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The opening pages of

1958 Harley-Davidson Panhead Buyer's Guide

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IRONHEAD

1958 Harley-Davidson Panhead — Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

IronHead single-year guide · Model year 1958 only · Covers all 1958 Panhead Big Twins — the first-year Duo-Glide: FL, FLF, FLH, FLHF · The 1957 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:** 1958 only — the FIRST Duo-Glide. FL, FLF (foot shift), FLH, FLHF Super Sport — all with swingarm rear suspension.
- **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; 53 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; 58.5 hp @ 5,400 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 1958:** swingarm rear suspension with twin shock absorbers (first year); step-down straight-leg frame; redesigned front and rear fenders; horseshoe oil tank; hydraulically actuated rear drum brake (first year — front brake remains mechanically operated); thicker cylinder-head fins; brush generator with 2-unit regulator; O-ring intake manifold seals; revised clutch; new taillight and speedometer.
- **Ignition:** 6-volt battery, breaker points; kick start only.
- **Transmission:** 4-speed constant-mesh; hand shift/foot clutch standard, foot shift/hand clutch optional.
- **Wheels/tires:** Wire-spoked wheels; factory tire data lists 4.00 x 18, 4.50 x 18, and 5.00 x 16 fitments.
- **Dimensions:** 61-inch wheelbase.

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- **1958 colors:** Calypso Red with Birch White tank panels; Black with Birch White tank panels; Skyline Blue with Birch White tank panels; Sabre Gray Metallic with Birch White tank panels; Police Silver; Police Birch White (two-tone schemes standard for 1958).
- **Identification:** No frame VIN — the engine serial (left case, between the cylinders, e.g. 58FL1234) is the ownership number. Belly numbers on both crankcase halves must match each other.
- **Production:** FL 1,591; FLF 1,299; FLH 195; FLHF 2,953 — 6,038 across the listed models (compiled figures; Harley-Davidson published no official year totals).
- **1958 price new:** $1,255 (FL); $1,320 (FLH).
- **Key 1958-only details:** the first swingarm frame — the step-down straight-leg design is 1958-specific; the horseshoe oil tank; the hydraulically actuated rear drum; the thicker head fins; the brush generator.

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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 1958 Duo-Glide was the biggest chassis change in the Big Twin's history: after a decade of the Panhead engine in a rigid frame, Milwaukee finally gave the rear wheel suspension — a swingarm with twin shock absorbers, a new step-down frame to carry it, and a hydraulically actuated rear brake to match the new capability. The "Duo" in Duo-Glide named the two suspended ends, and the touring motorcycle as America knows it dates from this bike.

The Panhead era that followed is the backbone of this brand: 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; 1957 was the last rigid year.

1958 changed the chassis more than any year since 1948 changed the engine. The Duo-Glide's swingarm rear suspension with twin shocks, the step-down straight-leg frame, the redesigned fenders, the horseshoe oil tank, and the hydraulically actuated rear drum brake made the Big Twin a modern touring motorcycle. The engine got thicker cylinder-head fins, a brush generator with a 2-unit regulator, O-ring intake seals, and a revised clutch — and the factory figures for 1958 read 53 hp (FL) and 58.5 hp (FLH) at 5,400 rpm.

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 springs from 57FLH4444.
1958	**FIRST DUO-GLIDE: swingarm rear suspension with twin shocks; step-down straight-leg frame; redesigned fenders; horseshoe oil tank; hydraulically actuated rear drum brake; thicker cylinder-head fins; brush generator with 2-unit regulator; O-ring intake seals; revised clutch.**
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.

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Year	What changed
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.
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 1958 Panhead

The 1958 is the first Duo-Glide — the year the Big Twin got a rear suspension, and the most important chassis year of the Panhead era. The step-down straight-leg frame, the swingarm, and the horseshoe oil tank are all 1958-specific in their first-year form. A correct 1958 restoration is a first-year-swingarm restoration, with all the one-year-only chassis details that implies.

1958 details to get right:

- **Swingarm rear suspension with twin shock absorbers** — first year. The

swingarm pivot, the shocks, and their mounts are 1958-specific.

- **Step-down straight-leg frame** — the new frame design; not interchangeable

with the 1957 wishbone or the later Duo-Glide frames in detail.

- **Horseshoe oil tank** — new for 1958, shaped to the new frame.
- **Hydraulically actuated rear drum brake** — first year. Note: the FRONT

brake remains mechanically operated in 1958 — claims of "hydraulic brakes both ends" are wrong; the hydraulic actuation is rear-only.

- **Thicker cylinder-head fins** — the engine's visual tell for 1958.
- **Brush generator with 2-unit regulator**; **O-ring intake manifold

seals**;** revised clutch**;** new taillight and speedometer**;** redesigned front and rear fenders**.

What did NOT exist in 1958 (common mix-ups):

- No hydraulic FRONT brake (rear-only in 1958), no Arrow-Flite emblem

(1959), no 12-volt system or electric start (1965).

1958 buyer cautions:

- **First-year swingarm wear.** The swingarm pivot and shock mounts take the

loads the rigid frame used to carry — check for worn pivot bushings, cracked mounts, and tired shocks before anything cosmetic.

- **Rear-brake hydraulics.** The first-year hydraulic rear brake needs a

full overhaul — master cylinder, lines, wheel cylinder — not just new shoes. Verify the front brake is the correct mechanical setup, not a later conversion.

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- **Frame originality.** The 1958-only step-down frame details are the

checks against a later Duo-Glide frame swapped underneath.

4. Technical restoration data — 1958 Harley-Davidson Panhead

4.1 Frame and engine numbers (1958)

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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58FLH2051
58 = model year | FLH = model | 2051 = sequential number
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(The serial above is from a documented 1958 FLH Duo-Glide sold at Bonhams.) 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 (1958)

Item	FL	FLH (Super Sport)
Configuration	45° air-cooled OHV V-twin; hydraulic lifters; aluminum heads, thicker fins	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	53 hp @ 5,400 rpm; 62 lb-ft @ 3,200 rpm	58.5 hp @ 5,400 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, revised for 1958	Same
Lubrication	Dry sump; gear-driven oil pump; horseshoe oil tank	Same; larger pump; Timken mains

4.3 Carburetion and electrical

- Linkert M-74B with O-ring intake manifold seals (new for 1958) — rebuild

with correct settings, not a generic kit

- 6-volt battery ignition with breaker points; brush generator with 2-unit

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