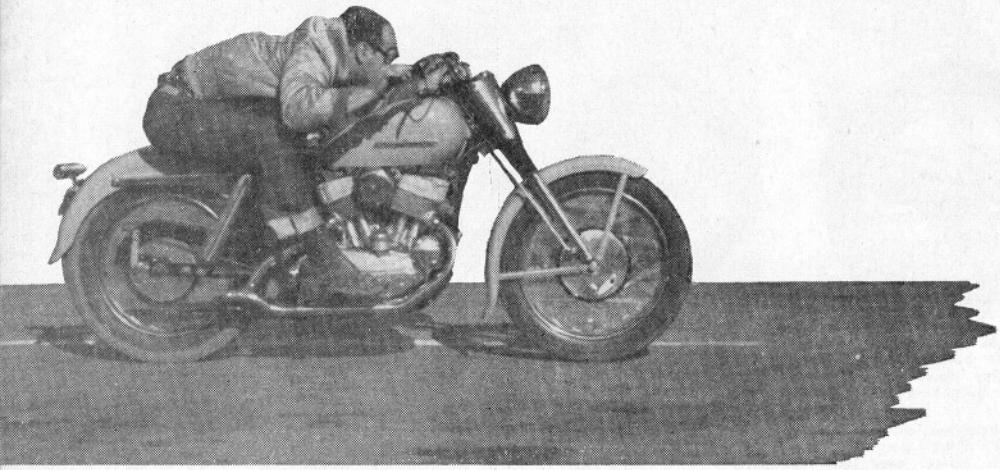
ROAD TEST: 1954 Harley-Davidson Model KH



Bettering 82 mph in third was accomplished by CYCLE lensman Lee in this position.

55 cu. in. Anniversary Model Is Full Of Surprises

By Bob Schanz, editor

WHAT'S ALL THIS fuss about Harley's new 55 cubic inch KH model? How much difference in performance can a ¾ inch increase in stroke make between two machines that are otherwise basically the same? To answer these questions you *must* ride the model. Another CYCLE road test is completed, a thorough shakedown of the 1954 KH Harley-Davdsion, and we now have the answers.

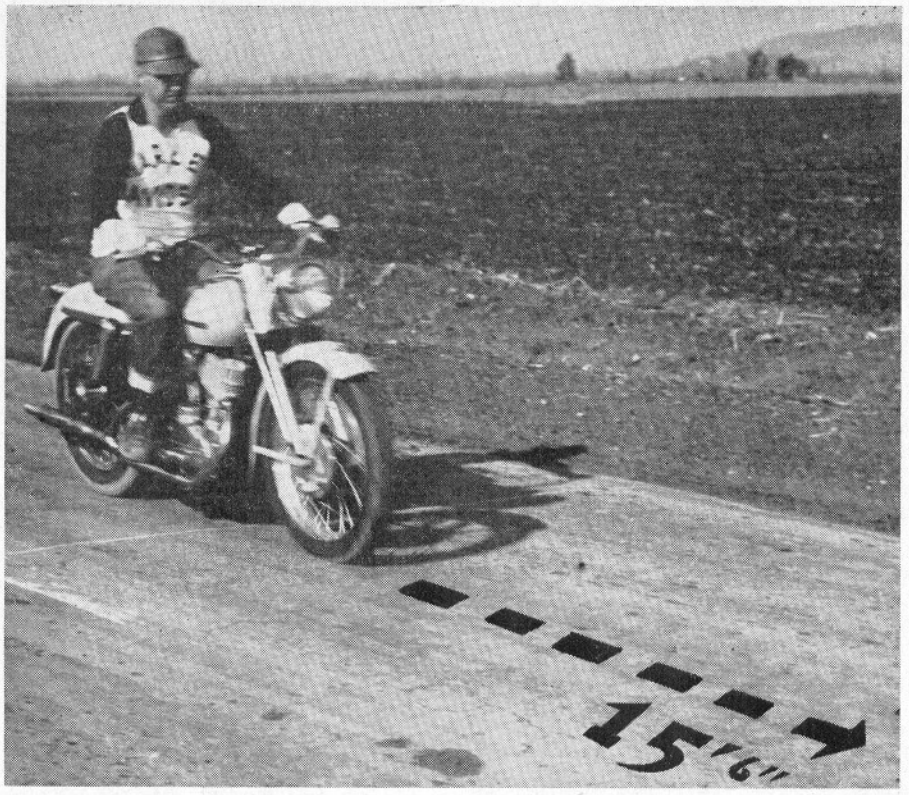
When we compared the new model's performance in figures with those of the 1952 45 cu. in. K tested by CYCLE, we learned that in most cases improvements were very evident. Maximum speeds were increased in every gear, the time for the ¼ mile drag was reduced more than two seconds, and individual stopping distances of both front and rear brakes were shortened. But, a fair comparison of the speed figures cannot be made because when testing the K 45, only stop watches were used for the timing. The KH was timed by the Christian electric timers which allow no percentage for human error.

