cruise comfortably at road speeds in the 140 km/h to 160



km/h range (if you can stand the wind pressure), we were surprised to find no oil cooler fitted. One is fitted to the Sturgis, and it has the same 1340 cm<sup>3</sup> mill as the FXRS.

While the rubber mounts soak up all the irritating vibrations in the upper half of the big twin's operating range, they do not inhibit the low frequency shaking from idle to 2000 rpm. If anything, the extremities of the FXRS dance around more at idle than those of solid mounted big-inch Harleys, emphasising the aura





of lazy power generated initially by the deep low-rev rumble of the exhausts.

To complement the model's new-found bend-swinging prowess, the factory has upgraded its original equipment tyres to Dunlop K181s, a 19-incher up front and a super-wide 16-inch beauty on the back. These tyres seem to suit the bike well, and we found they hung on securely in wet and dry conditions.

Another concession to the Eighties is the FXRS's five-speed gearbox, a positive (but not quite slick) shifting unit which permits smaller between-ratio gaps and a lower first than the four-speeder used on the Sturgis. The overall fifth gear ratio of the FXRS is actually a smidgeon shorter than the very tall top of the Sturgis, but the new box scores most by eliminating the clutchslipping necessary for a two-up, uphill start on the belt-driven model. With the low first the FXRS jumps off the line better at traffic lights, and no doubt would be quicker at the dragstrip.

The new cogbox changes much more smoothly than the old one, although lever travel remains longer than today's norm. While the speedo will show much higher (by six to ten percent) figures, the true road speeds at the 5400 rpm redline are 60, 85, 120, 155 and 190 km/h. That top is still very tall is obvious from the casual 2840 rpm engine speed for an honest 100 km/h.

An unusual plus for the non-unit gearbox is that the gearshafts, shiftcam and forks can be removed for repairs without disturbing the gearbox case behind the engine.

Harley-Davidson has redesigned the leverage to both brake master cylinders to reduce lever and pedal pressures by ten percent, and comfortable new dogleg levers further aid crash stop efforts. Nonetheless, a further 30 percent off is required to bring the front discs' operating pressures back to reasonable levels. A new Girling caliper squeezes high metal content pads onto the FXRS's giant rear disc.

Like most cruiser Harleys the Superglide II comes with a pair of highway pegs mounted to the frame's front downtubes. Provided you are over 1.75 metres tall, the alternative leg position works fine; but shorter riders will need to butcher the mounting plates to shift the pegs rearwards so they can reach them without stretching. Both short and long riders have to consciously keep their right knees away from the V-twin's oversized air cleaner box while riding on the front pegs — it vibrates just like the whole bike did before H-D adopted rubber mounting.

The tank mounted speedo and tacho of the Sturgis have given way to better lit

and clearer instruments which peer up at the rider from above the top triple clamp — much closer to his line of sight while riding. Immediately above the larger 14.4-litre tank's plastic filler cap is motorcycling's best fuel gauge. Unwavering and truthful, it shames Japan's best efforts — the design and location of the sender unit are obviously well thought out.

### Features worth copying

Two standard Harley features continue on the FXRS and other manufacturers would do well to adopt or re-adopt them. They are the friction screw to reduce or eliminate the self closing throttle on long tours (the Superglide II comes with a positive close, two-cable throttle) and the adjustable rear chain oiler which dribbles minute amounts of engine oil onto the secondary chain. With the oiler properly adjusted, even 1000 km of riding has little effect on the oil level in the dry sump engine's supply tank.

To date most 1340 cm<sup>3</sup> Harley engines have devoured oil at a rate high enough to alarm riders of other four-stroke motorcycles. The official owner's manual told buyers to expect healthy oil consumption and our 1981 Sturgis testbike (with close to 4000 km on the clock) lived up to the claims.

Probably in honour of the high esteem in which US citizens hold Arab oil sheiks, the '82 1340 cm<sup>3</sup> V-twin comes with its own oil control package. Valve guides have been lengthened and come equipped with new seals, while additional oil drain lines return cylinder head oil to the crankcase scavenge pump quicker than before. The changes work. Our fairly young Superglide consumed little oil during the test, which included several high speed cruises.

