FREE SAMPLE

The opening pages of

1952 Harley-Davidson Panhead Buyer's Guide

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IRONHEAD

1952 Harley-Davidson Panhead — Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

IronHead single-year guide · Model year 1952 only · Covers all 1952 Panhead Big Twins — the last-year 61ci EL and the 74ci FL, including foot-shift and sidecar variants · The 1951 Panhead and all later years are out of scope except where differences are noted

Factory-correct restoration guides for classic motorcycles

KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

- **Model year covered:** 1952 only — the EL (61ci, last year) and FL (74ci) Big Twins, plus sidecar variants. First year of the foot-shift option.
- **Engine:** 74ci (73.66 cu in) 45-degree air-cooled OHV V-twin; 3-7/16 x 3-31/32 in bore x stroke; 7.0:1 compression. 61ci EL (last year): 3-5/16 x 3-1/2 in, 60.32 cu in, 7.0:1. Aluminum heads, hydraulic lifters, internal oil lines.
- **New for 1952:** foot-shift/hand-clutch option (F suffix in the model code — ELF, FLF); ALL Panheads high-compression for the first time (medium-compression E and F gone); generator model 52; rotating exhaust valves late in the year.
- **Ignition:** 6-volt battery, breaker points; kick start only.
- **Transmission:** 4-speed constant-mesh; hand shift/foot clutch standard, foot shift/hand clutch optional (extra cost).
- **Chassis:** Wishbone rigid frame; Hydra-Glide telescopic fork; 8-inch front drum brake.
- **Wheels/tires:** Wire-spoked wheels; factory tire data lists 4.00 x 18, 4.50 x 18, and 5.00 x 16 fitments.
- **Dimensions:** 59.5-inch wheelbase.
- **1952 colors:** Brilliant Black, Persian Red, Rio Blue, Tropical Green, Police Silver, White (Marine Blue Metallic, White, and Bronco Brown Metallic at extra cost).

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- **Identification:** No frame VIN — the engine serial (left case, between the cylinders, e.g. 52FL1234) is the ownership number. Belly numbers on both crankcase halves must match each other.
- **Production:** EL 918; FL 5,554 — 6,472 across the listed models (compiled figures; Harley-Davidson published no official year totals; ELS, ELF, FLS, and FLF figures are not reported).
- **1952 price new:** $970 (FL), $955 (EL); foot shift extra.
- **Key 1952-only details:** the ONLY year combining the 61ci EL, all-high-compression lineup, and the first foot shift; last year of the 61ci engine; generator model 52; new muffler with rotating exhaust valves late-year; revised frame and toolbox brackets.

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1. Manufacturer history: Harley-Davidson

Harley-Davidson was founded in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1903 by William S. Harley and Arthur Davidson, with Walter and William A. Davidson joining the effort. The first factory went up in 1906; the first V-twin appeared in 1909. Through the 1910s and 1920s Harley built its name on V-twins and racing success; the 45-cubic-inch flathead models of the 1930s kept the company alive through the Depression, and the 1936 EL Knucklehead brought overhead valves to the Big Twin line.

The 1948 Panhead answered the Knucklehead's heat and oil troubles with aluminum heads, hydraulic lifters, and internal oiling; the 1949 Hydra-Glide brought telescopic forks; the 1950 heads made it breathe; the 1951 valve-train and the Linkert M-74B refined it. By 1952 Harley was reading the market: the British twins were winning converts with foot shift, and Milwaukee answered with its own foot-shift option — while keeping the traditional hand shift as standard.

The Panhead era that followed is the backbone of this brand: the 1958 Duo-Glide added rear suspension, and the 1965 Electra Glide added electric start and 12-volt electrics. The Panhead ran from 1948 through the 1965 model year, when the Shovelhead took over for 1966.

For the restorer, the authority is the factory literature: the Harley-Davidson Panhead service manual (1948–1957) and the year parts catalogs, backed by Bruce Palmer's *How to Restore Your Harley-Davidson*, Greg Field's *Original Harley-Davidson Panhead*, and the production research compiled by the Panhead & Flathead Site. This guide cites those sources throughout.

