

HARLEY-DAVIDSON 2006 MODEL YEAR PRESS LAUNCH

# **The Empire Strikes Back**

Pick a niche, any niche

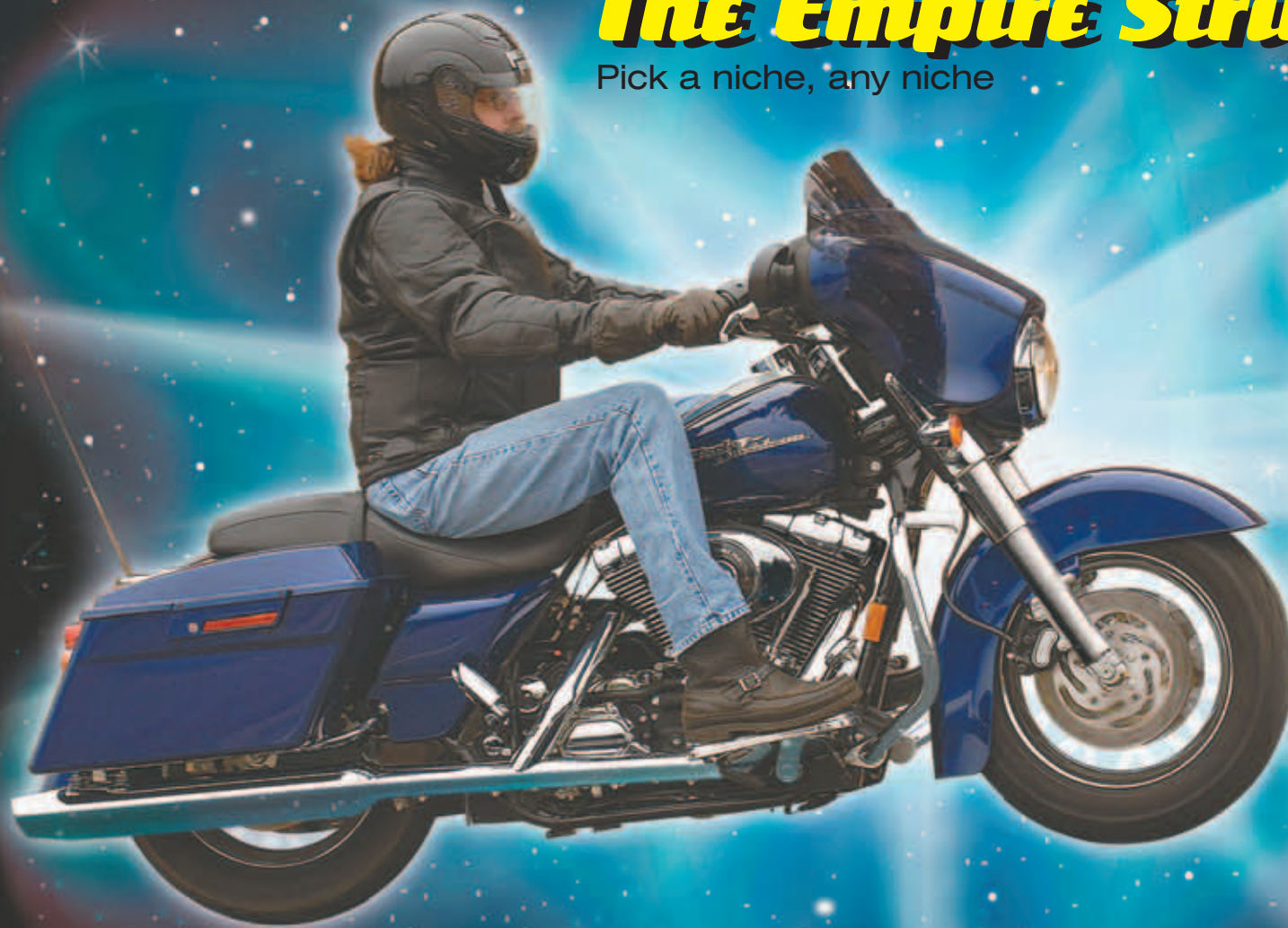


Photo by Wayne Davis

by Terry Roorda

DENVER, COLORADO, JULY 26—In what Bill Davidson referred to as “probably the single biggest launch we’ve had in our history,” The Motor Company swaggered into Denver flexing their design and development muscles and bringing forth no fewer than seven new models for 2006, and that’s only half the story. The other half of the story is told in the jaw-dropping number of significant and at times fundamental engineering and ergonomic changes made across the lineup, especially in the Dyna platform, which now boasts six-speed transmissions and standard fuel injection on all models.

