

# THE 25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE



# Bike 1983-2008

By Shahram Shiva #84481

Images: BMW Motorrad USA archive and Shahram Shiva

It was 25 years ago in 1983 when BMW introduced the groundbreaking new line of water-cooled 4-cylinder motorcycles called simply the “K.” There is much history around the K bikes as they became known as the new flagship BMW motorcycle range with powerful engines mated to modern styling. The K bikes soon became the new host machines for BMW’s most cutting-edge technology.

The ABS (Antilock Braking System) was first introduced on a K100RS in 1988 model year (MY). The ESA (Electronic Suspension Adjustment) was introduced on the K1200S in 2005 MY. BMW introduced their first 100 hp power plant with the wind-tunnel refined K1 and continuing with this tradition they used the K line to launch their very first 130hp engine on the truly unique K1200RS in 1997 for 1998 MY. BMW’s current most powerful motorcycle engine runs another K bike, the 167 hp, inline-4, K1200S. Also added to this list of firsts, the first electronic cruise control for motorcycles appeared on the K1200LT along with factory heated seats.

The K series of motorcycles began in

1983 as a single model, a naked K100. This bike had no other designation attached to it, such as “RS,” or “LT.” They came later. This new radical BMW looked ultra modern for its time (the K100 still looks contemporary) and it was powered by a new engine concept, a 987cc, flat-4, longitudinal, laid out on its left side with the cylinder heads on the left and the crankshaft on the right. It was nicknamed the “Flying Brick,” because of the look of the engine. This engine, in its most updated form as an 1170cc is still in use as it powers the current K1200LT motorcycles.

I remember the first time I saw a K100;

I was in my early twenties. As a rider and a young design student I gravitated almost immediately toward this new line of bikes from BMW. The highly modern, clean and linear lines of this new K machine were a complete departure from almost every other motorcycle on the road at that time. Although for many purists the early K bikes didn’t exactly rate as perfect riding machines, esthetically certain models in the BMW K range have always been among my most favorite motorcycles.

In the past nine years, I have put about 80,000 miles on K bikes alone. These high-spirited miles have been put

◀1▶ This is the very first Luxury Tourer from BMW, a K 100 LT. This bike started the “LT” craze more than 20 years ago. ▶2▶ The K 75 S. Powered by a 3 cylinder K bike engine, has remained popular, even though the last of the K75’s left BMW factory in 1995. ▶3▶ BMW K 1. ▶4▶ The 1983 K 100, the very first K bike. It still looks modern today. ▶5▶ The half-faired K 1200 R Sport, pays homage to the original K 100 RS of the 1980s. It’s based on the 163hp K1200R naked bike. ▶6▶ The K 1100 RS with 100hp, 16-valve, 4-cylinder engine is one of the most elegant bikes ever designed. ▶7▶ The Author’s highly customized 1999 BMW K1200RS, “Nandi.” This unique machine has over 140 horsepower, putting out about 122hp at the rear wheel. All non-essential touring bits have been taken off to save weight. ▶8▶ The BMW K1200RS. Built between 1998 and 2004 MY is considered to be the last of the old-school German motorcycle design discipline. With a 130hp and suspended power plant, it’s glass-smooth and very fast.





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on a variety of K models, starting with a very clean and pampered K 1100 RS that I picked up used from a dealership in NY. After 9,000 miles in nine months, I promptly swapped that K11 with a new K1200RS in November, 1999. Little did I know that this particular K12RS would in essence not only alter my professional life, but teach me about what it means to love a particular machine.

Of course BMW riders are no strangers to love affair with bikes. Ever since the very first Beemer, the R32, was launched in 1923 they have been coveted machines for those in the know.

In the past 25 years there have been numerous types of K motorcycles offering three distinct power plants. The K100 launched the 8-valve, 4 cylinder version with telescopic front forks. Soon after the popular K100RS emerged with a very elegant and functional half fairing. Continuing with the expansion of the range, touring models were also offered in the form of K100RT and K100LT. However, the bike that proved especially popular

was the smaller 740cc, 3-cylinder, K 75 that was introduced in 1985. The still-in-demand K75 is especially noteworthy because of its continuing popularity, even though the last of the K75s left the BMW factory 13 years ago, in 1995.

The next big shift with the K motorcycles started with the 1988 model range as the very first production ABS was introduced on a K 100 RS. This shift was quickly followed by an updated and more powerful version of the K bike power plant. For the 1989 MY the new "Flying Brick" sporting a 16-valve engine, now offered a cool 100 hp and appeared wrapped in racing plastics in an experimental, and very radical for its time, Superbike called the K1.

The revolutionary BMW K1, with its wind-cheating, super aerodynamic bodywork, in many ways ushered in a new performance age for BMW. The 130 hp K1200RS and the 167 hp K1200S wouldn't have been possible without the K1 DNA. Today, the K1 is a favorite among collectors of modern BMW's.

Although BMW introduced the anti-dive Telelever front suspension in 1994 on the Boxer engines, it wasn't until 1997 that they were placed on K bikes. The

first K that received the Telelever was the K1200RS. The popular, ultra smooth K1200RS (1998-2004 MY) marked the first time BMW broke through the self-imposed 100 horsepower limit. The K1200RS with its sexy and curvy Italian inspired bodywork was a hit. As the first K bike to actually suspend the engine beneath an aluminum frame, instead of using it as a stress member, the K12RS is glass-smooth and is an extremely reliable and comfortable long-distance runner. This successful engineering of a vibe-free, super smooth riding experience is one of the benchmarks of today's K1200LT luxury tourer.

