MOTO PORCH

Harley-Davidson Road Glide Buyer's Kit

Years covered: 1998 to 2013, 2015 to present

The shark-nose bagger with the fairing bolted to the frame instead of the forks. Reviewers say it steers lighter and steadier than batwing bikes. Used ones come in many trims and engines, so work out exactly which Road Glide you are looking at before you compare prices.

First bike? It weighs roughly 790 to 840 lb in the tests we read, and the frame-mounted fairing does not change that at a stop. Get a season on something lighter first, or take a big-bike handling course.

Generations

Early Twin Cam (Up to 2006)
Twin Cam engines with spring-loaded cam chain tensioners on Touring models from 1999 to 2006. NHTSA lists the Road Glide as FLTR and FLTRI. We did not confirm engine details for the earliest years.

Twin Cam 96 and 103 (2007 to 2013)
Hydraulic cam chain tensioners from 2007. The 2009 Touring line got a new frame, swingarm and stiffer triple clamps, with a Twin Cam 96 and a 6-speed. The 2010 Road Glide Custom (FLTRX) added a rear suspension lowered one inch. NHTSA also lists FLTRX103 codes for 2011 to 2013.

2015 return (2015 to 2016)
Harley left the Road Glide out of the 2014 lineup, then brought it back for 2015 with a redesigned frame-mounted sharknose fairing and the High Output Twin Cam 103. Base FLTRX and Special FLTRXS. The Special has linked brakes with ABS. Rider's test noted a stiffer 49 mm fork and only 2.1 inches of rear travel.

Milwaukee-Eight (2017 to 2023)
Four-valve Milwaukee-Eight 107 replaced the Twin Cam, with upgraded suspension. For 2020 the Road Glide Limited (FLTRK, Milwaukee-Eight 114) replaced the Road Glide Ultra.

Redesigned Road Glide (2024 to present)
Revised sharknose fairing with a 12.3 inch touchscreen and ride modes. Milwaukee-Eight 117 with liquid-cooled cylinder heads and about 50 percent more rear suspension travel. Reviewers put curb weight near 838 lb.

Known problems by year

Oil sumping on early Milwaukee-Eight engines
Years: 2017 to 2019 | Concern: medium

Harley-Davidson service bulletin M1450 says 2017 to 2019 Touring models with the Milwaukee-Eight engine can experience sumping during extended high rpm or heavy engine load. Excess oil sits in the crankcase, which can cause loss of power, strong engine braking and potential engine damage. The bulletin gives dealers a diagnostic procedure and lists a replacement oil pump assembly. It names the Touring family, not the Road Glide by name, and we did not confirm how many Road Glides were affected.

- [ ] Check: Ask about loss of power or strong engine braking on long high-rpm runs. Ask whether a dealer did work under bulletin M1450 and ask for the records.

Cam chain tensioner shoe wear on early Twin Cams

Years: Up to 2006 | Concern: high

Rider and Hot Bike both describe the spring-loaded tensioners on early Twin Cam engines as a weak point. The plastic shoes wear, and broken pieces can reach the oil pump and damage the engine. Harley sells a hydraulic tensioner upgrade kit for 1999 to 2006 Touring models. None of these sources names the Road Glide, so this rests on the Touring family and Twin Cam engine.

- [ ] Check: Ask if the cam tensioners were inspected or upgraded to hydraulic tensioners or gear-drive cams. Ask for the receipt. If it was not done, factor the work into your offer.

Hydraulic tensioner shoes on higher-mileage Twin Cams

Years: 2007 to 2016 | Concern: low

Hot Bike says the hydraulic tensioners helped somewhat but did not eliminate shoe wear. The 2012 owner thread we read has mixed reports. One owner found worn-out shoes on a 2008 bike at about 20,000 miles. Others found little wear at 50,000 to 62,000 miles. We did not find a factory inspection interval, and no source in this group was specific to the Road Glide.

- [ ] Check: On a high-mileage Twin Cam, ask when the cam chest was last opened and what was found.

Safety recalls on record

Recalls are repaired free by a dealer. Ask the seller for proof the work was done, or have a dealer check the VIN.

- [ ] 2024: electrical system:wiring (NHTSA #24V672000, listed for FLTRX, FLTRXSE, FLTRXSTSE) - confirm by VIN
- [ ] 2024 to 2026: engine and engine cooling:exhaust system:emission control:crankcase (pcv) (NHTSA #26V270000, listed for FLTRX) - confirm by VIN
- [ ] 2023: service brakes, hydraulic:foundation components:hoses, lines/piping, and fittings (NHTSA #23V672000, listed for FLTRXSE) - confirm by VIN
- [ ] 2020 to 2022: exterior lighting:brake lights (NHTSA #22V781000, listed for FLTRX, FLTRXS, FLTRK, FLTRXSE, FLTRKSE, FLTRXST) - confirm by VIN
- [ ] 2017 to 2018: power train:clutch assembly (NHTSA #18V734000, listed for FLTRX, FLTRXS, FLTRU, FLTRXSE) - confirm by VIN
- [ ] 2017: engine and engine cooling (NHTSA #17V333000, listed for FLTRX, FLTRXS) - confirm by VIN
- [ ] 2016: power train:clutch assembly (NHTSA #16V471000, listed for FLTRX, FLTRXS, FLTRU) - confirm by VIN
- [ ] 2016 to 2019: visibility (NHTSA #19V574000, listed for FLTRU, FLTRUSE) - confirm by VIN
- [ ] 2015: equipment (NHTSA #15V427000, listed for FLTRX, FLTRXS, FLTRUSE) - confirm by VIN