On the surface this was indeed an impressively ambitious press launch,



## 2006 Harleys

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but in the subtext it was something even more than that, and as new model after new model was brought forth, and innovation after innovation was



The Super Glide turns 35; we should all age so gracefully

described, I began to have the distinct sense that I was not at a press launch at all. I had the distinct sense that I was sitting through the final scene of "The Godfather." You know the one. That's where the Corleone family has finally had their fill of all the interlopers, claim jumpers, usurpers and general irritants in their midst and in one bloody spree systematically dispatch the lot of 'em, reestablishing themselves as the undisputed alpha clan of the industry... er... underworld.

No trend was overlooked, no competitor—neither OEM nor aftermarket—was spared in Milwaukee's multi-front assault; an assault that saw them deliver sharp reminders of their seminal styling flourishes with a 35th anniversary Super Glide and a

revivified Heritage Softail, flirt with fat rubber for the first time, scratch-build a direct drive six-speed transmission, build a bobber of sorts, and—with Willie G. personally at the helm—deliver a chopped, slammed and streamlined bagger. They dropped the prices on the VRSC platform significantly to commandeer the power cruiser market, brought out a paradigm-shifting sound system and electronic gadget capability on the Tourers to up the ante in the luxu-tourer genre, and in their spare time developed a positively fearsome production drag bike which they named the Destroyer—a fitting sobriquet that also serves nicely as a double entendre for the entire 2006 effort.

And they did a bunch of other stuff too, but I'm getting breathless. So

let's take the platforms one by one and run it all down. Get comfortable. We've got a lot of ground to cover.

### In the kitchen with Dyna

It's been customary in the recent past for Harley-Davidson to give special attention to one or another of their platforms each model year, and this year was the Dyna's turn. Boy, was it ever. If in fact the 2006 launch had given us nothing but the new Dynas it would still have been more than plenty to absorb. Changes made to the basic package run from stem to stern on the bikes, starting with 49mm front forks—10mm larger than 2005—and working back to the steering head where the rake was increased by at least a degree on all models (the Wide Glide jumps from 32 to 36 degrees with 2 degrees incorporated into the triple trees), and then out to the clutch lever where disengagement requires 35 percent less exertion than on previous models. The clutch pull has actually been reduced significantly across Harley's entire 2006 lineup, owing in large measure to a redesigned ball and ramp mechanism on the transmission. Moving farther back on the Dynas, we find restyled, comfier seats, a new battery box, a stouter swingarm, one-inch axle, and a 160/70-17 tire replacing the previous 150/80-16. The FXD, FXDL and FXDC get handsome new 10-spoke mags, and all models receive new wrap-around fenders to finish off the back end treatment.

And then there's the Dyna powertrain for 2006, which sets this platform well apart from its Milwaukee peers. For

one thing, carburetors have been banished completely, and all Dynas now come stock with EFI, and that should be some indication of things to come on all platforms in the near future. Of greater interest is the new Cruise Drive 6-speed transmission, which combines with a reengineered primary to give the

Dynas longer legs on the highway and less maintenance in the garage. The transmission's sixth gear is direct drive like a conventional 5-speed, and thus more quietly efficient than a true overdrive unit. In modifying the primary to achieve the drive ratio required to enable that setup, the primary chain adjuster has been upgraded to a self-adjusting



A six-pack of Milwaukee's Best

hydraulic unit (retrofitable with an adaptor plate to all post-1986 models), thus eliminating the need for an access



The Super Glide's AMF roots are showing

port on the primary cover. The transmission itself employs helical-cut gears for more of that aforementioned quiet efficiency, and shifts by means of sliding dog rings which engage slots in the sides of the drive cogs. This reduces the mass being shoved around inside the box and the result is a shorter and silkier shifter throw, and less mechanical trauma in the gear mesh. At highway speeds, the Dyna's 6-speed reduces engine speed by roughly 200 rpm—and as we know, lower engine speeds mean better fuel economy and less wear and tear generally.