If you have ever ridden the K 45 to any great extent, or owned one as I once did, you would immediately spot a world of difference in performance, a difference that cannot be tabulated in cold, hard numbers alone. Laying aside all of its unique features and fine qualities for a moment, the 45 inch predecessor to the KH just did not have gopower in relation to its displacement. This is where the story changes in testing the KH. Besides having one of the best riding frames in the world (no one can honestly disagree with that statement), in addition to the finest electrical equipment available in any motorcycle sold in the U.S., over and above its flawless finish and lavish use of chrome and stainless steel, the new 55 cu. in. KH has horsepower that most riders would hardly ever use. This one goes like the proverbial bomb and just won't quit when it comes to acceleration.

With a light hand on the throttle, put-

Look Out, It's Loaded

A study in speed. The landscape drifted by at a hundred per as I assumed as low a position as was possible with standard tank and pegs.



Stopping power of the KH Harley-Davidson was among the very best. Complete halt, using both brakes, was possible in a minimum distance of 15 feet and 6 inches. Front wheel would not skid when applied by itself.

ting around town, you might not notice it but pick out a clear, straight stretch of deserted highway and do as I did. With the 3.25 x 19 front hoop an inch behind the first light that bounded Frank Christian's one-tenth mile trap I grabbed a big handful of throttle, all there was, and let the clutch lever snap. Talk about surprised test riders! When all those engine rpm were translated into forward motion the rear wheel was spinning on the pavement and all but came around on my left to meet the handle bars before I straightened it out by easing off on the throttle slightly. And then I was on my way through the 1/10 mile acceleration trap. With all that time wasted burning rubber at the start, the KH still managed to carry through in 9.05 seconds. After getting used to all that sudden power this figure was eventually reduced to 8.41 seconds. Look back through the past road tests in CYCLE back issues and you'll find that it is a tough time to beat, especially if you check the electrically timed tests. Stop watch figures are sometimes flexible.

If the tenth-mile drag was a surprise, then the quarter-mile acceleration test was two of them. But the biggest hair-curler was one experiment that we threw in just for kicks.

Starting on the ¼ mile line I slipped it into second cog, wound it up and let the left hand clutch lever fly. Those seven clutch plates snapped together and, believe it or not, that 4:00 x 18 rear boot gnawed at the macadam leaving no less than twelve feet of powdered Firestone before it quit spinning. That was a second gear start! No, the KH has no shortage of horsepower. The factory's claim of 38 HP at 5,000 rpm seems indeed modest to me now. And to top it all off there was more wheelspin as the bike was powershifted into third. This bike comes on like Dragnet and will stay on all day if you're man enough to stay with it. 14.75 seconds through the quarter-mile in first, second and third gears is a healthy pace for any bike, but not just any bike will do it.

