FREE SAMPLE

The opening pages of

1956 Harley-Davidson Panhead Buyer's Guide

Read these pages exactly as they appear in the full guide.
Nothing here is rewritten or summarised — it is the product itself,
so you can judge the depth before you spend a dollar.

The full guide: https://ironheadguides.com/product/IH-HARLEY-PANHEAD-1956

IronHead — instant PDF download after checkout.

IRONHEAD

1956 Harley-Davidson Panhead — Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

IronHead single-year guide · Model year 1956 only · Covers all 1956 Panhead Big Twins — FL, FLF, FLE, and the FLH Super Sport with the new "Victory" cam · The 1955 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:** 1956 only — FL, FLF (foot shift), FLE (Traffic Combination), FLH/FLHF Super Sport.
- **Engine:** 74ci (73.66 cu in) 45-degree air-cooled OHV V-twin; 3-7/16 x 3-31/32 in bore x stroke; aluminum heads, hydraulic lifters, internal oil lines.
- **FL:** 7.25:1 compression; 55 hp @ 5,400 rpm; 62 lb-ft @ 3,200 rpm (compiled marque-reference figures; confirm against the factory service manual for the exact year).
- **FLH (new "Victory" cam):** 8.0:1 compression; about 12 percent more power than the 1955 FLH; strengthened bottom end with Timken mains; revised right-crankcase oiling with new check-valve path; redesigned cylinder heads and rocker-cover fastening.
- **New for 1956:** "Victory" high-lift cam for the FLH; flow-through air cleaner; new speedometer; FLH oil-tank decals revised; redesigned right crankcase with improved oiling to the top end.
- **Ignition:** 6-volt battery, breaker points; kick start only.
- **Transmission:** 4-speed constant-mesh; hand shift/foot clutch standard, foot shift/hand clutch optional.
- **Chassis:** Wishbone rigid frame (last rigid years: 1956–1957); 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:** 60-inch wheelbase.

SAMPLE EXCERPT — full guide available at the link on the cover sheet

- **1956 colors:** Pepper Red with white tank panels and red fenders; Black with Champion Yellow tank panels and black fenders; Atomic Blue with Champion Yellow tank panels and blue fenders; Police Silver; Police White; extra-cost Flamboyant Metallic Green with white tank panels (two-tone schemes new this year).
- **Identification:** No frame VIN — the engine serial (left case, between the cylinders, e.g. 56FLH1234) is the ownership number. Belly numbers on both crankcase halves must match each other.
- **Production:** FL 856; FLF 1,578; FLE 671; FLEF 162; FLH 224; FLHF 2,315 — 5,806 across the listed models (compiled figures; Harley-Davidson published no official year totals).
- **1956 price new:** $1,055 (FL); the FLH price is not listed in the compiled source.
- **Key 1956-only details:** the "Victory" cam and flow-through air cleaner are one-year FLH changes (the 1955 FLH had neither); redesigned right crankcase oiling; two-tone paint schemes; new speedometer.

SAMPLE EXCERPT — full guide available at the link on the cover sheet

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 1955 FLH Super Sport had been Harley's answer to the performance market — 60 horsepower from 8:1 compression and a strengthened bottom end. For 1956 Milwaukee went further: a high-lift "Victory" cam and a flow-through air cleaner lifted the FLH about 12 percent beyond the 1955 figure, while a redesigned right crankcase improved oiling to the top end. The hot rod was getting hotter, one year at a time.

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 Linkert M-74B; 1952 brought the foot-shift option, an all-high-compression lineup, and the end of the 61ci EL; 1953 relocated the hydraulic lifters below the pushrods and introduced the FLE Traffic Combination; 1954 was the Golden Anniversary year; 1955 introduced the FLH Super Sport with 8:1 compression, 60 hp, and a strengthened bottom end.

1956 turned the FLH up: the "Victory" high-lift cam and flow-through air cleaner added about 12 percent to the FLH's output, the right crankcase was redesigned with a new check-valve oiling path to the top end, the cylinder heads were redesigned with revised rocker-cover fastening, and the line got a new speedometer, revised FLH oil-tank decals, and new two-tone paint schemes.

The model letters work like this. **FL** = 74ci high-compression (7.25:1). **FLH** = Super Sport — 8.0:1 compression, strengthened bottom end, the performance model. **S** = sidecar gearing. **F** (not first letter) = foot shift. **E** as third letter = Traffic Combination motor with 61ci cam and M61 carburetor. **B** (1965) = electric start.

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.