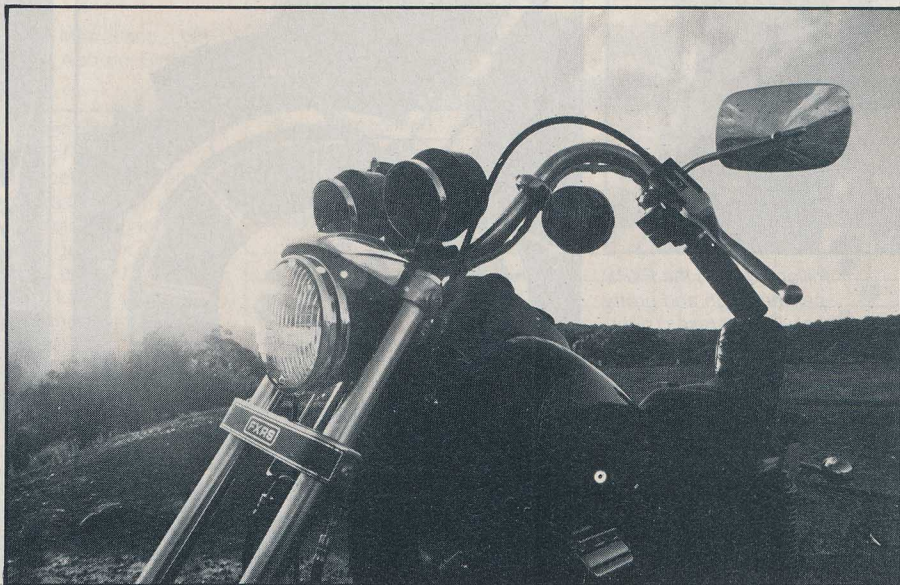
Soot-blackened rear silencers are a thing of the past!

Motive power for the FXRS comes from the Beyer-Garrett of motorcycling, an engine which has more in common with an automotive V8 than other bike powerplants — cooling aside. At least its power delivery does. Harley-Davidson claims 45 kW maximum crankshaft power at 4800 rpm and a gigantic 97.2 Nm of torque at 3500 rpm. Power delivery starts at idle and dies at 5000 rpm; 90 percent of peak torque is available at 2000 rpm, according to our test.

If the torque and rev range of the old boneshaker are reminiscent of times gone by, so are many of its design features. The hemi-style heads for example use an included valve angle of 78 degrees, quite wide by today's standards. Compression ratios of 7.4:1 were common 30 years ago, and few bikes today use one carb to feed more than one cylinder. Other manufacturers have built fours with half the displacement of one of the FXRS' 670 cm<sup>3</sup> pots, and rarely are modern engines as undersquare as the Harley's 88.8 x 108.0 mm bore and stroke.

For all that the lazy V-twin is a pleasant engine in all but ten tenths riding. Copious midrange power means immediate and solid pickup is always available. Tall gearing endows the Superglide with very long legs — the proverbial one bang every telegraph pole isn't wide of the mark. Such low operating stresses combined with modern metallurgy and lubricants should guarantee high mileage before a rebuild is called for. Quality touches like roller cam followers suggest H-D has longevity in mind as well.

Ease of routine maintenance is another strong point of the engine:





Hydraulic valve lifters eliminate clearance setting, the solitary carburettor needs no synchronisation, and the Magnavox electronic ignition with electronic advance consigns points replacement and timing worries to the garbage tin. Most serviceable items are readily accessible.

For those not familiar with big-inch Harley engines, the two cylinders are directly in line (one conrod is forked at the big-end) with 45 degrees between the V. The single 38 mm Keihin butterfly carburettor — feeding both cylinders through a short Y-manifold — has an accelerator pump.