- [ ] 2015: power train:clutch assembly (NHTSA #15V216000, listed for FLTRX, FLTRXS) - confirm by VIN
- [ ] 2009 to 2012: exterior lighting:brake lights:switch (NHTSA #11V506000, listed for FLTR, FLTRX, FLTRU, FLTRXSE, FLTRUSE, FLTRSE3) - confirm by VIN
- [ ] 2009: fuel system, gasoline:storage:tank assembly:mounting (NHTSA #09V457000, listed for FLTR, FLTRSE3) - confirm by VIN
- [ ] 2009: wheels (NHTSA #09V267000, listed for FLTRSE3) - confirm by VIN
- [ ] 2008 to 2011: service brakes, hydraulic:fluid (NHTSA #18V076000, listed for FLTR, FLTRX, FLTRX103, FLTRU103, FLTRUSE, FLTRSE3) - confirm by VIN
- [ ] 2008: fuel system, gasoline:storage:tank assembly:filler pipe and cap (NHTSA #08V357000, listed for FLTR) - confirm by VIN
- [ ] 2003: exterior lighting:tail lights (NHTSA #04V218000, listed for FLTR, FLTRI) - confirm by VIN
- [ ] 2000: power train:clutch assembly (NHTSA #02V272000, listed for FLTRSEI) - confirm by VIN
- [ ] 1999: engine and engine cooling:engine:gasoline (NHTSA #99V003000, listed for FLTR, FLTRI) - confirm by VIN
- [ ] 1999 to 2003: electrical system:wiring:fuses and circuit breakers (NHTSA #04V134000, listed for FLTRI, FLTRSEI) - confirm by VIN
- [ ] 1998: electrical system:ignition:switch (NHTSA #98V158000, listed for FLTR, FLTRI) - confirm by VIN

Road Glide-specific checks

- [ ] Work out the trim and engine from the VIN and the engine case: base Road Glide, Special, Ultra, Limited or a CVO. Equipment and engine size differ a lot.
- [ ] Stand in front and check the fairing sits straight and level with an even gap to the tank on both sides. Owners report a crooked fairing after a drop, often from a bent engine guard or fairing support.
- [ ] Check the fairing support clamp and mounts for cracks, and look for fresh paint or non-original engine guards.
- [ ] Check the vent cover and inner fairing for uneven gaps. Owners of 2015 and 2016 bikes report a gap at the top vent cover on some bikes.
- [ ] Look inside the outer fairing around the radio housing for wear-through, mainly on pre-2011 bikes.
- [ ] Test the infotainment: radio, GPS, Bluetooth, speakers and touchscreen. Ask about any aftermarket amplifier or speakers.
- [ ] On pre-2017 bikes with the air-adjustable rear shocks, check the shocks hold air. On later bikes, check the rear preload knob turns.
- [ ] Pre-2007 bikes: ask for proof the cam chain tensioners were inspected or upgraded.
- [ ] 2017 to 2019 bikes: ask about loss of power or heavy engine braking at high rpm, and about dealer work under M1450.
- [ ] Ride it on a hot day or in traffic if you can. Rider found the 2015 Special gives off noticeable engine heat, mostly on the right side.
- [ ] Check the belt for cracks, missing teeth and rock damage. Belt replacement is expensive.

- [ ] Check the bag latches, lids and mounts work and are not cracked. Test the cruise control, ABS light and all lights.
- [ ] Ask for a list of every modification, who did it, which tuner and map are installed, and whether the stock parts come with the bike.

Before you go

- [ ] Ask the seller not to start or warm up the bike before you arrive. A cold start shows problems a warm engine hides.
- [ ] Ask for the VIN by text and run a recall check at nhtsa.gov/recalls before you drive over.
- [ ] Ask for a photo of the title. Confirm it is in the seller's name and is not marked salvage, rebuilt or flood.
- [ ] Bring a flashlight, a rag, a tire pressure gauge, and cash or a payment plan you have already agreed on.
- [ ] If you are a new rider, bring someone who can ride the bike for you on the test ride.

Paperwork

- [ ] VIN on the frame (steering head) matches the VIN on the title.
- [ ] Title is in the seller's name, with no lien listed (or a lien release in hand).
- [ ] Title is not branded salvage, rebuilt, flood or junk.
- [ ] Seller's ID matches the name on the title.
- [ ] Service records, receipts or a logbook, if any.
- [ ] Both keys are present.