2. Model history: the Panhead Big Twin, 1948–1965

The 1948 Panhead kept the Knucklehead's proven crankcases, flywheels, and gear train and changed everything above the cylinders: finned aluminum heads with bronze valve seats and steel inserts, pushrod-operated hydraulic lifters, and redesigned rocker arms under pan-shaped covers. 1949 brought the Hydra-Glide telescopic fork, the 8-inch front drum, and the Brooks Stevens restyle; 1950 brought redesigned heads with enlarged ports; 1951 brought the two-piece cam, machined rocker sockets, and the mid-year Linkert M-74B.

1952 is the pivot year. The medium-compression E and F vanished — every Panhead was high-compression for the first time — and the 61ci EL entered its last year (the Panhead became a 74-only line in 1953). Most visibly, Harley offered foot shift with hand clutch as a factory option (the F-suffix models: ELF and FLF), the beginning of the end for the hand-shift/foot-clutch layout that had defined the Big Twin for decades. Late in the year came rotating exhaust valves and a new muffler, plus generator model 52 and revised frame and toolbox brackets.

The model letters work like this. **E** = 61ci medium-compression (6.5:1, through 1951); **EL** = 61ci high-compression (7.0:1); **F** = 74ci medium-compression (6.6:1, through 1951); **FL** = 74ci high-compression (7.0:1). **S** = sidecar gearing. **F** (not first letter, 1952 on) = foot shift. **H** (1955 on) = Super Sport; **B** (1965) = electric start; **E** as third letter = Traffic Combination motor with 61ci cam and M61 carburetor.

Year	What changed
1948	First Panhead: aluminum heads, hydraulic lifters, internal oiling; wishbone frame; springer fork (one year only); chromed pan covers (one year only); E/EL and F/FL.
1949	Hydra-Glide telescopic fork replaces the springer; Brooks Stevens restyle; front brake grows 7.25 to 8 inches; Harley-Davidson makes its own breaker points.

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Year	What changed
1950	Redesigned heads with enlarged ports (about 10 percent more power); fixed-jet carburetor with revised jetting; remote oil filter; primary screws to 6/12 o'clock; die-cast fork sliders.
1951	Two-piece cam with ramps both sides; rocker arms machined with pushrod sockets; mid-year Linkert M-74B carburetor (stays through 1965); larger pinion shaft; script tank emblem.
1952	**Foot-shift option (ELF/FLF); ALL Panheads high-compression — E and F medium-compression models gone; LAST year for the 61ci EL; rotating exhaust valves late in the year; generator model 52; revised frame and toolbox brackets; new muffler.**
1953	Lifters relocated from top of pushrods to below them; FLE Traffic Combination introduced; 4-rib gearcase cover; 24-roller pinion shaft.
1954	Golden Anniversary brass medallion on front fenders; tapered pinion shaft; Jubilee trumpet horn; first optional dual exhaust; winged fireball emblems.
1955	FLH Super Sport introduced — 8:1 compression, 60 hp @ 5,500 rpm; stronger bottom end with Timken mains; oval taillight; "V" tank emblem.
1956	"Victory" high-lift cam for the FLH and a flow-through air cleaner — about 12 percent more power; redesigned right crankcase oiling.
1957	Round Lucite tank emblem (first plastic emblem); polished aluminum rocker covers; steel-alloy valve guides from February 1; stronger valve springs from 57FLH4444.
1958	Duo-Glide: swingarm rear suspension and hydraulic rear drum brake; thicker cylinder-head fins; brush generator; step-down straight-leg frame.
1959	Arrow-Flite tank emblem; green neutral indicator on the foot-shift dash; chrome front fender tip; black footboards.
1960	Two-piece aluminum fork nacelle; Stellite-faced exhaust valves; rail-type oil-control rings; extra-heavy valve springs.
1961	Dual-point single-fire ignition with individual condensers; rear-cylinder timing mark added mid-year; four-point-star tank emblem.
1962	"Tombstone" speedometer; three round indicator lights; brushed-aluminum trim pieces.
1963	External oil lines to the cylinder heads; wider rear brake hub and shoes; round turn-signal housings; fiberglass saddlebags; new bar-and-shield tank emblem.

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Year	What changed
1964	Breather hole in the primary housing; oil-pressure switch; hollow hex timer adjuster; last year of the Duo-Glide.
1965	Electra Glide: electric start, 12-volt electrics, new frame, aluminum primary cover, automatic spark advance; last year of the Panhead.

