FREE SAMPLE

The opening pages of

1971 Harley-Davidson Shovelhead 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-SHOVELHEAD-1971

IronHead — instant PDF download after checkout.

IRONHEAD

The 1971 Harley-Davidson Shovelhead Buyer & Restoration Guide

KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

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

Manufacturer History

The Shovelhead story starts in 1966. Harley-Davidson needed more power from its Big Twin to move the heavy Electra Glide dresser, and the answer was the Power Pac: new aluminum cylinder heads with larger valves and ports on the existing Panhead-style lower end, with the rocker boxes shaped like the business end of a coal shovel — the name every Harley fan knows today.

The first Shovelhead generation runs from 1966 through 1969: the generator (slabside) years. The generator hangs off the front of the engine cases, the ignition is breaker points, and ownership identification is the engine serial number. In 1970 the motor changed fundamentally — the alternator replaced the generator inside a redesigned cone-shaped timing case, the ignition points moved into the nose cone, and a nine-character VIN appeared. That cone motor is the second Shovelhead generation, and it runs all the way to 1984.

The model line grew with the motor. The 1971 FX Super Glide — Willie G. Davidson's factory custom combining the FL frame and 74-ci engine with a Sportster front end and the boat-tail rear — invented the cruiser category. The line expanded through the 1970s: electric-start FXE, the FXS Low Rider (mid-1977), the FXEF Fat Bob (1979), the belt-drive FXB Sturgis and FXWG Wide Glide and the all-new FLT Tour Glide (1980). Displacement grew from 74 cubic inches to an 80-ci option (mid-1978) and then the all-1340 line (1981). Carburetion moved from Linkert (1966) to Tillotson (1967–1970) to Bendix (1971–1975) to Keihin (1976 on). Breaker points gave way to Prestolite electronic ignition late in 1978. The 17-digit federal VIN arrived for 1981, and in June 1981 Harley's executives bought the company back from AMF. The FXR chassis (1982) brought rubber mounting and a 5-speed to the FX line, and in 1984 the Evolution engine arrived — ending the Shovelhead era that this guide covers.

Model History

This guide covers one model year only. The Shovelhead Big Twin line for the covered year is described in the key-facts section; model codes, carburetion, ignition, and chassis details are year-specific and must be verified against the year parts book. The through-line of the era is the cone motor introduced for 1970 (alternator, nose-cone points, nine-character VIN), refined year by year until the 1984 split between the final Shovelheads and the first Evolutions.

What Is Unique About 1971

FX SUPER GLIDE INTRODUCED — Willie G. Davidson’s factory custom widened the market: the FL’s frame and 74-ci engine with a Sportster front end and running gear. First-year FXs carry the fiberglass boat-tail seat/fender unit (replaced by a conventional rear fender for 1972) and 19-inch front / 16-inch rear wire wheels.

Bendix replaces the Tillotson — the Bendix becomes the Big Twin carburetor for 1971 through 1975 (FL/FLH) and into the FX era. A Tillotson on a 1971 is a backward step; a Keihin is a 1976-and-later swap.

About 4,700 FXs built — the documented first-year Super Glide production figure; verify FX claims against the 2C model code in the VIN.

Last drum-front-brake year — 1971 is the final year before the front disc arrives on Big Twins (1972); the FX keeps drums both ends through 1972.

What 1971 Did Not Have

- No front disc brake (1972 FL/FLH; 1973 FX); no electric start on the FX (1974 FXE); no Keihin carburetor (1976).
- No conventional rear fender on the first-year FX — the 1971 FX wears the boat-tail; a steel fender on a claimed-1971 FX needs explanation.
- **Model year covered:** 1971 only (FL, FLH, and the new FX Super Glide). The Super Glide year.

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

- **Engine:** 1,207 cc (74 cu in) air-cooled 45-degree OHV V-twin; 3.4375 x 4.00 in bore x stroke; 8.0:1 compression; cone motor with alternator.
- **Fuel system:** Bendix carburetor (new for 1971, replacing the Tillotson on all Big Twins).
- **Ignition:** 12-volt battery and coil; breaker points in the nose cone.
- **The FX Super Glide:** Willie G. Davidson's factory custom — FL frame and engine with a Sportster front end; fiberglass boat-tail bodywork; 19-inch front and 16-inch rear wire wheels; Sparkling America paint.
- **Starting:** Electric + kick (FL/FLH); kick only (FX).
- **Transmission:** 4-speed constant-mesh; right-foot shift; chain final drive; dry multi-plate clutch.
- **Chassis:** Drum brakes front and rear on all 1971 models (the front disc arrives for 1972).
- **Identification:** 9-character VIN at the steering head and engine (2A = FLH-1200, 2C = FX-1200); year code H1.
- **Production:** About 4,700 FX Super Glides (documented auction-marque figure).
- **Key 1971-only features:** First-year FX with boat-tail; first-year Bendix; last year of drum-front brakes on Big Twins.

