



## LEADING THE WAY WITH A SPECIAL K

### The BMW K 1100 RS

Road Test by Steve Engelbrecht

Photos by David Duprey

**Achtung! willkommen der Uberbike (attention! welcome the superbike)**

Imagine banking over a large litre-class sportbike, farther and farther into a long sweeper. As you roll on the gas and watch the speedo creep progressively past one hundred and twenty, the landscape rushes by in a frenetic blur, yet all the while you remain serene. The suspension completely isolates you from any surface disturbances, remaining firm, never harsh, and always having a little travel in reserve. Noise is minimal, wind is deflected. The power plant is smooth and potent; its delivery effortlessly. Your lean angle becomes extreme, but the bike has not yet approached its limit. You could experience this on many bikes. [The only reason you roll off is what makes this experience surreal and unique: your passenger is getting nervous; he's afraid your going to drag the hard luggage, and all his stuff's in there.]

As you exit the sweeper you duck in behind the little fairing, and your passenger ducks in behind you. You click the shifter down to fourth, rev it out, then shift up to fifth and keep the throttle open. The quiet inline-four pulls redline comfortably, with the bike fully loaded, and two man-sized passengers. The speedo indicates 152 M.P.H., yet nothing seems to strain. You wonder to yourself, "have I discovered some secret here or is my test

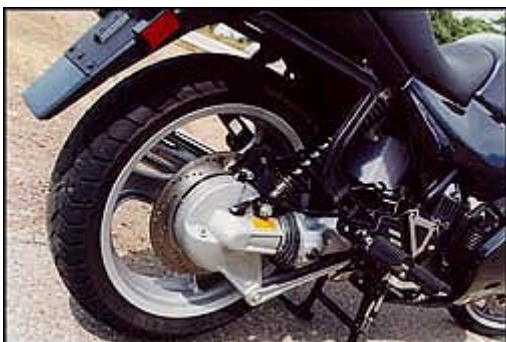


bike possessed, like Herbie the love bug?" I don't

remember reading too many rave reviews about this machine, and yet in overall competence from my adult, civilised perspective, the K 1100 RS just smokes all those other horsepower-heavy monster bikes. And I love huge engines and tacky graphics. The four-cylinder K-bike feels like it's truly in touch with the top of the line BMW automotive philosophy: fast, ultra competent handling machines that are pragmatic, reserved in style and designed for the wealthy enthusiast.



BMW has achieved some amazing results with the K 1100 RS. When the K-series was introduced in that last, forgettable decade, it was met with a lukewarm reception. The new inline, water-cooled engines were to replace the quaint old flat twin motor that had become obsolete after the Japanese war of the superbikes, and transport BMW into the future. Criticisms flew. I remember adjectives like: bland, heavy, slow and ...bland. Most reviewers preferred the three cylinder 750 because it would at least pretend to corner. Though these assessments were unfair, it was indeed possible that



BMW had made a mistake. Porsche made the same one when they tried to phase-out the air-cooled flat six 911 series for more current front-engine, water-cooled designs. In retrospect, it seems that not many enthusiasts wanted BMW to build a better superbike. They wanted BMW to remain the eclectic, eccentric alternative; they wanted to look cool. After a few years of poor sales BMW took notice. It was back to the drawing board to build an entire new line around a redesigned update of their old twin boxer motor. BMW kept the new line fresh with innovative suspensions and alternative styling. It worked. BMW has won back the hearts of its two-wheeled boxer-



headed faithful. But deep in the Black Forest at the factory they never gave up on the K-bikes. They quietly refined them to this present incarnation, the automaton of autobahn, a true German superbike.

### At first glance

I didn't get bowled over the first time I laid my eyes on the K 1100 RS. I don't think it cared for me too much either. This bike is reserved. The K 1100 RS doesn't have a lot of billboard graphics or take any wild styling risks. At about seven-and-a-half feet in length, it is huge! Our test bike had a perfectly applied dark charcoal grey metallic paint job, with just one set of stickers. The bike was fitted with BMW's optional hard luggage and tank bag. The styling is under-stated yet substantial like the rest of the bike. The fairing upper, tank and tail-piece retain the boxy look of the original K's, but the rounded lowers and side-panels redesigned for 1993 soften and update the bikes appearance nicely. The rectangular headlight is still big enough to pass for a TV screen. The wheelbase, at 61.61 inches unladen, is a couple of inches longer than other sport touring bikes, making it more like a big cruiser. The weight isn't bad at all, at 538 dry /590 wet, the K 1100 RS looks larger.



The heart of the BMW K 1100 RS is the 1093cc longitudinal in-line flat four. It boasts such standard fare as four valves per cylinder double overhead cams, water-cooling and fuel-injection. Redline comes at 8,900 rpm, and the compression ratio is 11.0 to 1. Bore and Stroke is a close to square 70,5/70.