The company context matters when judging a bike. The postwar boom made the late 1940s Harley's biggest years yet; by the mid-1950s British imports were pressuring the sporting end of the market (answered by the 1952 K-model and the 1957 Sportster), while the Big Twin settled into its long career as America's touring motorcycle. The 1969 AMF takeover came after the Panhead era; no Panhead left Milwaukee under AMF ownership.

3. What is unique about the 1952 Panhead

The 1952 is the end of the 61 — and the beginning of foot shift. It is the only year that combines a last-call EL, an all-high-compression lineup, and the first foot-shift option. A correct 1952 restoration starts with one question: hand shift or foot shift? The answer decides the gearbox internals, the controls, and the model code.

1952 details to get right:

- **Foot shift — first year, factory option.** F-suffix models (ELF, FLF):

foot shift with hand clutch. Note that the foot-shift and sidecar suffixes do not always appear in the stamped ownership serial — verify against the factory records and the parts catalog, not the tank badge.

- **Last year of the 61ci EL** — only 918 built. The EL's rarity makes it

the most faked 1952 variant; numbers scrutiny is mandatory.

- **All high-compression.** No medium-compression E or F in 1952 — a

low-compression 1952 Panhead is wrong.

- **Rotating exhaust valves — late in the year.** Early-build bikes do not

have them; check the build date.

- **Generator model 52** — new for the year.
- **Revised frame and toolbox brackets; new muffler.**

What did NOT exist in 1952 (common mix-ups):

- No lifter relocation (1953 — 1952 lifters still sit atop the pushrods),

no FLH (1955), no rear suspension (1958), no 12-volt system or electric start (1965).

1952 buyer cautions:

- **The EL premium trap.** With only 918 ELs built, a "1952 EL" commands a

premium — and attracts re-stamped cases and converted FLs. Verify the serial format, the belly numbers, and the build date against each other.

- **Foot-shift conversions.** Many hand-shift bikes were converted to foot

shift later; a factory foot-shift 1952 has the correct factory controls and linkage, not a later bolt-on.

- **Early-versus-late build** for the rotating exhaust valves and the

late-year muffler.

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4. Technical restoration data — 1952 Harley-Davidson Panhead

4.1 Frame and engine numbers (1952)

Pre-1970 Harleys carry no frame VIN — the engine number is the ownership number. It is stamped on the left crankcase between the cylinders, in the form year-digits + model letters + sequential number, for example:

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52FL1234
52 = model year | FL = model | 1234 = sequential number
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Foot-shift (F) and sidecar (S) suffixes may not appear in the stamped ownership serial even when the bike is a factory foot-shift or sidecar model — the model code in the sales literature and the stamped serial can differ. The frame carries only manufacturing stampings and casting numbers.

Belly numbers are stamped on the bottom of each crankcase half. They were stamped by the machinist to identify a matched pair of cases through line boring and final machining — the two halves must carry the SAME belly number, and the belly number has no direct relationship to the engine serial.

4.2 Engine specifications (1952)

Item	Specification
Configuration	45-degree air-cooled OHV V-twin; pushrod hydraulic lifters; aluminum heads
Displacement	73.66 cu in (74ci class) / 60.32 cu in (61ci class, EL only)
Bore x stroke	3-7/16 x 3-31/32 in (87.3 x 100.8 mm) — 74 / 3-5/16 x 3-1/2 in — 61
Compression ratio	7.0:1 (all models — first all-high-compression year)
Claimed output	FL: 50 hp @ 4,800 rpm (reported for the 1948 FL; the 7.0:1 FL engine carried through 1954 — confirm against the factory service manual for the exact year). No published figure survives for the 61 — do not quote internet estimates.
Carburetor	Linkert M-74B
Ignition	6-volt battery, breaker points
Starting	Kick starter only
Clutch	Dry multi-plate
Lubrication	Dry sump; remote-mounted oil filter; gear-driven oil pump

4.3 Carburetion and electrical

- Linkert M-74B (standard since mid-1951); rebuild with correct settings —

not a generic kit

- 6-volt battery ignition with breaker points; generator model 52 new for

the year; verify charging under load

- Kick starter only

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