1971 Technical Specification

- **Models covered:** the FL, FLH Electra Glide, and the new FX Super Glide
- **Engine:** 1,207 cc (74 cu in) air-cooled 45-degree OHV V-twin (Shovelhead)
- **Bore x stroke:** 3.4375 x 4.00 in (87.3 x 100.8 mm)
- **Compression ratio:** 8.0:1
- **Power:** FLH 60 bhp; FX 58 bhp @ 5,150 rpm (period spec-sheet data)
- **Carburetion:** Bendix (new for 1971, replacing the Tillotson)
- **Ignition:** 12-volt battery and coil; breaker points in the nose cone
- **Starting:** Electric starter with kick-starter backup (FL/FLH); kick starter (FX)
- **Transmission:** 4-speed constant-mesh; right-foot shift; chain final drive; dry multi-plate clutch
- **Brakes:** Drum brakes front and rear (all models)
- **Wheels:** FL/FLH: 16-inch wire-spoked wheels; FX: 19-inch front, 16-inch rear wire wheels

Identification: Engine Serial and VIN

For 1966 through 1969, ownership identification is the engine serial number stamped on the left engine case. From 1970, Harley-Davidson used a nine-character VIN: the first two characters identify the model, the next five are the production sequence, and the last two are the model year (H0–H9 = 1970–1979, J0 = 1980). From 1981, the federal 17-digit VIN applies (10th character = model year).

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

Nine-character VIN model codes (1970-1980 era)

Code	Model	Years
1A	FL-1200	1966–1973 (74 ci dresser)
2A	FLH-1200	1966–1980 (74 ci Electra Glide)
2C	FX-1200	1971–1974 (74 ci Super Glide)
2D	FX-1200	1975–1976 (74 ci Super Glide)
2E	FX-1200	1977 (74 ci Super Glide)
9D	FXE-1200	1974–1977 (74 ci Super Glide, electric start)
2F	FXS-1200	1977–1978 (74 ci Low Rider)
4F	FXS-80	1979–1980 (80 ci Low Rider)
6F	FXEF	1979 (Fat Bob)
7F	FXEF-80	1979–1980 (80 ci Fat Bob)
5F	FXE-80	1979–1980 (80 ci Super Glide)
3G	FLH-80	1978–1984 (80 ci Electra Glide)
5G	FLT-80	1980–1983 (80 ci Tour Glide)
6G	FXE-80	1981 (80 ci Super Glide)
7G	FXWG-80	1980–1984 (80 ci Wide Glide)
8G	FXB-80	1980–1982 (80 ci Sturgis)

Nine-character year codes: 1970 = H0, 1971 = H1, 1972 = H2, 1973 = H3, 1974 = H4, 1975 = H5, 1976 = H6, 1977 = H7, 1978 = H8, 1979 = H9, 1980 = J0.

Federal 17-digit years: The 10th character of the 17-digit federal VIN is the model-year code: 1981 = B, 1982 = C, 1983 = D, 1984 = E.

What to Check Before You Buy

Boat-tail originality. The fiberglass boat-tail is fragile, often cracked, and frequently replaced with the 1972 steel fender — a correct 1971 FX keeps the boat-tail.

FX vs. FLH engine claims. The FX uses the FLH-spec 74; verify the 2C model code — FL/FLH bikes do not become FXs with a front-end swap.

Bendix setup. The Bendix is simpler than the Tillotson but jetting-sensitive; verify correct application and jets before chasing other faults.

Paint and Finishes

- **Sparkling America** is the documented first-year FX finish (red/white/blue commemorative scheme).
- FL/FLH colors: verify against the year parts book (Painted Parts section); repaint in a non-factory color is the single biggest value deduction on a restored bike.
- **Hidden original paint:** check under the seat, inside the side covers, and behind badges for the original finish before trusting any color claim.

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

Production

About 4,700 FX Super Glides were built for 1971 (documented auction-marque figure). No reliable FL/FLH model-year total was found in the sources consulted.