SAMPLE EXCERPT — full guide available at the link on the cover sheet

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; last year for the 61ci EL; rotating exhaust valves late-year; generator model 52.
1953	Lifters relocated below pushrods; FLE Traffic Combination introduced; 4-rib gearcase cover; 24-roller pinion shaft; revised generator; new muffler; 74-only lineup.
1954	Golden Anniversary brass medallion; tapered pinion shaft; Jubilee trumpet horn; first optional dual exhaust; winged fireball emblems; transitional frames.
1955	First FLH Super Sport — 8:1 compression, 60 hp @ 5,500 rpm, strengthened bottom end with Timken mains, larger oil pump, polished rocker covers; oval taillight; "V" emblem.
1956	**FLH "Victory" high-lift cam and flow-through air cleaner (about 12 percent more power); redesigned right crankcase with new check-valve oiling path; redesigned heads and rocker-cover fastening; new speedometer; two-tone paint schemes.**
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.

SAMPLE EXCERPT — full guide available at the link on the cover sheet

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 1956 Panhead

The 1956 is the "Victory" year — the only FLH with the 1956-spec high-lift cam, flow-through air cleaner, and redesigned right crankcase oiling. The 1955 FLH had none of these; the 1957 kept the spirit but changed the trim and the valve train again. A correct 1956 FLH restoration is about the cam, the air cleaner, and the cases.

1956 details to get right:

- **"Victory" high-lift cam (FLH)** — the year's performance centerpiece;

about 12 percent more power than the 1955 FLH. Verify the cam stamping, not just the seller's word.

- **Flow-through air cleaner** — new for 1956, FLH.
- **Redesigned right crankcase** with the new check-valve oiling path — a

1956-only case detail; confirm against the factory parts catalog.

- **Redesigned cylinder heads** with revised rocker-cover fastening.
- **New speedometer**; revised FLH oil-tank decals; **two-tone paint

schemes** (Pepper Red/White, Black/Champion Yellow, Atomic Blue/Champion Yellow).

What did NOT exist in 1956 (common mix-ups):

- No Lucite tank emblem (1957), no rear suspension (1958), no 12-volt system

or electric start (1965).

1956 buyer cautions:

- **The "Victory" premium.** The cam is the value in a 1956 FLH — and the

easiest part to fake with a regrind. A claimed-original Victory cam wants stamping verification.

- **Case originality.** The redesigned right case is a 1956 tell; swapped

1955 or 1957 cases are the common cheat.

- **Two-tone paint.** The two-tone schemes are new for 1956 — get the

correct color breaks from the factory literature, not from a later year's scheme.

4. Technical restoration data — 1956 Harley-Davidson Panhead

4.1 Frame and engine numbers (1956)

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:

SAMPLE EXCERPT — full guide available at the link on the cover sheet

```
56FLH1234
56 = model year | FLH = model | 1234 = sequential number
```

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 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 (1956)

Item	FL	FLH (Super Sport, "Victory" cam)
Configuration	45° air-cooled OHV V-twin; hydraulic lifters; aluminum heads	Same, strengthened bottom end
Displacement	73.66 cu in	73.66 cu in
Bore x stroke	3-7/16 x 3-31/32 in (87.3 x 100.8 mm)	Same
Compression ratio	7.25:1	8.0:1
Claimed output	55 hp @ 5,400 rpm; 62 lb-ft @ 3,200 rpm	About 12% above the 1955 FLH figure (compiled year-page research)
Carburetor	Linkert M-74B	Linkert M-74B with flow-through air cleaner
Ignition	6-volt battery, breaker points	Same
Starting	Kick starter only	Same
Clutch	Dry multi-plate	Same
Lubrication	Dry sump; gear-driven oil pump	Dry sump; redesigned right case, new check-valve oiling path; larger pump; Timken mains

4.3 Carburetion and electrical

- Linkert M-74B across the line; FLE takes the M61; FLH gets the

flow-through air cleaner — rebuild with the correct model's settings, not a generic kit

- 6-volt battery ignition with breaker points; verify charging under load
- Kick starter only

4.4 Transmission and final drive

- Four-speed constant-mesh gearbox, separate from the engine
- Hand shift/foot clutch standard; foot shift/hand clutch optional
- Chain primary and chain final drive; dry multi-plate clutch

4.5 Chassis, suspension, and brakes (1956)

- Wishbone rigid frame — 1956–1957 are the last rigid years; rigid rear with

sprung solo saddle

SAMPLE EXCERPT — full guide available at the link on the cover sheet