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# LEADING THE WAY WITH A SPECIAL K

## The BMW K 1100 RS

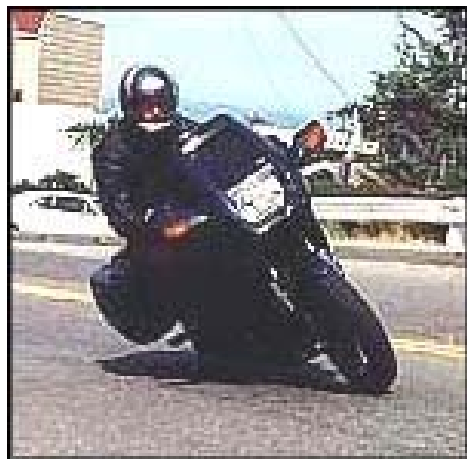
Road Test by Steve Engelbrecht  
Photos by David Duprey



**Achtung! willkommen der Uberbike (attention! welcome the superbike)**

Imagine banking over a large liter-class sportbike, farther and farther into a long sweeper. As you roll on the gas and watch the speedo creep progressively past one hundred and twenty, the landscape rushes by in a frenetic blur, yet all the while you remain serene. The suspension completely isolates you from any surface disturbances, remaining firm, never harsh, and always having a little travel in reserve. Noise is minimal, wind is deflected. The power plant is smooth and potent; its delivery effortlessly. Your

lean angle becomes extreme, but the bike has not yet approached its limit. You could experience this on many bikes. [The only reason you roll off is what makes this experience surreal and unique: your passenger is getting nervous; he's afraid your going to drag the hard luggage, and all his stuff's in there.]



As you exit the sweeper you duck in behind the little fairing, and your passenger ducks in behind you. You click the shifter down to fourth, rev it out, then shift up to fifth and keep the throttle open. The quiet inline-four pulls redline comfortably, with the bike fully loaded, and two man-sized

passengers. The speedo indicates 152 m.p.h., yet nothing seems to strain. You wonder to yourself, "have I discovered some secret here or is my test bike possessed, like Herbie the love bug?" I don't remember reading too many rave reviews about this machine, and yet in overall competence from my adult, civilized perspective, the K 1100 RS just smokes all those other horsepower-heavy monster bikes. And I love huge engines and tacky graphics. The four-cylinder K-bike feels like it's truly in touch with the top of the line BMW automotive philosophy: fast, ultra competent handling machines that are pragmatic, reserved in style and designed for the wealthy enthusiast.

BMW has achieved some amazing results with the K 1100 RS. When the K-series was introduced in that last, forgettable decade, it was met with a luke-warm reception. The new inline, water-cooled engines were to replace the quaint old flat twin motor that had become obsolete after the Japanese war of the superbikes, and transport BMW into the future. Criticisms flew. I remember adjectives like: bland, heavy, slow and ...bland. Most reviewers preferred the three cylinder 750 because it would at least pretend to corner. Though these assessments were unfair, it was indeed possible that BMW had made a mistake. Porsche

made the same one when they tried to phase-out the air-cooled flat six 911 series for more current front-engine, water-cooled designs. In retrospect, it seems that not many enthusiasts wanted BMW to build a better superbike. They wanted BMW to remain the eclectic, eccentric alternative; they wanted to look cool. After a few years of poor sales BMW took notice. It was back to the drawing board to build an entire new line around a redesigned update of their old twin boxer motor. BMW kept the new line fresh with innovative suspensions and alternative styling. It worked. BMW has won back the hearts of its two-wheeled boxer-headed faithful. But deep in the Black Forest at the factory they never gave up on the K-bikes. They quietly refined them to this present incarnation, the automaton of autobahn, a true German superbike.

### At first glance

I didn't get bowled over the first time I laid my eyes on the K 1100 RS. I don't think it cared for me too much either. This bike is reserved. The K 1100 RS doesn't have a lot of billboard graphics or take any wild styling risks. At about



seven-and-a-half feet in length, it is huge! Our test bike had a perfectly applied dark charcoal gray metallic paint job, with just one set of stickers. The bike was fitted with BMW's optional hard luggage and tank bag. The styling is under-stated yet substantial like the rest of the bike. The fairing upper, tank and tail-piece retain the boxy look of the original K's, but the rounded lowers and side-panels redesigned for 1993 soften and update the bikes appearance nicely. The rectangular headlight is still big enough to pass for a TV screen. The wheelbase, at 61.61 inches unladen, is a couple of inches longer than other sport touring bikes, making it more like a big cruiser. The weight isn't bad at all, at 538 dry /590 wet, the K 1100 RS looks larger.



The heart of the BMW K



1100 RS is the 1093cc longitudinal in-line flat four. It boasts such standard fare as four valves per

cylinder double overhead cams, water-cooling and fuel-injection. Redline comes at 8,900 rpm, and the compression ratio is 11.0 to 1. Bore and Stroke is a close to square 70,5/70. Power is delivered to the rear wheel by BMW's patented Paralever single-sided swingarm with its encased shaft-drive. BMW chose an eighteen inch wheel for the rear, with a seventeen up front. Widths are slightly narrower than industry standard, at 3.0" in the front 4.5" for the rear. This choice I applaud; superbike width wheels are unnecessary on the street, and would just hamper transitions on such a large motorcycle. The wheels are plenty large enough to mount Michelin Radials, which BMW does.

