

Power and handling in an ever higher gear

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New shapes, better performance, lighter weight and improved aerodynamics highlight 2007 model year changes for most major motorcycle manufacturers. The sport-bike category continues its relentless increase in engine horsepower and handling dynamics. Most sport bikes are now redesigned every two years.

Enhanced performance is producing more track-ready motorcycles, but with the inherent tradeoff of a less versatile street motorcycle. Sharper handling and more peak power make the bikes more maneuverable but harder for new riders to master.

Bikes today are so fast and handle so well that one can approach the limits of their performance only on a racetrack. This begs the question of whether these types of bikes are best left for the track or if they can be ridden safely on the street. Regardless, bike makers continue to churn out more capable models every year, and 2007 is no different. More street-friendly standards, cruisers and touring bikes exist for riders whose focus is less racetrack oriented. Improved technology trickles down here as well, with better brakes, suspension and engines. The latest trend of super motard (supermoto) bikes continues with more models from many manufacturers. Motorcycle buyers have never had a greater variety of choices.

Let's take a look at some of the new models.

Standards



Kawasaki Z1000

Completely redesigned for 2007, the Z1000 offers increased performance and sleeker styling. Ergonomics have been improved with handlebars placed closer to the rider, a slimmer saddle and more compact riding position. Kawasaki says this superbike should be even more fun to ride because of its higher horsepower, re-engineered chassis and lighter weight. Available in metallic diablo black for MSRP \$8,649, www.kawasaki.com/Products/Motorcycles.aspx.



Yamaha FZ6

The FZ6 is Yamaha's middle-weight sporting standard with an R6 motor and aluminum frame, revised with a longer swingarm, new four-piston Monoblock brake calipers and newly restyled fairing. Yamaha says the new fairing and windscreen reduce turbulence and that the new, higher quality paint, new front fender and specially finished fork tubes are an improved look. In Team Yamaha blue or candy red, MSRP \$6,849, yamaha-motor.com.

Supermoto



Husqvarna SM 610 / 510 (above) / 450

Husqvarna has three supermoto bikes. The SM 610 is for those who use their bikes every day and want comfort to go with performance. With an MSRP of \$7,599, it has a single-cylinder 576-cc. four-valve motor, six-speed transmission, 43-mm. inverted forks and weighs 313 pounds. The SM 510 and 450 are replicas of the world Motard championship winning team bikes and weigh 292 and 263 pounds dry, respectively. Their new 50-mm. Marzocchi forks, larger valves and a shorter stroke highlight their sharper race focus, but they're still street legal. The SM 510 is \$7,799 and SM 450 is \$7,299, husqvarnausa.com.



Buell Lightning Super TT

The Lightning Super TT combines supermoto style with the attitude of the standard Lightning. It features a 1,203-cc. air/oil/fan-cooled V-twin that puts out 103 hp. at 6,800 rpm and 84 pound-feet of torque. Six-spoke cast aluminum wheels feature Pirelli Scorpion Sync 17-inch tires. A narrow solo seat, front fender, racing style flyscreen and tail section number plates add supermoto edge to its styling. The light 400-pound dry weight and short 54-inch wheelbase should make for nimble handling. Available in Arctic white or barricade orange, MSRP \$10,295, buell.com.



BMW G650 X Moto (above) / X Country / X Challenge

This is one of three new BMW G650s. Powered by a liquid-cooled 652-cc. engine, it pumps out 53 hp at 7,000 rpm and 44 pound-feet of torque. Performance tires are on 17-inch wheels, with a low-mounted front fender and broad, flat seat to accent the aggressive supermoto styling. In graphite metallic matte red, MSRP \$9,100, bmwmotorcycles.com/bikes.

Cruisers



Victory Vision Street / Tour (above)

Victory's new touring motorcycle is available in two forms: the Vision Tour, intended primarily for two-up, long-distance touring in luxury, and the Vision Street, intended primarily for solo touring and cruising. The Vision is a sleekly designed, bold new look for Victory. They both feature a relaxed, feet-forward riding position and 26.5-inch seat height, Freedom V-Twin engine, aerodynamic windscreen, six-speed transmission and a six-gallon fuel capacity. Available in the fall as a 2008 model in black, super steel gray and midnight cherry. MSRP to be announced, polarisindustries.com/en-us/Victory/.



Touring/Sport Touring Triumph Tiger

The Tiger has been redesigned for 2007 and given the 1050-cc. fuel-injected three-cylinder engine with 114 hp. at 9,400 rpm and 74 pound-feet of torque. Also new is the twin-spar aluminum frame, braced aluminum swingarm and 17-inch cast aluminum wheels. The cycle features adjustable 43-mm. upside-down forks, and front radial-mounted four-piston brake-clamp 320-mm. discs. Dry weight is 436 pounds, and a 5.2-gallon fuel capacity extends its touring range. In black, Caspian blue, scorched yellow and fusion white for \$10,699 or \$11,499 with ABS brakes, triumph.co.uk/usa/.



Harley-Davidson XL1200N Nightster

A new version of the 1200-cc. Sportster, the Nightster has a 25.3-inch seat height, making it among the lowest riding of all Harley-Davidson models. The Nightster has mid-mount controls, a rubber-mounted, gray-colored V-twin engine, front fork gaiters, chopped front and rear fenders, new graphics, side-mounted license plate and black trim evoking images of the past. MSRP is \$9,595 in black, \$9,990 in two-tone colors, harley-davidson.com.