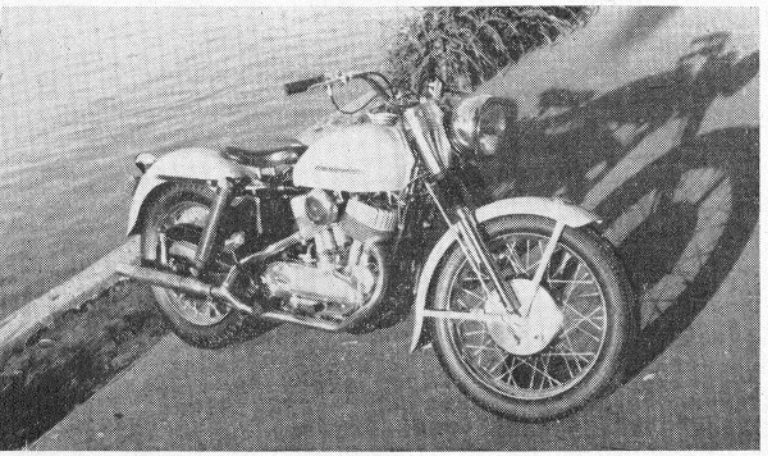
After this sensational demonstration of digging out, a pretty terrific top speed would seem to follow easily. Without half trying 95.23 mph was attained and with only the removal of the muffler the clocks advised that I had shot through the tenth-mile trap at 100.55. Now that was an honest electrically timed speed with an engine that so far had only registered about 250 miles. It could be safely estimated that even more speed was possible when the bike reaches its prime, usually from three to ten thousand miles. It also gave the impression that it would pack another tooth on the drive sprocket. This all added up to fact that if you are running with other stock machines, you'll never have to worry about being left behind.

We had proven that it goes and the next important item on the test sheet was brakes. So often we find machines with really fine speed and acceleration capabilities only to be disappointed when it comes to stopping the rig. The KH has eight-inch internal expanders that will bring it to an absolute halt in a minimum of 15 feet 6 inches from a steady 25 mph. Using only the front stopper, 20 feet are required and the rear brake, by itself, skids to a stop in 34 feet and 9 inches. During the several trys at the stopping line with all the aforementioned combinations, not once was there noticed any tendency to fade.

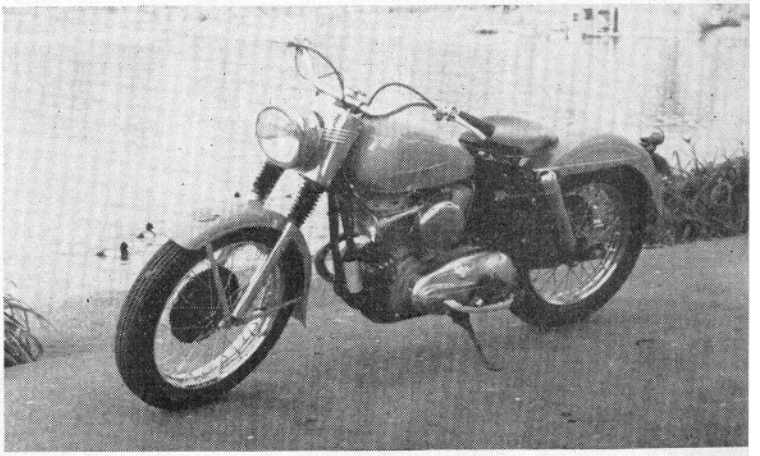
It sounds mighty rosy so far, and it is, but there are some definitely irritating little eccentricities in this model that might disturb you. I found the speedometer absolutely useless when digging out in a hurry and at speeds over 80 mph the needle was lost some-

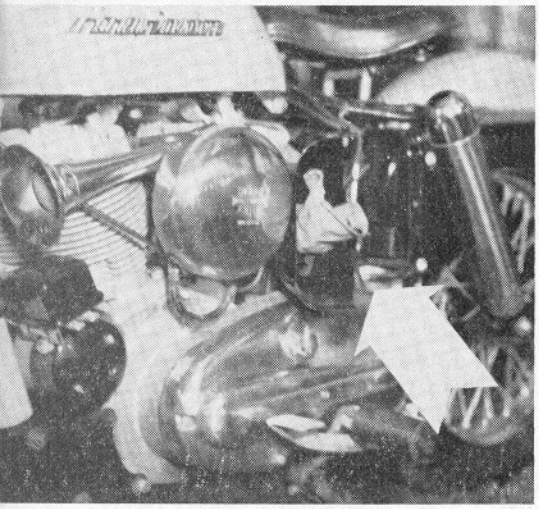
(Continued on next page)

At first we were fooled by what looked like an extravagant use of chrome, which might add much to cost. Most of glitter, we learned, is stainless steel.