The crankshaft is a massive but short pressed-up affair running one crankpin and two ball main bearings. Conrod small ends are plain, while the double big-end bearing is a caged roller unit with two smaller outer roller races for the cylinder with the female rod and one larger inner race for the big-end male rod. The cylinders fire on alternate crank revolutions with slightly uneven firing pulses (less uneven than 75 or 90 degree V-twins) which help give a Harley its distinct "rump, rump" sound. Unlike 90-degree V-twins, the Harley layout does not have perfect primary balance. Without auxiliary balancer shafts these engines must be shakers, and they are.

Primary drive is via the time-honoured duplex roller chain. It runs in a huge, largely dry primary chaincase on the engine's left side. This case also contains the dry clutch, a strong unit in our experience which requires a purposeful lever pull to operate.

The Superglide II is a large motorcycle — its wheelbase of 1643 mm is among the largest. In keeping with Harley tradition it's also a heavy bike, tipping the scales at 263 kg dry. Even the nine-spoke alloy wheels weigh a ton — try changing a tyre one day.

The other area where the FXRS ranks as a heavyweight is purchase price. One of these highly individual bikes costs \$8000 without registration, insurance and so on. The well-heeled only need apply.

### Fire up and ride

When starting the bike forget the choke. Opening and closing the throttle once to activate the accelerator pump is sufficient before pushing the magic button. This sets the big twin a-pulsing, not to mention the wide, droopy, rubber mounted handlebars and your hands and arms. Three minutes of 1340 idle a day will put the flabbiest arms back in shape.

Noiselessly select first — thanks to the dry clutch — and ease the clutch out with a touch of throttle. With no discernible drop in engine speed or change in sound 350 kg of bike and rider go from a standstill to 20 km/h. At 30 km/h in first the Superglide sounds and feels as though it's loafing at just above idle. This is an illusion of course. The engine is turning half its maximum safe revs, but 2700 rpm and two cylinders is so much more relaxing than 4500 rpm multiplied by four pistons.

In all but the iciest weather the big mill will pull happily from almost dead cold.

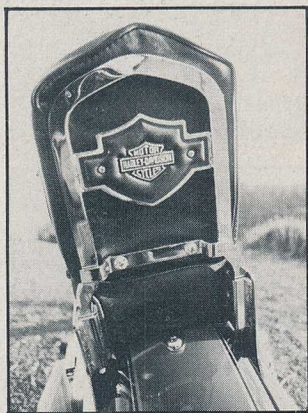
Plenty of flywheel inertia and locomotive-like low-rev torque make the V-twin all but stall-proof.

Open the throttle and the bike just moves out smoothly. No fuss, but no megabike acceleration either — just strong, even power. In normal riding the engine is rarely spun beyond 3500 rpm before a gearchange. Switching to a taller gear with the tach showing under 3000 revs is common. So long as engine revs stay above 2200, the rubber mountings absorb virtually all the powerplant's vibration.

