FREE SAMPLE

The opening pages of

1957 Harley-Davidson Panhead Buyer's Guide

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IRONHEAD

1957 Harley-Davidson Panhead — Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

IronHead single-year guide · Model year 1957 only · Covers all 1957 Panhead Big Twins — FL, FLF, and the FLH Super Sport · The 1956 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:** 1957 only — the LAST rigid-frame Panhead. FL, FLF (foot shift), 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:** 8.0:1 compression; 60 hp @ 5,500 rpm; 65 lb-ft @ 3,200 rpm (compiled marque-reference figures; confirm against the factory service manual for the exact year); strengthened bottom end with Timken mains.
- **New for 1957:** round Lucite tank emblem (first plastic emblem — red-white-and-blue with the V); plastic fender tip; polished aluminum rocker covers; steel-alloy valve guides from February 1; stronger valve springs from engine 57FLH4444; revised throttle, clutch, and choke controls; "Big Bertha" saddlebags (one-year option); revised rear fender.
- **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 — the last rigid year; 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.

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- **Dimensions:** 60-inch wheelbase.
- **1957 colors:** Pepper Red with black tank panels and Pepper Red fenders; Black with Pepper Red tank panels and black fenders; Skyline Blue with Birch White tank panels and blue fenders; Birch White with black tank panels and Birch White fenders; Police Silver; extra-cost Metallic Midnight Blue with Birch White tank panels. Birch White in solid or with black tank panels at no extra cost.
- **Identification:** No frame VIN — the engine serial (left case, between the cylinders, e.g. 57FLH1234) is the ownership number. Belly numbers on both crankcase halves must match each other.
- **Production:** FL 1,579; FLF 1,259; FLH 164; FLHF 2,614 — 5,616 across the listed models (compiled figures; Harley-Davidson published no official year totals).
- **1957 price new:** $1,167 (FL); $1,243 (FLH).
- **Key 1957-only details:** the last rigid Panhead — a 1957 with rear suspension is modified; the Lucite emblems are the first plastic tank badges; the February valve-guide and 57FLH4444 valve-spring changes make build date matter; Big Bertha bags were a one-year option.

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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 1957 Panhead was the end of an era twice over: the last year of the rigid rear end that had carried every Big Twin since the beginning, and the last Panhead before rear suspension changed the motorcycle's whole character in

1958. Milwaukee gave the old chassis a proper send-off — new plastic emblems,

polished rocker covers, better valve guides — while the engineers finished the swingarm frame that would debut as the Duo-Glide.

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; 1956 gave the FLH its "Victory" high-lift cam and redesigned right-crankcase oiling.

1957 was the last rigid year: the round Lucite tank emblem (the first plastic emblem), the plastic fender tip, polished aluminum rocker covers, steel-alloy valve guides from February 1, stronger valve springs from engine 57FLH4444, revised controls, the one-year Big Bertha saddlebag option, and a revised rear fender — the final refinements before the 1958 Duo-Glide's swingarm changed everything.

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. **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.

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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; 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; new speedometer.
1957	**LAST RIGID YEAR: round Lucite tank emblem (first plastic emblem); plastic fender tip; polished aluminum rocker covers; steel-alloy valve guides from February 1; stronger valve springs from 57FLH4444; revised controls; one-year Big Bertha bags; revised rear fender.**
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 1957 Panhead

The 1957 is the last rigid Panhead — the final year of the frame layout that had defined the Big Twin since 1903. A 1957 with a swingarm is a 1958 or a conversion, never original. The year's running changes (valve guides in February, valve springs at 57FLH4444) make the build date as important as the model code.

1957 details to get right:

- **Round Lucite tank emblem** — the first plastic tank emblem, red-white-and-blue with the V. Metal badges on a 1957 are wrong.
- **Plastic front fender tip** — new for the year (chromed metal from 1959).
- **Polished aluminum rocker covers.**
- **Steel-alloy valve guides — from February 1.** Early-build bikes have the earlier guides; check the build date.
- **Stronger valve springs — from engine 57FLH4444 (FLH).** The serial number, not just the year, decides which springs are correct.
- **Revised throttle, clutch, and choke controls; revised rear fender.**
- **"Big Bertha" saddlebags — one-year option.** A documented 1957-only accessory; verify against the accessory catalog.

What did NOT exist in 1957 (common mix-ups):

- No rear suspension of any kind (1958), no Arrow-Flite emblem (1959), no 12-volt system or electric start (1965).

1957 buyer cautions:

- **Rigid-frame verification.** The swingarm conversion is the most common major modification on 1957s — a claimed-original 1957 must have the rigid wishbone frame, full stop.
- **Build-date running changes.** The February valve-guide change and the 57FLH4444 spring change mean a "1957-correct" top end depends on when the engine was built. Get the serial and the build date before judging.
- **Lucite emblems.** Original 1957 Lucite emblems are fragile and often replaced; reproductions vary in quality — compare against the factory parts catalog.

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4. Technical restoration data — 1957 Harley-Davidson Panhead

4.1 Frame and engine numbers (1957)

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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57FLH1234
57 = model year | FLH = model | 1234 = sequential number
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(The stronger valve springs arrived at engine 57FLH4444 — the serial itself is a running-change marker.) 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 (1957)

Item	FL	FLH (Super Sport)
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	60 hp @ 5,500 rpm; 65 lb-ft @ 3,200 rpm
Carburetor	Linkert M-74B	Linkert M-74B
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; larger oil pump; Timken mains

4.3 Carburetion and electrical

- Linkert M-74B across the line — rebuild with correct 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

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