FREE SAMPLE

The opening pages of

1959 Harley-Davidson Panhead Buyer's Guide

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Nothing here is rewritten or summarised — it is the product itself,
so you can judge the depth before you spend a dollar.

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IRONHEAD

1959 Harley-Davidson Panhead — Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

IronHead single-year guide · Model year 1959 only · Covers all 1959 Panhead Big Twins — the second-year Duo-Glide: FL, FLF, FLH, FLHF · The 1958 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:** 1959 only — the second-year Duo-Glide. 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; 7.25:1 compression (FL), 8.0:1 (FLH). Aluminum heads, hydraulic lifters, internal oil lines.
- **New for 1959:** Arrow-Flite tank emblem; green neutral indicator light on the foot-shift dashboard; chrome front fender tip (replacing the 1957–1958 plastic tip); black footboards; optional center stand; revised taillight lens.
- **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:** Duo-Glide swingarm frame; Hydra-Glide telescopic fork; 8-inch front drum (mechanically operated); hydraulically actuated rear drum.
- **Wheels/tires:** Wire-spoked wheels; 5.00 x 16 fitment (standard Big Twin fitment; confirm against the factory service manual for the exact year).
- **Dimensions:** 61-inch wheelbase.
- **1959 colors:** Calypso Red, Black, Skyline Blue, Hi-Fi Red, Hi-Fi Turquoise, Police Silver, Police Birch White — generally with Birch White tank and fender panels; no extra cost for solid colors without the panels.

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- **Identification:** No frame VIN — the engine serial (left case, between the cylinders, e.g. 59FL1234) is the ownership number. Belly numbers on both crankcase halves must match each other.
- **Production:** FL 1,201; FLF 1,222; FLH 121; FLHF 3,223 — 5,767 across the listed models (compiled figures; Harley-Davidson published no official year totals).
- **1959 price new:** $1,280 (FL); $1,345 (FLH).
- **Key 1959-only details:** the Arrow-Flite emblem is the one-year tank badge; the neutral indicator is new on foot-shift models; the chrome fender tip replaces the plastic tip — a quick 1958-versus-1959 tell.

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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 had been the biggest chassis change in Big Twin history — swingarm rear suspension, a step-down frame, and a hydraulic rear brake. For 1959 Harley refined the formula: new tank graphics, a neutral indicator for the foot-shift bikes that now dominated sales, and detail upgrades like the chrome fender tip and black footboards. The Duo-Glide was settling into its long career as America's touring motorcycle.

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 introduced the Duo-Glide — swingarm rear suspension, step-down frame, horseshoe oil tank, hydraulic rear drum.

1959 was the refinement year: the Arrow-Flite tank emblem, the green neutral indicator on foot-shift dashboards, the chrome front fender tip, black footboards, the optional center stand, and a revised taillight lens — small changes that together make a 1959 instantly separable from a 1958.

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.
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.

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Year	What changed
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; step-down straight-leg frame; horseshoe oil tank; hydraulically actuated rear drum; thicker head fins; brush generator; O-ring intake seals.
1959	**Arrow-Flite tank emblem; green neutral indicator on foot-shift dash; chrome front fender tip; black footboards; optional center stand; revised taillight lens.**
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.
1964	Breather hole in the primary housing; oil-pressure switch; hollow hex timer adjuster; last year of the Duo-Glide.

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Year	What changed
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 1959 Panhead

The 1959 is the refinement year — the details that separate it from a 1958 are all in the trim and the dashboard. The Arrow-Flite emblem is the one-year tank badge, the neutral indicator is the foot-shift tell, and the chrome fender tip is the quick visual separator from the 1958's plastic tip.

1959 details to get right:

- **Arrow-Flite tank emblem** — one year only; not the 1958 graphics, not

the 1960 nacelle look.

- **Green neutral indicator** on the foot-shift dashboard — new for 1959.
- **Chrome front fender tip** — replaces the 1957–1958 plastic tip. Plastic

on a 1959 is wrong; chrome on a 1958 is wrong.

- **Black footboards** — new for the year.
- **Optional center stand** — a 1959 accessory, not standard equipment.
- **Revised taillight lens.**

What did NOT exist in 1959 (common mix-ups):

- No fork nacelle (1960), no dual-point ignition (1961), no 12-volt system

or electric start (1965).

1959 buyer cautions:

- **1958-versus-1959 trim.** The two years are mechanically close and the

trim differences are small — which is exactly why 1958s get re-trimmed as 1959s and vice versa. Check the serial (59...) against the trim, not the trim against the seller's story.

- **Neutral-indicator wiring.** The new indicator adds dashboard wiring —

check for hacked harnesses on converted bikes.

- **Foot-shift dominance.** By 1959 the foot-shift models outsold the

hand-shift models heavily (3,223 FLHFs against 121 hand-shift FLHs) — a claimed hand-shift 1959 deserves the same scrutiny as any rare variant.

4. Technical restoration data — 1959 Harley-Davidson Panhead

4.1 Frame and engine numbers (1959)

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

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59FLH3333
59 = model year | FLH = model | 3333 = sequential number
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(The serial above is from a documented 1959 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 (1959)

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
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; horseshoe oil tank	Same; larger pump; Timken mains

Note: no factory output figure is documented for 1959 in the surviving factory literature consulted — the 1955–1958 figures are not carried forward here, and period advertising claims vary. Do not quote an output number for a 1959.

4.3 Carburetion and electrical

- Linkert M-74B with O-ring intake seals — rebuild with correct settings,

not a generic kit

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

regulator; verify charging under load

- Kick starter only; neutral-indicator wiring on foot-shift models is

1959-specific

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

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