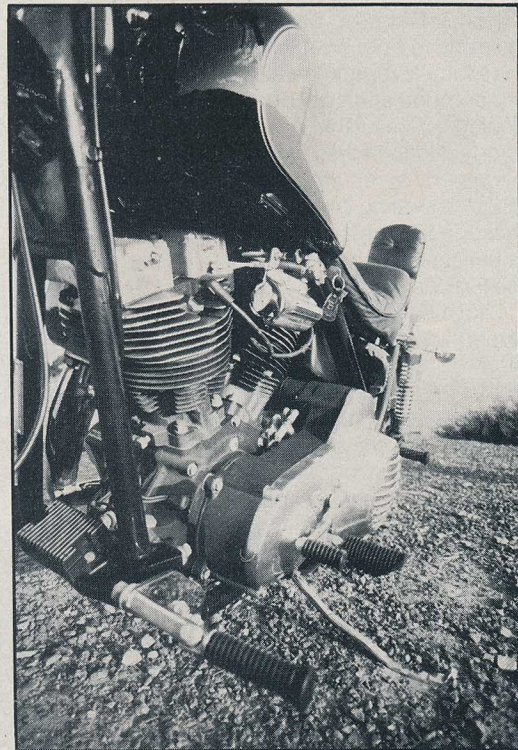
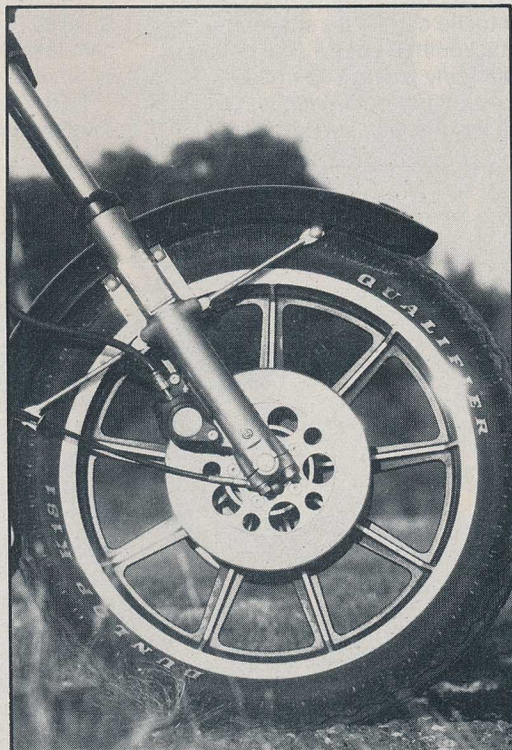
With a power curve so flat, the pickup available in the next higher gear is only marginally less than the bike's acceleration in the lower gear. This remarkable engine flexibility is what makes the Superglide II so relaxing to ride and so unique. By comparison, BMW's 1000 twins have no bottom end power at all.

Performance is not what Harleys are about. We'd estimate the five-speed FXRS would run the standing 400 m in 14.3 or 14.4 seconds. Top speed for our testbike was a true 175 km/h, but with more km 180 km/h should be possible.

Likewise, fuel economy should be better than the figures we achieved when the engine is thoroughly freed up, again judging by the Sturgis (which uses the same engine). Mind you, a test average of 16.2 km/litre is not to be sneezed at. And while brisk touring gave only 18.4 km/litre, two gentler runs returned consumptions of 20.5 km/litre, a commendable result for so large an engine and so heavy a bike.



*Pillion rider on the FXRS perches high and pretty (above). Front brakes (right) work well, but still demand a heavy pull on the lever. Raked-out forks aid stability. Big-inch motor (far right) is a shaker no longer, courtesy of new rubber mounts.*





# Harley FXRS

## ENGINE

Air cooled, longitudinal, 45 degree, ohv four-stroke V-twin. Two valves per cylinder, hydraulic valve lifters, roller followers. Built-up crankshaft with single crankpin, ball bearing main bearings, roller big end and plain conrod small ends. Dry sump lubrication.

Claimed crankshaft power .....	45 kW at 4800 rpm
Claimed torque.....	97.2 Nm at 3500 rpm
Bore x stroke.....	88.8 x 108.0 mm
Displacement .....	1339 cm <sup>3</sup>
Compression ratio.....	7.4:1
Maximum engine speed .....	5400 rpm
Carburetion.....	1 x 38 mm butterfly Keihin
Air filtration.....	Oiled polyurethane foam
Starter system .....	Electric only
Ignition .....	Magnetically triggered battery/coil
Mean piston speed at redline revs.....	19.4 m/second

### Fuel consumption

Touring.....	18.4 km/litre
City.....	16.3 km/litre
Hard riding .....	14.2 km/litre
Average on test.....	16.2 km/litre

## TRANSMISSION

Duplex chain primary drive through dry clutch to five speed constant mesh gearbox with one-down, four-up pattern and direct drive top. Final drive by roller chain.

## FRAME AND BRAKES

Welded double cradle frame with box section backbone and box section swinging arm. Coil/spring telescopic forks with oil damping. Oil-damped rear spring/damper units with five spring preload settings. Hydraulic double disc front brake, hydraulic single disc rear brake.

