

# Harley-Davidson Motorbike

## *The “Great American Freedom Machine”*

How did such a sexy vehicle get nicknamed “the Hog”? It turns out that back in 1920, H-D’s (Harley-Davidson’s) racing team started to celebrate their victories by taking their mascot, a pig, on a victory lap. And they usually won every race they entered. Like the Ford Model T, the Harley was popular partly because it was a “winner.”

Also like the Model T, the Harley gained a reputation for outstanding reliability, durability, and economy as well. In 1920, H-D was already the largest motorcycle manufacturer in the world, with 2,000 dealers in over 50 countries.

William S. Harley was only 23 years old in 1903 when he and his friend Arthur Davidson built and sold their first “motor bicycle.” It ran for over 100,000 miles. By 1907 the two men had been joined by Arthur’s two brothers. Together, the four men incorporated the Harley-Davidson Motor Company.

But the Harley does not owe its mystique to mere speed or practicality. From the beginning, the designs looked “clean” and impressive. By the mid-1920s, there were even more powerful-looking contours. The vehicle was somehow reminiscent of a tiger or lion in full stride. That impression was reinforced by the “teardrop” gas tank, first introduced in 1925. Since then, Harley has had different “looks” that have appealed to different customers: military and police forces, Hell’s Angels, hippies, and yuppies. Many Harley owners customize and accessorize their bikes—and themselves. And then there is that incredible sound.

The sound of a Harley. If two pistons are horizontally opposed (at 180 degrees), one piston is always firing, and the engine sounds balanced. But the classic Harley-Davidson positions its cylinders in a 45-degree V. It also connects both piston rods to a single-pin crankshaft. That produces a two-pop “potato potato” stutter, or growl. In fact, the Harley’s sound signature is so distinctive that the company once tried to trademark it.

Machine; design; mobility; power; individualism; freedom. The Harley-Davidson motorcycle is not just a means of transportation, but an American icon. And now it’s a logo, merchandising, and “lifestyle” empire as well.