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BIKES: 2014 Star Motorcycles Bolt

Ken "Hawkeye" Glassman rides the brand new Star Motorcycles Bolt...

Ken "Hawkeye" Glassman | Posted May 22, 2013 Charlotte, NC

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The Bolt is powered by a 942cc (58 C.I.) 4-valve, air-cooled, 60-degree V-Twin engine. (Photo: Ken "Hawkeye" Glassman)



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In 2006, Yamaha introduced the Star brand, to separate their cruiser lineup of motorcycles from their sport [bikes](#), dirt bikes, dual sports, and sport tourers. They had been making cruisers for years, with their Virago line, and later the V-Star 650's and 1100's. Those bikes were traditional looking cruisers, and sold in large numbers. More recently they branched out with modernized, almost Art Deco looking cruisers, like the Roadliner and Stratoliner, and V-Star 1300. All of those models are very popular with the Baby Boom generation, but Star knew they needed something to bring in the younger Generation X and Y crowd – those individuals who are between 20 and 36 years old.

To better understand this young crowd, Star did some extensive research and discovered that these younger generations think of themselves as anti-establishment, counter-culture individuals, with a black sheep mentality. Their mantra is "simple is more", and they embrace the idea of stripped down, "bobber style [motorcycles](#), and are proud of what they could create with a minimalist approach. They definitely don't look to buy their "Father's Cruisers", with all the glitz and chrome. If anything, they want a very "un-bling" looking motorcycle. And because they are just starting out in life, they want something affordable.

So Star went to work, and the result is the all new Bolt – an "Urban Performance Bobber." The engineers and designers set down a particular set of parameters to achieve the right balance of performance and styling to suit their target audience. The bike had to have strong low end power and torque, nimble feel, good brakes, and generous lean angles. It had to have a comfortable riding position, and quality suspension performance. A low seat height was important, along with light weight, and the use of simple genuine materials like steel fenders instead of fiberglass. The appearance needed to be an urban performance bobber style, to give it just the right attitude. After spending an entire day on the Bolt, it is clear that Star has hit their goals.

The Bolt is powered by a 942cc (58 C.I.) 4-valve, air-cooled, 60-degree V-Twin engine. A closed loop Mikuni fuel injection system with 3D mapping meters out the Dino juice. The result is a powerful engine that offers lively acceleration, and very smooth power delivery from just off idle all the way up to the rev limiter. Maximum torque is 58.2 Ft. lbs. @ 3,500 RPM, which was great for squirting around cars in congested traffic situations.

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The Bolt is fitted with a single-pin crankshaft so the rider gets that lovable V-Twin lope with just the right amount of engine pulsation for character, and without any annoying quaking vibrations. Star also did a great job of tuning the 2-into-1 exhaust system to offer a delightful low grumble at idle, and the right throaty growl when accelerating. Fuel efficiency is also a respectable 50mpg on regular gas. With the 3.2 gallon gas tank, a cruising range of just over 150 miles is achieved.

The Bolt Press launch was very different from other press introductions I've been to. Since Star is billing the bike as an "urban-friendly" [motorcycle](#), most of our day was to be spent tooling around in the urban environment of San Diego, rather than going off to carve turns on rural roads east of the city. I was skeptical of this arrangement after checking some of the Bolt's specs, especially the rear suspension travel of only 2.8". I was lamenting not bringing my kidney belt, and a chiropractor along with me. But by the time we stopped for lunch, all fears were allayed, and I found the Bolt to be a rather comfortable riding experience.

While the city of San Diego, can't compete with my home town of Chicago in the pot hole and busted pavement department, we rode on plenty of city streets that would test the suspension of any motorcycle, or car for that matter. The telescopic front fork, with 4.7" of travel soaked up the bumps nicely, and the rear suspension (adjustable for pre-load) was up to the task of smoothing out rough pavement without sending shivers up my spine. On a few occasions, I hit a pot hole that sent the dual shocks to their full bump stop, but still it wasn't jarring as I anticipated. You could tell that the Bolt wasn't fitted with bargain basement dampers, and that the engineers spent a lot of time dialing them in to provide enough compliance, yet still be firm enough to provide crisp handling for challenging higher speed cornering capabilities, which we had a few opportunities to experience. And the pegs are set high enough to offer excellent lean angles when riding aggressively, without worrying about scraping them or your boots.

The 5-speed transmission provided crisp, sure shifts, with the right amount of mechanical feel. Finding neutral was easy. Best of all, the clutch pull was light, which was very welcomed by the end of the day spent in a lot of stop and go traffic. The reach to the clutch lever was good for small hands, and can be adjusted with tools for an even shorter throw.