The Technical Restoration Content

Casting and date codes

Engine cases, cylinders, and heads carry casting numbers and date codes. A factory-correct restoration matches casting numbers to the model year and checks date codes against the build date — parts cast months after the bike's assembly date are replacements. Photograph every casting number before disassembly; the year parts book lists the correct numbers.

Torque specs

Do not use torque values from memory or from generic charts. Head bolts, case bolts, and critical fasteners are torque-to-yield or angle-sensitive on these engines, and published values vary between sources. Use the year-correct Harley-Davidson factory service manual for every torque value, and follow its sequence. If you cannot verify a number, follow the factory manual procedure — a wrong torque value breaks cases.

Gaskets and seals

Shovelheads mark their territory. A restoration that aims at correctness uses the right gasket materials for the year (cork, paper, or composition as the parts book specifies), and a restoration that aims at riding replaces every seal in the primary, the rocker boxes, and the pushrod tubes as a matter of course. Budget for it; there is no cheap way around it.

The top end

The Shovelhead's aluminum heads are its glory and its weakness. Check valve guides, seats, and the head gasket surface before committing to machine work. Overheating history shows in discolored fins and pulled head-bolt inserts — both are repairable, both cost money, and both should be found before paint.

The bottom end

The 1966–1969 generator lower end and the 1970-on cone lower end share the Shovelhead top end but differ in the timing chest, oiling, and charging system — parts do not freely interchange between the generations. Verify the case casting against the model year before buying a "rebuilt" engine.

Rust-prone areas

Check the frame at the steering head and swingarm pivot, the inside of the gas tanks, the fender mounting points, and the floorboard/forward-control brackets. Chrome that looks tired is usually telling the truth about the metal underneath — budget for re-chroming, not polishing.

Restoration sequence

1. Verify numbers (engine serial / VIN, title, model codes) before spending anything.
2. Assess the engine: compression, leak-down, oil pressure history.
3. Frame and sheet metal: straighten, repair, then paint — never paint before the mechanical assessment.
4. Rebuild the engine and transmission to the year-correct specification.
5. Re-chrome and re-plate to the year-correct finish.
6. Reassemble with the year parts book open — fasteners, clamps, and finishes are year-specific.

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

7. Final verification: every number, every code, every finish against the book.

Shop the Supplies

The parts and tools for this restoration are covered in the IronHead parts-and-tools box at ironheadguides.com. Buy the year-correct factory service manual first — it is the single most valuable tool in a Shovelhead restoration.

Sources

- Rider Magazine — Retrospective: Harley-Davidson Shovelhead 1966–1984 (Power Pac heads; 1966 FLH 60 hp @ 5,500; generator 1966–1969; alternator/points-in-timing-case from 1970) —
  `http://ridermagazine.com/retrospective-harley-davidson-shovelhead-1966-1984`
- Bonhams — documented 1966 FLH, first Shovelhead year (engine no. 66FLH2575; second-year electric start; fiberglass saddlebags) —
  `https://cars.bonhams.com/auction/24509/lot/156/1966-harley-davidson-1200cc-flh-electra-glide-engine-no-66flh2575/`
- Linkert reference — DC-7 for 1966 FL/FLH —
  `http://www.linkertcarbs.com/linkert.html`
- Lowbrow Customs — Harley-Davidson motorcycle VIN lookup/decoder chart (1970–1980 nine-character VIN; model codes; H0–H9/J0 year codes) —
  `https://www.lowbrowcustoms.com/blogs/motorcycle-how-to-guides/harley-davidson-motorcycle-vin-lookup-decoder-chart`
- Zodiac/INOA — Harley model years explained (17-digit federal VIN from 1981; 10th character = model year: B = 1981, C = 1982, D = 1983, E = 1984) —
  `https://zodiac.nl/docs/instructions/Harley`
- Hagerty valuation — 1971 FX Super Glide (Willie G. Davidson factory custom, FL frame/engine + Sportster front end, boat-tail 1971, conventional fender 1972, front disc and single tank 1973, FXE 1974, FXS 1978) —
  `http://www.hagerty.com/valuation-tools/harley~davidson/fx/1971/1971-harley~davidson-fx`
- Mecum — 1971 FX Super Glide (4,700 built, 74 ci, 4-speed foot shift, drum brakes, boat-tail, 19/16-in wire wheels, Sparkling America) —
  `https://www.mecum.com/lots/1161873/1971-harley-davidson-fx-super-glide`
- National Motorcycle Museum — FX Super Glide origins (1971, FL engine/frame + Sportster front end) —
  `https://nationalmcmuseum.org/2018/09/21/1982-harley-davidson-sturgis`

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