Elsewhere in the Dyna's extensively reworked TC88 we find changes in the cam case, which will be of special interest to consumers who've experienced problems in that area. The cam bearings in the support plate have gone from roller to

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The new FXDBI Street Bob

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plain, and redesigned cam chains are tensioned by hydraulic units instead of springs. To provide the necessary lubricant to the plain bearings and hydraulic adjusters, the oil pump capacity has been increased by 10 percent on the supply side and 25 percent on the scavenging. Additionally, the engine oil supply, return and



Back for more; the Heritage Softail returns to the lineup

vent lines have been replaced by direct connections between the motor and oil tank. And there's more. The camshafts themselves are now component assemblies of lobes, sprockets and needle bearings pressed onto a knurled shaft; the crankshaft is attached to the output sprocket by means of a tapped hole and stout bolt instead of a nut screwed down on external threads; the EFI inlet manifold is a single piece with revised injectors, and last but not least, the starter jackshaft assembly has been eliminated completely, and the starter engages directly with the ring gear on the redesigned clutch basket. Whew.

Two new models have been added to the Dyna platform—the FXDI35 limited edition 35th Anniversary Super Glide and the FXDBI Street Bobber—and one model was shown the door, the FXDX, which like so many previous function-driven Harleys, never lived up to expectations in the showroom. Ya'll just love your chrome, don'tcha? The FXDI35 commemorates the 1971 introduction of the audacious FX Super Glide, the model that first wedded a svelte Sportster front end to a Big Twin chassis and drivetrain. Those of us of a certain age recall the impact of that model, designed by a young Willie G. and dubbed at the time the Night Train—not to be confused with the current Softail of that name—and also recall wanting one so bad it ached. Actually, this new model is more an homage to the 1972 model, since it wisely eschews the boat tail bodywork

of the '71, which, though strikingly original, met with mixed reviews—to put things mildly. The styling elements that most vividly recall the original FX are the patriotic paint scheme and a ribbed seat that strongly suggests the stepped tuck-and-roll saddle of the '71. For added nostalgic effect, the famous #1 logo of the dark AMF days has been dusted off and affixed to the bike's fuel tank console. Profile laced wheels and oodles of chrome complete the package. A total of 3,500 units will be produced.

The FXDIB Street Bobber is The Motor Company's thrust into the burgeoning bobber market, and they did the best they could with what they

had and within the constraints of legality and mass consumption. If you squint at the bike peripherally, you almost see what you would call an authentic bobber, but buzzwords aside, this bike is a badass looker. Apehangers, midmount footpegs, lowered rear suspension, tank-mounted speedo, and a solo saddle pursue what H-D calls the “old school theme.” Wrinkle-black finish abounds on this model, and four colors are offered, but the most striking treatment is the new Black Denim—a tuff flat-black paint scheme reminiscent of rattle can jobs of yore.

### A tale of two tails

Either we missed the memo on this one, or Harley-Davidson decided to quietly slip a new family designation in on us, but whatever the case, the 2006 Softail lineup has a new subheading, “Bobtail,” which refers to the FX-prefixed models, the Softail Standard, Night Train and Springer. It's a handy distinction to make since these three models receive a serious reworking in the hindquarters this year, growing by 2.25 inches in width and getting shod with 200mm rubber. They also receive a dashing new slotted disc rear wheel and a super-tough and skinny 20mm drive belt.

The returning FL Softails (the Deluxe, Springer Classic, Fat Boy, Heritage Classic and Deuce) are largely unchanged for 2006, but are joined by a new/old stable mate, the Heritage Softail. Introduced in 1986 and retired in 1990, the Heritage started the real retro revolution in Harley styling that has served them so well. It was joined and then superseded by the touring-

outfitted Heritage Classic, but has now been revived in all its stripped-down glory and touted as an “entry point” for customers with customizing on their mind. It sports a silver powder coated motor with polished cases and a new seat with the quick-release passenger pillion introduced last year on the Deluxe and Springer Classic. All Softails/Bobtails benefit from the aforementioned ball and ramp redesign, giving them a 24 percent reduction in clutch lever pull.