Power is delivered to the rear wheel by BMW's patented Paralever single-sided swingarm with its encased shaft-drive. BMW chose an eighteen inch wheel for the rear, with a seventeen up front. Widths are slightly narrower than industry standard, at 3.0" in the

front 4.5" for the rear. This choice I applaud; superbike width wheels are unnecessary on the street, and would just hamper transitions on such a large motorcycle. The wheels are plenty large enough to mount Michelin Radials, which BMW does.



This BMW model relies on standard 41.7mm telescopic forks. As on all BMWs, brakes are provided by the masters at Brembo, which means 'great' in Italian. The K 1100 RS has twin discs up front with four-pot calipers. A single disc rides the Paralever out back, all hooked up to an ABS system.

### Take it for a spin

Starting the bike up is easy and uneventful. The K 1100 RS won't start with the kickstand down, but you can warm it up on the centrestand. Though the lever reads choke, it's really just a throttle advance for the fuel injection. It takes a good five minutes of 'choke' to warm this bike's breadbox. The big K purrs quietly a few octaves lower than most litre-sized bikes. The seat is very comfortable, and its relationship to the handlebars and foot pegs is good. Once rolling the torque motor pulls hard everywhere, but not screamingly so. You might expect a bike so large as the BMW to be a handful around town but it's not. The bike is sprung in its own way with a wallow. The engine design and position enable gravity allowing easy transitions. The frame feels rigid and the suspensions balance harmoniously. Still, the K1100RS feels a little stifled in city traffic, and if it's warm out, say above ninety, your in trouble. The BMW likes its flow of cool air, without it the temperature gauge parks its needle right next to the red and the fan holds it there. Generous waves of heat radiate from the fairing lowers, broiling your legs like a rotisserie chicken. It can be a little relentless, but the BMW won't overheat. One great thing about driving the BMW in the city is the amazing air-horn. Few cars have horns this loud, and I used it generously for every traffic slight, real or imaginary. It allowed me to compensate for years of inadequate honking.



# 1996 BMW K 1100 RS Specifications

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## Engine

Type	liquid-cooled, four stroke inline 4-cylinder
Bore x stroke	70.5 mm x 70.0 mm
Displacement	1093 cc
Horsepower	100 bhp @ 7750 rpm
Torque	77.3 lb.-ft. @ 5500 rpm
Compression Ratio	11.0:1
Valve Gear	DOHC, chain-driven
Valves per cylinder	Four
Carburetion and ignition	fuel injection and electronic ignition controlled by Bosch Motronic MA 2.2 engine management system
Fuel Capacity	5.2 US gallons including 1.3 gal. reserve
Air Filter	Micronic plate-type paper element
Charging system	14 V, 50 Amp Alternator (700W)
Battery	BMW Mareg, 19 Amp/h low maintenance
Cooling System	Liquid cooled controlled via thermostat

## Drivetrain

Primary drive	Helical-cut gears with tensioner	
Clutch	180 mm dry, single plate with diaphragm spring	
Gear Ratios	1st gear - 4.49:1	4th gear - 1.88:1
	2nd gear - 2.96:1	5th gear - 1.61:1
	3rd gear - 2.30:1	
Drive System	enclosed driveshaft with two universal joints and integral torsional damper	
Final Drive	spiral bevel gears, 2.81:1 ratio (31/11)	

## Frame/Suspension

Frame	Tubular steel, engine as a structural component
Front Suspension	telescopic fork with progressive spring action, refillable "cartridge type damper" system
Travel / Dimensions	5.3 inches / 41.7 mm stanchion tube diameter
Rear Suspension	Patented BMW Paralever swingarm and shaft drive, single shock with variable rebound damping
Travel / Dimensions	4.7 inches, progressive spring, 5 positions

## Brakes

Brake System	BMW / FAG anti-lock brake system ABS II
Front Brakes	two 4-piston calipers, wear compensation
Front Rotors	dual 12.0 inch floating rotors
Rear Brake	one double-action 2-piston caliper
Rear Rotor	single 11.2 inch diameter fixed rotor

## **Wheels and Tires**

Front Wheel	3.50 x 17 MT-H2, cast alloy, 3-spoke U-profile
Rear Wheel	4.50 x 18 MT-H2, cast alloy, 3-spoke U-profile
Front Tire	120/70 - VR 17 tubeless
Rear Tire	160/60 - VR 18 tubeless

## **Dimensions**

Overall Length	87.8 inches (2230 mm)
Overall Width	31.66 inches (803 mm) (over mirrors)
Wheelbase	61.6 inches (1565 mm) (unladen)
Ground Clearance	4.9 inches (125 mm) (unladen)
Seat Height	31.5 (800 mm)
Steering Angle	64 degrees
Front Wheel Trail	3.74 inches (95 mm) (with rider)
Dry Weight	564 lbs.

## **Available Colours**

Marrakech Red  
Night Black/Arctic Silver Metallic  
Graphite Metallic  
Palmetto Green Metallic