

New BMW bike is a motorcycle for all seasons

by Jerry Garrett

Headed uphill on a fairly steep on-ramp, I spied a gap ahead in the heavy freeway traffic. I gave a good goose to the throttle on the new BMW K1200GT sport-touring motorcycle and aimed for the gap. I ended up a good quarter-mile ahead of where I'd intended to go.

Good grief! What powers this thing?

NEW BMW - The new BMW K1200GT is a motorcycle for all seasons. It has optional heated seats, handgrips and electronic stability controls. CNS Photo.

The quick answer is an enhanced version of BMW's 1,157-cubic-centimeter inline four-cylinder engine. It's enhanced by 17 percent more horsepower and 11 percent more torque than its predecessor. With 152 horsepower and 96 foot-pounds of torque, it's more like a motorcycling equivalent of BMW's high performance automotive M Series. Let's call it the M12.

If you can find anyone brave, foolhardy or clueless enough to ride along on the backless back seat, you're not likely to know they are there. Open the throttle as I did on the freeway ramp, and you might find they are, indeed, no longer back there.

The zero-to-60 for this bike is some stupid number I won't even print here. Top speed is somewhere well north of 120 mph - and yes, you can run it comfortably at those speeds.

Operator comfort is assured by a fairing as crisply creased as a paper airplane, and it seems about as aerodynamic. A windscreen, electrically operated by a handlebar-mounted toggle, allows nearly 4 inches of adjustment; lower it to set new speed records, or raise it for maximum protection from wind, rain, cold and bugs. Optional heated seats and hand grips (standard on some BMW models) add to the protection from inclement weather. (It's really amazing how much less the cold bothers you when your buns are warm.)

The K1200GT is one of the smartest choices for a four-season bike. In addition to the aforementioned creature comforts, this touring/sportbike hybrid handles as well as any two-wheeler on the road today. This isn't surprising when you realize the Duolever front-wheel suspension and Paralever rear come from the K1200S sportbike. But you now need to factor in these must-have upgrades:

Â§ The new partially integrated anti-lock braking system is more carlike in that it uses valves and

hydraulics to make the system lighter, more refined, more capable and more predictable. Linked braking systems usually annoy bike magazine editors and professional testers - because they prefer little or no rear braking in high-performance riding - but you'd be hard-pressed to find anyone posting a negative comment on this unobtrusive setup.

Â§ For 2007, BMW is offering on some K and R series bikes an industry-first traction and stability control system, known as anti-skid control (a \$385 option). ASC only works when the integral ABS is fitted; it utilizes the same sensors to determine when the front and rear wheel are moving at different speeds. If the rear wheel starts spinning up, the sensors pick up the information and cut the engine until traction is regained. The system works best compensating for wet roads, slippery white lines and manhole covers, gravel on the road and winter riding.

Â§ The electronic suspension adjustment system (\$800) offers multiple factory-optimized settings for things like preload and damping in various conditions.

Â§ Tire pressure monitoring (\$260) offers the peace of mind of knowing all BMW's wonderful new electronic gadgetry won't be defeated by an air leak.

You might be wondering how much all this wizardry weighs down this bike.

You might be wondering how much all this wizardry weighs down this bike.

You might be wondering how much all this wizardry weighs down this bike.

You might be wondering how much all this wizardry weighs down this bike.

You might be wondering how much all this wizardry weighs down this bike.

The answer: not much. These days, BMW's engineers are more weight-conscious than a Brazilian supermodel. They've managed to bring this bike's dry weight to less than 550 pounds, which is commendable considering all it offers. The engine and six-speed transmission are 6 percent lighter than previous powertrains. This allows for a lower center of gravity, which in turn helps handling.

Although the K1200GT is theoretically set up for two-up touring, it's really a loner's bike. The K1200LT is the far better choice for a double-date; it offers a trunk, backrest and surround sound stereo for your passenger's comfort. The GT can be had with trunk, but it is a pricey, hard-to-find, special-order option.

The GT's attractive twin saddlebags are standard, however, and can easily be detached, and the resulting half-naked bike is really quite handsome. And it's a heckuva lot easier to store in the garage with the bags off. With them on, it's almost as wide as a Scion. White-lining is definitely a no-no with this wide load.

So get used to sitting in traffic, just like all your four-wheeled friends. For those occasions when you just want to hop on and ride into the sunset, gridlock notwithstanding, range has been extended. You can easily go more than 200 miles before needing to replenish the premium in the 6.3-gallon tank.

Gas isn't the only high price associated with this bike. There is also the matter of its sticker price. The \$19,025 is the basic price of admission. You'll no doubt want to add amenities such as xenon lighting, ESA, ASC, TPM, heated seats and grips, cruise control and an onboard computer.

With all that, you might be wise to comparison-shop less-expensive offerings from Honda, Yamaha, Triumph, Suzuki, Buell, Moto Guzzi, Harley or even BMW itself. A loaded \$22,195 K1200LT is even likely to wind up being less.

But price didn't prevent editors of Cycle World magazine from selecting the K1200GT as the top sport-tourer on the market. If price is no object, the K1200GT may be your selection, too.

Jerry Garrett is a freelance motor journalist. Copley News Service SPECS 2007 BMW K1200GT
Engine: 1,157-cc liquid-cooled inline four cylinder
Horsepower: 152 at 9,500 rpm
Torque: 96 foot-pounds at 7,750 rpm
Transmission: 6-speed
Fuel capacity: 6.3 gallons
Front suspension: Duolever
Rear suspension: Paralever
Brakes: Linked ABS
Tires: 120/70 17-inch front; 180/55 17-inch rear
Wheelbase: 61.8 inches
Seat height: 32.3 inches
Dry weight: 549 pounds
MSRP: \$19,025

New BMW bike is a motorcycle for all seasons by Jerry Garrett