This BMW model relies on standard 41.7mm telescopic forks. As on all BMWs, brakes are provided by the masters at Brembo, which means 'great' in Italian. The K 1100 RS has twin discs up front with four-pot calipers. A single disc rides the Paralever out back, all hooked up to an ABS system.

### Take it for a spin

Starting the bike up is easy and uneventful. The K 1100 RS won't start with the kickstand down, but you can warm it



up on the centerstand. Though the lever reads choke, it's really just a throttle advance for the fuel injection. It takes a good five minutes of 'choke' to warm this bike's breadbox. The big K purrs quietly a few octaves lower than most litre-

sized bikes. The seat is very comfortable, and its relationship to the handlebars and foot pegs is good. Once rolling the torque motor pulls hard everywhere, but not screamingly so. You might expect a bike so large as the BMW to be a handful around town but it's not. The bike is sprung so well it never gets in its own way with a wallow. The engine design and position ensure a low center of gravity allowing easy transitions. The frame feels rigid and the front and rear suspensions balance harmoniously. Still, the K1100RS feels a little stifled in city traffic, and if it's warm out, say above ninety, you're in trouble. The BMW likes its flow of cool air, without it the temperature gauge parks its needle right next to the red and the fan holds it there. Generous waves of heat radiate from the fairing lowers, broiling your legs like a rotisserie chicken. It can be a little relentless, but the BMW won't overheat. One great thing about driving the BMW in the city is the amazing air-horn. Few cars have horns this loud, and I used it generously for every traffic slight, real or imaginary. It allowed me to compensate for years of inadequate honking.

The brakes work well unless you really need them. I am referring to the ABS system, which doesn't do much for me. On the lighter BMW twins the system seemed more effective, but on this bike the system activates too early, long before lock-up. Once activated it releases the brakes too much, sending the bike lurching forward. Others like ABS, I would disconnect it. To be fair, the publisher told me it saved his ass once during this test. Otherwise, the adjustable lever's feel is excellent and low effort.

The transmission is the only weak point in the drive line. Though the ratios are nicely spaced, the gear box requires a long throw to engage the next gear cleanly. If you don't there is a false neutral between every gear.



The optional luggage on K1100RS is a must. Having that kind of storage space attached securely and locked to a





motorcycle adds a whole new dimension. Finish of the hard luggage is excellent, though fit can be a little cumbersome. It can be a little difficult to fit

them to the bike. BMW also includes a nice little tank bag that attaches to tabs on the tank. It comes with its own little rain cover.

The cockpit is elegantly functional. Simple analog gauges for road speed, engine speed, fuel and temperature. The dash has a LCD gear indicator, and idiot lights for the ABS, low fuel, and oil. There is a handy hazard flasher. The tool kit and tire repair kit are complete and high quality. BMW tire patch kits are world renown as the best, BMW is a stickler for detail.

### **Climb every mountain**

The BMW K 1100 RS loves the open road. Once you leave the city, the bike's proportions begin to make a lot of sense. The fairing, with its little spoiler, keeps things quiet. The BMW gobbles up distance, space and time like the Starship



Enterprise, and does so in calm comfort, even two up. It's not surprising that long-distance endurance riders tend to gravitate towards BMW's, and the K series in particular. The machines are so smooth and effortless that they enable you to rip across long stretches of country-side with out the usual fatigue. This is what sets the K1100RS apart from other sport-touring motorcycles. The flawless suspension, functional but unobtrusive fairing, excellent ergonomics for both the rider and passenger, and smooth, quiet and powerful engine combine to cancel each-other

out. The BMW doesn't isolate you from the environment like a big, luxury tourer, it isolates you from the tiring aspects of the motorcycle, which allows extended high speed forays to be much more comfortable. At first I misunderstood this quality. I thought the bike was a little reserved and maybe a little dull. I couldn't be more wrong! The Japanese Sport-tourers always rely on mind numbing power bands and other such doo-dads. The German philosophy shies away from these distractions, leaving you free to focus on the landscape and conquer the world. This is how the Germans quietly built their own superbike.

The BMW K 1100 RS even feels good on the race track. I took it out for a couple of laps at Laguna Seca, luggage and all, and I must say it behaved well. It tracks straight as hell, though it's not much for mid-corner apex changes. It goes fast through corners without elevation changes, and scares the hell out of guys on sportbikes when you stuff them. The ABS is a little scary when you grab a hand-full over a hundred.

Speed is what the K 1100 RS likes, thousands of miles of it. This motorcycle feels most comfortable cruising at one hundred, which can be a drag in this restricted land because the minute your attention wanders, that's how fast you end up going. The more time you spend with this bike, the more time you want to. You begin to make up excuses to leave town everyday and maybe drive to Utah. The BMW K1100RS was designed to be at home on the Autobahn and have the world as its oyster.



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