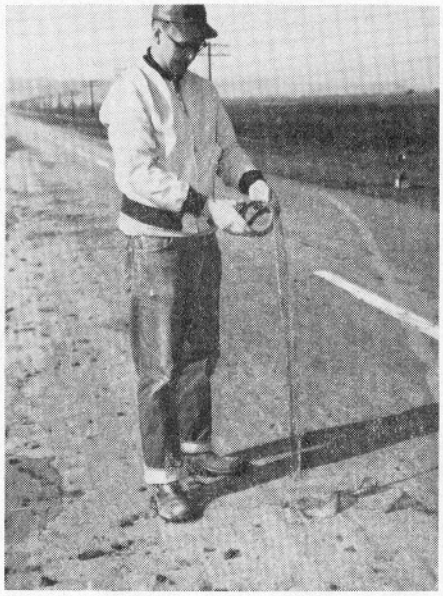


Sidestand is easy to reach from seated position and is plenty sturdy. No rear stand is provided. Note timing and primary cases are polished this year.

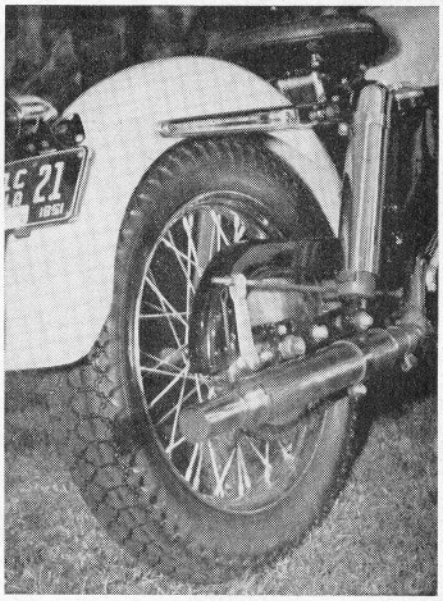




Case on left of engine, which matches right side oil tank in size and shape, splits and opens to hold tool kit. Foot pegs fold and are rubber covered. Horn is "honkingest" cycle trumpet we've heard yet.



Dick Hutchins, Rich Budelier salesman, unreels a few yards of air filter mesh which demonstrates easy cleaning possible with this type. Has chrome cover.



Fiberboard rear shock absorber covers don't show on deluxe models which have bright casings and add a lot to the appearance of the rear of the motorcycle.

(Continued from page 19)

where up around where 140 might be situated on the dial. And it is not a very easy instrument to read. This might be partly attributed to the vibration that comes in fairly strong at 58 miles per hour and subsides at about 61 mph and from there on out never quite leaves the bike. It is not serious and has no effect on the operation or excellent handling in any way but it is there and will take some getting used to. But before you stake out the KH as alone with a vibration, it might be wise to remember its stroke—4 9/16 inches. Quite often long strokers have a tendency to buzz.

As far as construction goes, it will take some very sharp equipment to stand up against the KH. Look one over closely and you will find, as CYCLE did, little evidence of cost-cutting in its manufacture. Let me point out a few little items. The oil tanks, handlebars and voltage regulator are all mounted in rubber. There is a smooth operating seven plate clutch that did not once require any attention throughout our test. Neat rubber boots keep harmful dirt and water out of the fork sliders. Another big improvement appearancewise was the chrome plated rear shock absorber covers that are new this year. Clutch and front brake control cables are of a larger diameter than those used on any other make available here. With occasional lubrication these cables should last forever. Look over a KH with an unbiased eye and you'll see that it is engineered to some pretty rigid specifications.

If you like a motor that stays clean, like I do, here is another point in its favor. The test model didn't drip a single drop of oil in the week that it was at our disposal. And this was no exception either. I can cite two other examples that will bear up its cleanliness. First, there's Dick Hutchins, salesman for Rich Budelier, the Los Angeles firm that furnished the test bike. Dick can be seen just about any day riding around on a K or KH in a business suit and looking as neat as if he just stepped out of a limousine. The second example that I am familiar with took place under quite different circumstan-

(Continued on page 28)

PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

SPEED	
Maximum in first	48 mph
Maximum in second	65 mph
Maximum in third	82.37 mph
Maximum in high	100.55 mph
ACCELERATION	
1/10 mile drag	8.41 sec.
¼ mile drag	14.75 sec.
BRAKING DISTANCES	
(From 25 mph to stop)	
Front brake only	20' 0"
Rear brake only	34' 9"
Both brakes	15' 6"
SLOW RUNNING	
High gear without without chain snatch	14 mph
GASOLINE MILEAGE	
Overall average	41 mpg

SPECIFICATIONS

Engine: 55 cu. in. side valve V twin, bore 2¾", stroke 4 9/16". Removable aluminum alloy cylinder heads, low expansion aluminum alloy, cam-ground pistons. Deep cylinder fins extend around intake and exhaust ports for greater cooling. All main bearings retained roller type; double tapered Timken bearings on the drive side. Linkert carburetor. Develops approximately 38 horsepower at 5,000 rpm.