In the summer of 1999 I took my only demo ride on the new K1200RS and I was hooked. I loved the power, the styling, the ergonomics and specially the new ABS II. A few months later I picked one up in Black custom paint with all the available options at that time. I like black bikes but the K12RS wasn't available in my favorite color, so I had the bike painted before I took delivery and nicknamed it "Nandi" for the mythical bull that the Hindu god Lord Shiva rides upon. A short few months later, in March 2000, I organized the first ever K1200RS only rally in



Connecticut, which made the cover of the June 2000 issue of this fine magazine.

Now nine years and 64,000 miles later, my love affair with "Nandi" is still continuing. Although I have the privilege of riding different bikes but every time I take Nandi out, whether for a commute in all kinds of weather or a joy ride, it brings a smile to my face. K bikes have been bringing smiles to many hardcore, committed riders for decades. The K75 for example with its smooth, highly reliable, counter-balanced engine has run quite successfully in the Iron Butt Rally, and has also been the choice of global adventurers.

The year 2004 is a historically important one for BMW. This was the year that BMW introduced a new product philosophy. BMW's post 2004 engineering vision is to produce bikes that not only remain faithful to the brand's time-honored qualities of reliability, advanced engineering, premium components and safety, but also to become highly competitive in the areas of performance and esthetics. With this new goal in mind, power-to-weight ratio has become the new mantra at BMW. Their fine machines that used to be the heaviest in their respective categories are now the lightest. For example, the new K1200S is the lightest in the Hypersport class, as so is the new K1200GT amongst the multi-cylinder Touring bikes.

With this new philosophy in mind BMW changed their K series line up in 2004, by introducing the 1157cc, across the frame (transverse) mounted, liquid-



*The 152hp K1200GT has grabbed Cycle World's best Sport Tourer two years in a row. It's the lightest and most sophisticated multi-cylinder Touring bike on the road today.*



*The very fast, 167hp K 1200 S, with Duolever front suspension, helped launched the now favorite BMW factory option the ESA. The K1200S is incredibly stable in high speeds and set a FIM world land speed record at Bonneville in 2005.*

# 2008 K1200S

## Riding the Latest Generation K Bike

By Shahram Shiva #84481

What better way to acknowledge the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the K bike and all its history and heritage than to test ride the most recent K series motorcycle from BMW.

Although I had done a long-term test on a 2007 K1200R Sport, I hadn't ridden a K1200S since 2006. Therefore I was eager to hop on the 2008 and explore the refinements and advancements that have been made on this awesome machine in the past two years.

The 2008 BMW K1200S feels

surprisingly different than the previous versions that I have ridden. As a whole the K12S is unlike the K1200R or the K1200R Sport, even though they share a similar platform. There is certain sophistication that's inherent in the "S" which can't be found in others.

Although the 2008 K12S looks identical to the previous versions it feels entirely different. The upgrades to the transmission are noticeable, the annoying loud clunk into 2nd and 3rd are gone, the bike overall feels much more responsive and faster. Even the Duolever front suspension feels more responsive than the

previous version, and that could be just a by-product of the overall refinement of this fine machine.

Reading comments from members on my forums, the riders on the 2007-08 K bikes are reporting far less maintenance visits than the previous built years. Overall this is all very good news for one of the most unique motorcycles on the road today. The combination of ABS, anti-dive Duolever front suspension, Paralever shaft drive and refined styling married to the most powerful engine from BMW is certainly a tempting concoction that is irresistible. The K bikes are back!



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cooled inline 4-cylinder power plant putting out an impressive 167hp and 96 ft-lb of torque at 8250rpm. This engine was mated to a new K1200S that was about 15% lighter and 30% more powerful than the generation it replaced. This new production of K bikes also launched an alternative front suspension, different from the trusted Telelever. BMW called this new system Duolever for a double wishbone, with an up-right and steering linkage system that was originally designed by inventor Norman Hossack.

The K1200S was followed by a lighter and slightly quicker K1200R naked bike and the 152hp K1200GT, an agile and comfortable Grand Touring. A half-faired K1200R Sport was also introduced in 2007.

This renaissance at BMW Motorrad began in 2004. However, initially this new shift at BMW didn't go quite so smoothly. The first series of the new K bikes proved somewhat troublesome, but by the 2007 model year the bikes became much more reliable, sporting upgraded transmission and clutch assembly. As I write this article I am conducting a long-term test of an '08 K1200S and so far have found it to be

much more refined and spirited than the previous versions of this bike. The series of upgrades and advancements have really paid off. This new K12S is a joy to ride.

The renaissance at BMW is continuing, with even faster and more competitive bikes. After 25 years the multi-cylinder BMW's are no longer confined to the letter "K." In April BMW Motorrad launched another designation to represent even a faster line of BMW I-4 bikes and that mark is "S." BMW is planning to enter Superbike racing with their new S series.

K bikes have developed quite a diehard following in the past quarter-century. I have thoroughly enjoyed riding them in the last decade. With their planted, straight-line high stability, all-day comfortable and roomy ergonomics, smooth and always very powerful engines, ABS, shaft drive, great braking power, alternative front suspension and host of trick options, they'll remain a favorite amongst serious two-wheel enthusiasts with a taste for refinement.

Happy Birthday, K Bikes!

*Shahram Shiva is longtime BMW K bike enthusiast and evangelist. He is the founder of K12RS.COM, BMW-K.COM and BMWSuperBikes.com. Special thanks to Oleg Satanovsky of BMW Motorrad USA for archival images.*



The author riding a K1200R. It is the naked version of the K1200S. Because of its long wheelbase and quicker acceleration, the K1200R is natural at drag racing and it has won in Bandon Drag races in Ireland in 2006.



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