

MOTORCYCLES

Naked or dressed, new bikes are built to thrill

The International Motorcycle Show at the Jacob Javits Convention Center in Manhattan continues through today.

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How long can motorcycles continue to get faster and better handling? Makers of sport and supersport motorcycles wrestle with these questions every year, and their engineers and designers still eke out ever-greater power while meeting tightening emissions standards.

Sportbikes continue to become more narrowly focused with less compromise for comfort and almost complete emphasis on racetrack results. With better performance and handling, real world comfort and ergonomics take a backseat — as illustrated by the Honda CBR1000RR, Kawasaki ZX-10R, Suzuki GSX-R600 and 750 and Yamaha R6.

Industry trends for cruiser motorcycles mimic automobiles in their drive for lower, sleeker vehicles with wider tires. Some manufacturers have resorted to engineering trickery such as offset forks to fool the eye and brain into thinking “chopper” while retaining more standard chassis dimensions for fork rake and trail and seat height. The result is a more radical looking motorcycle that still steers and handles normally. Examples: the Harley-Davidson Rocker and Yamaha Raider.

Riders also are seeing more middleweight bikes in the adventure touring category that can travel on gravel or hard-pack dirt roads. Models such as the BMW F800GS and Kawasaki Versys fit in here. New and notable 2008 motorcycle models:



The 2008 Harley-Davidson Rocker sells for about \$17,000.

BMW F800GS

The long-awaited F800GS is based on the F800S and ST models. The 85-hp., 800-cc parallel twin has been mated to an adventure-touring steel trellis frame. It will come with chain final drive, optional electronic suspension adjustment, and antilock brakes that may be selectively disabled. Price has not been announced.

Buell 1125R

The 1125R is Buell's new top-of-the-line, liter-class sportbike, with the company's first liquid-cooled engine. Displacing 1,125 ccs, the Helicon V-twin is a 72-degree, double overhead cam brute that develops a claimed 146 crankshaft horsepower at 10,500 rpm. Jointly developed by Buell and BRP-Rotax, the 1125R utilizes Buell's patented fuel-in-the-frame, under-engine muffler and zero-torsional-load brakes to centralize mass for crisper, steadier handling. For \$11,995 in black.

Ducati Desmosedici

Ducati unleashes its race-replica based on its MotoGP racer; the 990-cc V-4 engine produces a claimed 200 hp. at 13,800

rpm. Fully street legal, the Desmosedici lists for \$72,500 and has a three-year warranty. A limited production run should make this Ducati very rare.

Ducati 848

The 848 Superbike replaces the 749. Similar in styling to the 1098, the 848 has a 94.0-by-61.2-mm bore and stroke, a wet clutch, and with its aluminum frame weighs in at 369 pounds. Ducati claims 134 hp. with about 71 pound-feet of torque. In red or white for about \$13,000.

Harley-Davidson Rocker

The Rockertail suspension features a swingarm-mounted rear fender for a clean look. Internally wired handlebars neaten the front, with its narrow forked front tire, stretched, 38-degree raked fork and low 26.2-inch solo seat. Its 96-cubic-inch V-twin pumps out a claimed 86 pound-feet of torque at 3,200 rpm. In black for \$17,295; \$17,640 in colors.

Honda CBR1000RR

Performance-oriented changes include a more oversquare engine with a 76.0-mm bore

and 55.1-mm stroke, higher 12.3:1 compression ratio and titanium 30.5-mm intake valves with double valve springs for higher rpm. Fuel-injection throttle bodies have been enlarged to 46 mm, and a new idle air control valve allows smoother throttle transitions. A new aluminum frame with thinner walls saves weight, and Honda's electronic steering damper was added for increased high-speed stability. A new slipper clutch eases downshifting, and revised styling includes front turn signals integrated into the mirrors. \$11,599.

Kawasaki Ninja 250R

Sleek styling, enhanced power and lightweight response highlight the new 250R. Kawasaki has added a full fairing similar to the one worn by its larger Ninjas. One of just a few 250-class sportbikes sold in the United States, the little Ninja blends sporty styling, easy handling and usable power delivery. Featuring a 249-cc parallel twin engine, 2-into-1 exhaust and six-speed transmission, it rides on 17-inch wheels. With a 30.7-inch seat height and light 333-pound dry weight, it should fit a wide variety of riders. \$3,399.

Kawasaki Versys

Kawasaki describes this bike as a jack-of-all-trades. Short for Versatile System, the Versys contains a 649-cc, eight-valve, parallel twin engine housed in a sportbike-like chassis with long-travel suspension. With a 399-pound dry weight, 33.1-inch seat height and over 5½ inches of suspension travel at each end, the Versys should prove comfortable and agile. \$6,899.

Kawasaki ZX-10R

Greater high-rpm performance without sacrificing stellar midrange response was the goal for Kawasaki's new ZX-10R. New secondary fuel injectors, oval throttle bodies and reshaped intake ports were some of the refinements made to its already capable DOHC 998-cc inline-four. Reshaped ram air ducts and a larger airbox help boost efficiency and power. A single titanium silencer highlights exhaust



The 2008 Victory Kingpin 8-Ball has black chrome.

changes that are claimed to provide better flow while generating lower emissions and less noise. A new ignition-management system senses throttle opening, gear position and rpm change, and retards ignition timing when sudden engine revs are detected. Kawasaki says this system, similar to traction control, helps get power to the ground. \$11,549.

Suzuki GSX-R600 and GSX-R750

Suzuki introduces new versions of its GSX-R sportbikes with virtually identical chassis and running gear. Wheelbase is 55.1 inches, rake and trail are 23.8 degrees and 3.9 inches, respectively, and each bike has a 31.9-inch seat height. Both models meet new stricter emissions requirements and utilize an exhaust catalyst. Suzuki's new drive mode selector allows each rider to choose engine characteristics and soften power delivery on demand, via a switch. The 600 is \$9,399; \$10,599 for the 750.

Suzuki B-King

Based upon a 2001 showbike, the B-King has a 1,340-cc inline-four engine from Hayabusa, and is a naked streetfighter with extravagant styling. Its rear, high-mounted underseat exhaust, side-mounted radiators and sculpted headlight nodule exude uniqueness. Naked-bike ergonomics should provide a comfortable riding position, with a 31.7-inch seat height. \$12,899.

Victory Kingpin 8-Ball

A blackened version of the Victory Kingpin, the 8-Ball follows the theme started by the Vegas 8-Ball by replacing most of the chrome with basic black. The inherent characteristics of the Kingpin are retained, with its 100-cubic-inch Freedom engine, overdrive six-speed transmission and valanced fenders. Retaining its upside-down forks and cast wheels, it has no seat or footpegs for a passenger and a basic round headlight shell, all to reduce costs to \$13,999.

Yamaha R6

Yamaha says this one is “sharper, meaner and nastier.” The R6 is lighter, at 366 pounds dry, more powerful with the addition of variable intake tract length based on engine rpm, and better handling because of its all-new frame with magnesium rear subframe. New pistons and a 13.1:1 compression ratio with a fly-by-wire throttle system are claimed to boost low- and mid-rpm power for a broader powerband. It's \$9,599 for blue, raven or silver; \$9,799 for cadmium yellow with flames.

Yamaha Star Raider

The Star division cranks out its new Raider with a 113-cubic-inch V-twin and custom chopper-inspired styling. A 34-degree rake plus 6-degree yoke-angle gives it the chopper look with lighter, more natural steering. A 210/40-18 rear radial tire is the widest ever on a production Star motorcycle. Available in raven and red from \$13,180.



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