Transmission: 4-speed constant mesh gearbox integral with crankcase casting. Sliding dog clutches. Foot shift and hand operated multiple dry disc clutch with bonded-on clutch facings.

Rear Suspension: Swing arm type sprung by means of two helical coil springs and controlled by means of two hydraulic, automotive type shock absorbers. Pivot point of swing arm is supported by pre-loaded Timken bearings.

Front Fork: Hydraulically controlled telescopic fork. Load is transmitted by long helical springs supported and contained in main tubes. Hydraulic stops are provided in both recoil and cushion positions.

Ignition: Two-brush shunt, voltage controlled generator, storage battery, spark coil, circuit breaker. Ignition system waterproofed.

Brakes: Fully enclosed front and rear brakes with molded anti-score lining. Drums are pressed steel. Both brakes are 8 inches in diameter and 1 inch wide.

Tires: Goodyear or Firestone, 3.25 x 19, 4 ply. 3.50 or 4.00 x 18 optional.

Tanks: Welded heavy gauge steel gas tank with center filling cap. Capacity: 4.5 gallons, with reserve in addition. Reserve controlled by two-way gas valve with fuel strainer. Welded heavy gauge rubber mounted steel oil tank. Capacity: 3 quarts, with provision for filter. Oil tank has screw down provision in cap.

Finish: Pepper Red, Forest Green, Glacier Blue, Anniversary Yellow and Daytona Ivory. Information on other optional colors and combinations available from Harley-Davidson dealers. Frame is finished in black enamel. Trim is chrome and stainless steel.

Price: $1,098.99 plus sales tax and license delivered in Los Angeles.

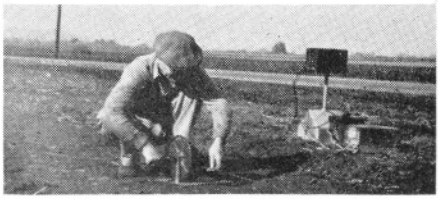
Manufacturer: Harley-Davidson Motor Company, Milwaukee, Wis.

H-D KH ROAD TEST

(Continued from page 20)

ces. It was Paul Goldsmith's winning K model after last year's Daytona championship. After inspecting most of the finishing motors it was evident that Goldsmith's K was the cleanest of all after the 200-mile grind. Evidence of an oil-tight motor? To these eyes it is.

Although the high bars that were standard on the earlier Ks are still available at your option, lower and more practical handlebars are fitted as it is de-



Timing completed, Frank Christian packs up and prepares to leave. Frank times all CYCLE road tests.

livered. This bar is made in two pieces, the "break" being in the exact center and hidden under the mounting clamp. There are only two bolts to loosen to adjust them to your own individual requirements. And if you should ever drop the model and bend or break a bar, it only costs half as much to replace half a handlebar—a good feature.

The battery is located well out of the way where any loose acid will do no harm. It is situated above the gearbox (which is built in unit with the engine) and between the oil tank and toolbox. The toolcase, incidentally matches the opposite side oil tank in size and shape but its size is deceiving. The rear half of the box houses the ignition coil, leaving only a rather small space for the tool kit that is supplied with the machine. Adequate maybe, but not much room for any extras.

Harley-Davidson's golden anniversary surprise, the 55 cubic inch KH, is a different kind of motorcycle. It is a side valve wonder that will make many others scamper to keep up and will last and last and last. When the K model first was announced in late 1951 there were, as in most new models, some "bugs" that took a few months to clean up but this was done and the KH starts off with the earlier production headaches of the K in the distant past. I feel safe in predicting that many happy miles will be ridden in the rough and on the road with the new KH Jubilee Jewel.

—Bob Schanz