### High tech touring

High fidelity stereo, AM/FM, weather band, CD, MP3, CB, intercom, bike-to-bike communication, satellite radio, and hands-free cell phone all linked to a digital display that reports the status of one and all. That's what the new Harman/Kardon-designed Advanced Audio System on the radio-equipped models (Road Glide, Electra Glide Classic, Ultra Classic, and new Street Glide) is capable of providing—once you've added all the options. In stock trim, the system is a vast improvement over previous units, punching out 20 watts per channel through new high-output, low-impedance speakers. The unit will play compressed MP3 formats, allowing you to pack 10 hours of listening onto a single CD, and if that's not enough uninterrupted music for you,



On the dark side; the new VRSCD Night Rod

an optional XM satellite radio will provide 150 channels of genre-specific music and information around the clock for a subscription rate of under 10 bucks a month. And if it's not loud enough, there's a 40-watt per channel amplifier upgrade available.

And that's just the beginning of the gadgetry that can be neatly integrated into the system. A Bluetooth wireless cell



The new FLHX Street Glide; a bagger for the fashion-conscious

phone module can be added to give you the freedom to make and take calls while riding in heavy traffic—always a good idea—and a GPS unit is in the planning stage. As Harley's marketing lead for the Tourer platform, Pat Koppa, noted, “Riders are becoming



The Street Glide's super sanitary and high-style rear end; and who doesn't want that?

more and more savvy with the gadgets.” He also quipped that if customers aren't currently conversant with technologies like MP3 formats, “their kids can probably do it.”

To power all of this and all of the other gadgetry that's finding its way onto baggers these days, the platform's charging system has been beefed up for 2006, increasing charging capacity by as much as 32 percent, improving reliability, and providing enhanced reserve capacity for all the e-toys.

Other improvements to the line include reflector optics on auxiliary lights, the aforementioned lighter clutch pull, and in the case of the Electra Glide Classics, a completely revamped Tour Pak. Constructed of injection-molded “GTX nylon alloy,” the new trunks are smoother, lower-profiled, and can be mounted in either of two positions—the rear position provides an additional inch of passenger space over

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last year's model. A pair of LED light panels accent the sides of the box.



The XL1200R Sportster 1200 Roadster gets a black motor for 2006

And that brings us to what in our humble opinion is the most delicious and desirable new model for 2006, the FLHX Street Glide. This Tourer has Willie G.'s fingerprints all over it, and is a study in contemporary customizing trends on baggers. Less is more, and lower is better with the Street Glide as it dispenses with auxiliary lights, moves the rearview mirrors into the fairing wings, slams the suspension by an inch, and hacks off most of the windscreen, leaving just a smoked eyebrow above the batwing. The rear fender sports slick ground effects with three thin bands of LED lights down by the pavement. The saddlebag hinges are color-match powder coated to eliminate the visual distraction of chrome. The front fender is the unadorned sheet metal found on the Road Glide and Road King Custom. Taken together, this bike presents a seamless integration of elements, and the admiring eye slides right over the thing from end to end.

### Splicing V-genes

I don't know whether or not it was how the H-D marketing wonks had it figured from the outset, but over the four years since its splashy introduction in 2001, the VRSC platform has been steadily gaining traction in a number of unorthodox markets and coming into its own in a big way. By the time of the Street Rod launch in February of this year, more than 50,000 VRSC units had been shipped, more than half of them to Europe, and more than 60 percent to customers coming off of competing brands. The Street Rod itself represented a major roadworthy shift in the direction of the platform, and one that The Motor Company continues to follow with the unveiling of the 2006 VRSCD Night Rod. Succinctly put, the Night Rod grafts the Street Rod's exhaust system and midmount footpegs onto a V-Rod chassis. The front end rake is a compromise between the two donors, scaling 36 degrees to the V-Rod's 38, and the Street Rod's 32. Components unique to the new model are highway pegs, a fly screen, slotted disc wheels, and a dipped-in-black cosmetic treatment.

Upgrades shared by all three VRSC models (the VRSCB was bumped from the lineup for 2006) include four-pot Brembo calipers and 300mm rotors—two on the front, and one on the back—as well as a new instrument display that includes a clock and a second tripmeter. Of special interest in the P&A catalogue for 2006 is a

240mm tire kit which for the low, low price of \$3,895 gives you everything you need to mount the new Dunlop 240 found on the new Screamin' Eagle V-Rod. And most importantly of all, the V-bikes receive steep cuts in their MSRP as part of Harley's strategy to entice more off-beat ridership to the Bar & Shield. While the V-Rod may have started life as an exotic and exclusive drag-inspired machine, the platform has matured and morphed into what The Motor Company now calls "gateway" models, charged with scouring niche markets and bringing in the converts. The notion's just wacky enough to work.