Front suspension travel.....	150 mm
Rear suspension travel.....	80 mm
Front brake diameter.....	260 mm
Rear brake diameter.....	300 mm
Front tyre .....	Dunlop K181 MJ90-19
Rear tyre .....	Dunlop K181 MT90-16

## DIMENSIONS

Dry weight.....	264 kg
Seat height.....	755 mm
Wheelbase .....	1643 mm
Fuel capacity (incl. reserve).....	14.4 litres
Fuel reserve .....	1.5 litres

## TEST MACHINE

Manufacturer .....	Harley-Davidson Motor Company, Milwaukee, USA
Test machine.....	Burling and Simmons, Auburn, Sydney
Price .....	\$7995

**Best points:** Phenomenal low and midrange power. New rubber mounting system completely kills jackhammer vibes of the 1340 cm<sup>3</sup> twin at high and midrange revs, combines with excellent seat and improved suspension to make Superglide II a pleasant open road tourer. Locking sidestand is excellent. New frame transforms handling and FXRS is fun to ride on winding roads. Five speed gearbox is decades ahead of four speeder and shifts with precision. Larger, 14.4 litre tank is welcome (fuel gauge is best ever). Dunlop K181 tyres do much for road grip wet or dry. Finish quality is good and the shaped handlebars ease control effort. Best of all the FXRS still looks, sounds and feels like a real Harley.

**Worst points:** Engine is low on top end power. Front brake stops well but requires strong hand, clutch pull is unnecessarily heavy too. More cornering clearance still is needed, especially on right side, and suspension compliance needs improving. Rear silencer heats passenger's right shoe — too close. Blinker operation is diabolical in stop/start traffic. Lack of toolkit is unforgivable (can't even adjust rear shocks), a centrestand would be nice. Deletion of Sturgis' oil-cooler is puzzling. \$8000 pricetag guarantees FXRS will remain exclusive.

# SUMMARY

	Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Outstanding
<b>RATINGS</b>					
<b>ENGINE</b>					
Responsiveness			●		
Smoothness			●		
Bottom end power					●
Mid range power				●	
Top end power	●				
Fuel economy				●	
Starting			●		
Ease of maintenance					●
Quietness			●		
Engine braking		●			
<b>TRANSMISSION</b>					
Clutch operation			●		
Gearbox operation				●	
Ratio suitability				●	
Drivetrain freplay			●		
<b>HANDLING</b>					
Steering			●		
Cornering clearance		●			
Ability to forgive rider error			●		
High speed cornering			●		
Medium speed cornering				●	
Bumpy bends			●		
Tossing side to side				●	
Changing line in corners				●	
Braking in corners				●	
Manoeuvring				●	
Top speed stability				●	
<b>SUSPENSION</b>					
Front			●		
Rear		●			
Front/rear match		●			
<b>BRAKES</b>					
Resistance to fading			●		
Stopping power			●		
Braking stability				●	
Feel at controls			●		
<b>CONTROLS</b>					
Location of major controls			●		
Switches			●		
Instruments			●		
<b>TWO-UP SUITABILITY</b>					
Passenger comfort			●		
Stability with pillion				●	
Cornering clearance two-up		●			
<b>GENERAL</b>					
Quality of finish				●	
Engine appearance				●	
Overall styling					●
Seat comfort				●	
Riding position				●	
Touring range		●			
Headlight	●				
Other lights	●				
Stand (sidestand only)					●
Rearview mirrors			●		
Horn				●	
Toolkit (none)					
<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b>					
		●			



## Great until it grinds

The big difference in handling between the Sturgis and FXRS is that on the belt-driven job a rider slows down to speeds where the bike is happy and works quite well, while on the newer model any cornering speed up to a grinding lean angle is fine. There are no wallows, wobbles or weaves; the Superglide just rolls over whatever the road throws at it and continues on its merry way. Stability is first rate, aided by the long wheelbase, raked out forks (31 degrees) and low centre of gravity. A competent rider on an FXRS will have little trouble staying with Oriental fours on winding roads, provided the ride is not an all-out race. What's more, Superglide riders will enjoy bendy roads whereas Sturgis riders see them as necessary evils between boulevard smooth straights.