Walkaround

- [ ] Tires: check tread depth and the 4-digit DOT date code (week and year). Tires older than about 5 to 6 years should be replaced regardless of tread.
- [ ] Chain and sprockets (if chain drive): hooked or pointed sprocket teeth, kinked or rusty links, or a chain that pulls far off the rear sprocket mean replacement soon.
- [ ] Brakes: pad thickness, rotor grooves or lip, and brake fluid color (clear to light amber is good, dark brown is overdue).
- [ ] Fork tubes: look for oil on the tubes or below the seals, and pitting on the chrome.
- [ ] Drop damage: scuffed bar ends, levers, footpegs, mirrors, engine covers, frame sliders and the tank. Bent levers or a crooked handlebar mean it went down.
- [ ] Frame and subframe: cracks, kinks, fresh paint or welds near the steering head, footpeg mounts and swingarm pivot.
- [ ] Leaks: oil or coolant under the engine, around the cylinder head, the water pump and the drain plug.
- [ ] Fluids: oil level and color in the sight glass or dipstick. Milky oil can mean coolant mixing in.

- [ ] Steering head bearings: with the front wheel off the ground (or a friend leaning the bike back), turn the bars slowly. Notchy or a center detent means worn bearings.
- [ ] Wheel bearings: grab each wheel top and bottom and try to rock it. Any clunk means worn bearings.
- [ ] Electrics: headlight high and low, brake light from both the lever and pedal, turn signals, horn, neutral light, kill switch and side stand switch.
- [ ] Modifications: aftermarket exhaust, intake or wiring. Ask what was changed and whether the fuel system was tuned to match.

Cold start

- [ ] Feel the engine before starting. If it is already warm, ask why.
- [ ] Starter should spin the engine briskly. A slow crank points to a weak battery or charging problem.
- [ ] Watch the exhaust on startup. Blue smoke means burning oil. White smoke that does not clear after warm-up can mean coolant.
- [ ] Listen for knocking, loud ticking or rattles that do not settle as it warms up.
- [ ] With a multimeter: about 12.6V at the battery engine off, and roughly 13.5V to 14.5V with the engine at a fast idle. Outside that range, suspect the charging system.

Test ride

- [ ] Clutch: in a higher gear at low RPM, open the throttle firmly. If RPM rises but speed does not, the clutch slips.
- [ ] Shifting: every gear, up and down. Watch for false neutrals or jumping out of gear.
- [ ] Brakes: firm lever and pedal, straight stops, no pulsing.
- [ ] Handling: no wobble or pull with relaxed hands on a straight road.
- [ ] Throttle: smooth pickup, no stumbling, and the throttle snaps closed on its own.
- [ ] After the ride: look under the bike again for fresh leaks and check that the cooling fan runs when hot (liquid-cooled bikes).

Questions to ask the seller

- [ ] How long have you owned it, and why are you selling?
- [ ] Has it ever been dropped, laid down or in an accident?
- [ ] Do you have service records? When was the last oil change?
- [ ] When were the valve clearances last checked?
- [ ] How old are the tires, chain and battery?
- [ ] What modifications have been made, and do you have the original parts?
- [ ] Have all recalls been done by a dealer?
- [ ] Is the title in your name, and is there a loan on it?

☐ Has it been stored outside or through winters without being ridden?

Red flags: walk away if you see these

- The title is not in the seller's name, or the VIN does not match.
- The seller warmed the bike up before you arrived and will not let you see a cold start.
- The seller refuses a test ride with cash in hand or a second rider present.
- Fresh paint, new levers and new mirrors on one side only (a hidden crash).
- Milky oil, steady blue smoke, or a clutch that slips on the test ride.
- A story that changes when you ask the same question twice.

Price worksheet

List 5 to 10 comparable bikes (same model, similar year and miles) before you go.

Listing / source	Year	Miles	Asking $	Notes

Costs this bike will need soon (tires, chain, brakes, service, recall work, damage):

Listing / source	Year	Miles	Asking $	Notes

Negotiation script

- Before you go, find 5 to 10 comparable listings (same model, similar year and miles) and note their asking prices on the worksheet.

- Write down every item from your inspection that will cost money: tires, chain and sprockets, brake pads, overdue service, recall work, damaged parts. Get a rough price for each.
- Open with the facts, not a lowball: "It needs tires and a chain soon, which is about $X. Comparable bikes are listed at $Y. I can do $Z today."
- Stay quiet after your offer. Let the seller answer.
- Decide your walk-away price before you arrive and stick to it. There is always another bike.

Important

This kit helps you ask better questions and spot common problems. It is not a mechanical inspection and cannot tell you whether a specific motorcycle is safe. If you are unsure, pay a qualified mechanic for a pre-purchase inspection or walk away. Recall data comes from NHTSA; confirm open recalls for the exact VIN with a dealer or at nhtsa.gov/recalls.