### Oh, and Sportsters, too

2004 was the Year of the Sportster. This year is not. The big news is that the transmission on all models has been dramatically improved using the same helical-cut gears and sliding dog ring combo as the Dyna's Cruise Drive. Clutch pull has also been reduced—again—this time by 12 percent on the 1200s and 17 percent on the 883s. New side stands on the 1200R, 883R and basic 883 make for easier lifting to the upright position—are you listening, girls?

### C is for crazy

For 2006, the mad scientists at Harley-Davidson's CVO division have continued their tradition of introducing a model (or two) and retiring a model after its allotted two-year run. In this instance it wasn't much of a regime change as the Screamin' Eagle Electra Glide Classic bowed out, only to be replaced by the new Screamin' Eagle Electra Glide Ultra Classic—a model that has already distinguished

itself in Harley history as the biggest single dose of alphabet soup ever. The new—take a deep breath—FLHTCUSE builds on the elaborate foundation of last year's 103-inch Screamin' Eagle Classic with a distinctive leather-covered Tour Pak that incorporates a leather lumbar support for the passenger and is illuminated within with LED lighting. That's a nice touch, but where the new bike really distinguishes itself is in the fully loaded Harman/Kardon Advanced Audio System that in addition to all of the other standard features mentioned earlier, comes stock with XM satellite radio (the first three months of subscription service included) and intercom/CB headset.

Returning for another year on the CVO roster is the Screamin' Eagle Fat Boy, which continues to sport the novel grinder-swirled bare-metal patches in the paint scheme, and adds some rubber for 2006. The rear tire is now a 200/55-17 and the front grows to 140/75-17. The Screamin' Eagle V-Rod returns as

well, and likewise has more rubber on the road—a lot



The Screamin' Eagle Electra Glide Ultra Classic;

just call it the Gadget Glide

more. The rear tire is a Dunlop 240mm unit specially designed for this application, and to accommodate it, the bike's swingarm, fender and struts have been widened accordingly. And as with all Screamin' Eagle models, all three of this year's street-legal offerings are lavishly decorated with custom paint, parts and accessories that would require more space than we have here to enumerate (there are 58 custom elements on the FLHTCUSE alone), so we'll refer you to the Web ([www.harley-davidson.com](http://www.harley-davidson.com)) for further exhaustive details on the models.

### Did he say street legal?

That's exactly what I said, and the reason I had to use that qualifier is that for 2006, the CVO has colored completely outside of the

lines and produced a race-only model, the VRXSE Destroyer. Inspired by the Vance & Hines Screamin' Eagle V-Rod NHRA Pro Stock champion drag bikes piloted by Andrew Hines and GT Tonglet, this Screamin' Eagle produces 165 horsepower at the crank and comes race-ready with a wheelie bar, shift light, two-stage launch box, and a 7" x 25" racing slick among a good many other things. Reportedly, even I could turn 10-second quarters on this thing.

In the bigger picture, the Destroyer is intended to bring more H-D dealers into the racing game and spread the drag strip fever among the faithful, and in that undertaking they're off to a good start. A class specifically for these machines is being instituted by AHDR, and interest in the campaign was so lively at Harley's annual dealer show in Denver, 400 of the outrageous rides have already been ordered. The production run of these behemoths is allegedly extremely limited, but CVO Director Jim Hofmann has acknowledged—off the record, of course—that they'll build as many as there are takers.

### "On the cam"

That's the expression Bill Davidson invoked at the press launch to describe the state of The Motor Company's design, development and production folks going into 2006. All systems go, all the right people in all the right places, a finely tuned and well-oiled operation, and you'd be hard put to argue. While HDI as a publicly traded entity has appeared besieged of late, behind the ticker tape and legal briefs they've clearly been hitting on both cylinders—or all four cam lobes, if you prefer—and the result is the unprecedented outpouring of new models and technologies described here. The upside of all of it is a wealth of new models for me to ride and assess, and for you to kick and consider in the showroom. For the competition there is no upside. For them there is nothing but a huge looming downside, and that's Harley's obvious resolve—to forget their manners, take off the gloves and slug it out for every single facet of the domestic—and foreign—market. The downside for me is I've got writer's cramp. ♦



The VRXSE Destroyer; 'nuff said...