The FXRS is basically a forgiving handler whose only limitation is cornering clearance. The bike is easily flicked about (for a big bike) and feels less heavy than it is (except for picking it up off the sidestand). Midcorner line changes or braking cause no drama, and crash stops don't upset stability. There is some self steering at low speeds, but basically the FXRS is a well balanced steerer.

Adding a pillion passenger causes no ill effects other than slightly reducing cornering clearance. The rear suspension, which is slightly too firm for light solo riders, works better with the extra load, although a preload increase will be necessary to prevent bottoming on rough roads.

Putting it starkly, the Superglide's suspension arrangements could not be called anything better than mediocre — the Japanese-made forks had too much stiction to respond properly to small bumps and the rear shock absorbers on

our testbike suffered from over springing and under damping. They offer restricted travel only. Modern air-assisted or at least multi-adjustable, suspension would improve these weaknesses out of sight.

The FXRS brakes well in wet or dry conditions (it needs to, the gearing is so tall engine braking is very limited). Our only complaint is the gorilla-like hauling needed on the lever to get the front anchors working. The rear brake is excellent.

Most riders found the FXRS comfortable at speeds up to 120 km/h, and our pillion-seat tester much preferred it to the Sturgis, although neither ranks as armchair comfy from a passenger's viewpoint. The rider's seat is a well padded, wide, saddle-like cushion, but the passenger sits on a much narrower strip-like support (with a good backrest we might add) directly above the rear shock mount.

Riding position is pure custom — pegs way, way forward and high rearward-curving handlebars. The rider looks cool but feels like a windsock. Still, no riders complained of discomfort and there are two sets of pegs to choose from. Both seats are upholstered in attractive, very soft, rich looking black vinyl, complete with sunken buttons which look very spoofy but hold rainwater or dew in miniature lakes. Passengers large and small complained of overheated right feet due to the close proximity of the rear (upper) silencer to their shoes.

## Beefs, breakages and laid back

For an \$8000 motorcycle, not supplying a toolkit with the FXRS is penny-pinching at its worst — you can't even adjust rear shock preload without a C-spanner. The folding footpegs are all very well, but our testbike needed a pipe lever on them to bring about folding!



Spring loading these pegs is essential if the aim is to avoid them digging into or hitting something. The large diameter rubber handgrips, however, are superb — fingers don't cramp and muscles don't tire, let's see more of these.

The lights generally are lousy. The home market (US) model FXRS has a halogen headlamp but Aussie owners have to spot the kangaroos with a miserable tungsten unit. Handlebar switches are all of the rocking type and work well, except for the two blinker actuators — one on each side for each pair of blinkers. The buttons have to be held down for the blinkers to continue working. Damned difficult, if not downright dangerous, when the rider is going down gears in heavy traffic.

The FXRS is a macho-looking motorcycle in the traditional Harley mould. Our testbike was very well finished in black with red tank sides and front guard centre, and gold pinstriping to delineate the two. Add plenty of chrome and polished alloy and the overall result is very pleasing to most people's eyes (at least those who don't hate custom styling).

On test our FXRS's starter switch or relay went on holiday. The bike could only be started by shorting the solenoid contacts with a long screwdriver (we had pulled the rubber boot off) or bumpstarting (which was not as difficult as it sounds on sealed surfaces). The insides of the steering lock came adrift, and two of the blinkers filled with water each time it rained. We hope these faults are isolated and not typical of production FXRSs or H-D may need some lessons from the Japanese, as well as vice versa.

But if you want a real laid back cruise with all the comforts of home and don't mind passing up a bit of performance, the FXRS may be for you. The bike is a big improvement over previous H-D offerings and is actually fun to ride on winding roads. Thumbs up! (but pity about the pricetag).

— C.M.