The Bolt's frame is a steel double cradle design with the engine mounted as a stressed member, for additional stiffness, and a solid feeling. The wheelbase is a compact 61.8", and the quick handling is aided by a 29-degree rake and 130mm of trail. With the engine mounted low in the frame, the Bolt has a very low center of gravity, and only weighs 540 lbs. ready to ride, so it's easy to get off the sidestand, and it feels very well balanced.

The brakes are good, if not remarkable, with a single 298mm floating front wave disc, clamped down by a 2-piston pin-slide caliper. Out back you get a 298mm wave disc and a single-pot caliper. Both brakes have good feel, and not prone to lock up. The front 12 spoke cast wheel wears a tubeless 100/90-19 tire, and the rear sports a 150/80B-16, and both offer good grip and traction.

The Bolt got the ergonomics right for my 5'6" build. The seating position is upright, and the mid mounted pegs are located underneath the rider's thighs. They're placed so you can even stand up on them to go over severe bumps when necessary. The handlebars are comfortably placed so your hands are in a neutral position. The solo seat is very well padded, and gives the rider the feel of sitting in the bike, not on it. However, due to the compact nature of the Bolt, (overall length is a hair over 90") the seat doesn't offer any fore and aft movement. But at least it does lock you into a comfortable position, and it's tapered at the front, so that the low 27.2" seat height makes it easy for short legged riders to flat foot the ground. The quiet, low maintenance carbon fiber drive belt is only 21mm wide, which allows for the whole bike to be narrower. Oddly, another journalist friend of mine, who stands 6'3", praised the Bolt for being comfortable even for his large frame.

There is a single round gauge mounted just in front of the fuel tank, with a large digital read-out for the speedometer, and a right thumb switch toggles between dual trip meters, and a clock. It is that digital gauge, however, that prompts my biggest complaint. It is very difficult to see the large numbers for the speedo, and almost impossible to see the smaller trip meters and clock in many daytime light conditions. Oddly, it most easily seen when the sun is shining on it directly. I'd also like to see a tachometer built into the gauge.

The Bolt comes in two models – the standard Bolt as described, at \$7,990, which is finished in either Raven Black, or Pearl White, and the R-Spec model. For an additional \$300, the R-Spec gives you upgraded anodized rear shocks, with piggyback style gas chambers, a suede type seat vinyl with colored stitching, blacked-out mirrors, and a choice of a satin Matte Grey, or Camo Green colors. The upgraded shocks seemed to provide a bit more comfortable ride, but again, the stock shocks worked very well, so deciding between models will mostly come down to color choice. Even though I'm past the target market age by more years than I'd like to admit, I think the bike is beautifully styled. There is not much brightwork, just a few touches to offset the blacked out engine area and to accent the exhaust system. The rear cylinder header pipe sweeps gracefully forward under the air cleaner, and then curls back around to meet up with the front header, and on back to the silencer. The bobbed front and rear fender give the minimalist look, and a round tail light with bright LED's sits atop the rear fender, old school style. And Star has over 50 accessory parts to personalize the Bolt to the riders taste, with more on the way.

For those familiar with the San Diego area, we left our hotel in the heart of San Diego's Gaslight District, and had the chance to visit some of the sights around the city. Seeing the Midway Aircraft Carrier Museum was an awesome sight, and then on to Bayview and Sunset Parks on Coronado Island. We also went north to Presidio Park, and visited the Embarcadero, and down to Chicano Park, and all points in between. We spent a lot of time on the city streets, some two lane roads, and even a few highway stints, where cruising around at 75 mph, was comfortable and easy. The Bolt handled it all with composure and poise.

The motorcycle that is the closest comparison to the Bolt is Harley-Davidson's Iron 883. The price is identical, and the dimensions are similar – with the Bolt being 4.4 inches longer overall, and a two



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inch longer wheelbase. The Bolt has 1.2 inches more ground clearance, 3 n  lbs. of torque and weighs 33 lbs less than the Sporty. But the numbers don't tell the story. The Bolt is a far superior motorcycle in all areas. It is quicker, runs smoother, shifts better, handles better, provides more ground clearance and lean angle, has a quiet belt drive instead of a chain, and the ride quality is far better than the [Sportster](#). In the lower gears at high rpm on the Bolt, you get some buzz in the mirrors making things look a bit fuzzy. On the Sportster the mirrors shake so much, even at idle, they're virtually useless. With excellent fit and finish, the Bolt is what a Harley Sportster should have been for the last 40 years.

The new Bolt is a fine motorcycle, and should be very popular with new riders, and the younger generations. But I wouldn't be surprised if a few graybeards like myself buy one to get a little jolt from the Bolt.

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