

**★ WORLD EXCLUSIVE RIDE**

# Style over substance?

**BMW likes to do things differently - one look at the R1200ST tells you that. But what lies behind the quirky styling?**

BY PED BAKER PICTURES BY DOUBLE RED

**B**MW is full of surprises. The last three bikes it has launched have been genuinely shocking in both appearance and engineering thinking. The R1200GS, K1200S and R1200RT bristle with innovation and brave solutions. It's all part of the firm's plan to shed its 'pipe and slippers' image.

The R1200ST is the latest bike to be hit with the uber-technik stick. As a replacement for the massively popular R1150RS, the ST features the same technology which first made its appearance on the ground-breaking R1200GS in 2004. The ST also has 10bhp over the GS plus a new gearbox designed to make the most of the extra power. The lever's travel is shorter, giving more accurate shifting, and top gear is a true sixth gear, not an overdrive.

The 1200 boxer twin engine is never going to set the world ablaze in pure performance terms. But what it lacks in high-speed thrills, it makes up for with a massive spread

of grunt and real-world usability. From 3000rpm the eight-valve twin piles on the torque, peaking at a whopping 85ftlb at 6000rpm. This means a massive spread of grunt whatever gear you're in. And like the R1200RT and GS, the fuel injection is superb and glitch-free from tickover to the 7500rpm redline.

The chassis matches the engine superbly. The tubular steel frame is virtually identical to the one found on the recently launched R1200RT, the only difference being a larger (41mm) fork tube to increase stiffness and stability.

On the road, the ST steers a little heavily at slow speed, but as you get above walking pace it becomes poised and confident. The chassis absorbs bumps and potholes admirably if sometimes a little harshly. As corner speeds increase, the limitations of the Telelever front end become apparent in the form of an uncertainty as to how much further you can push the bike.

If you've never ridden a machine

with Telelever front suspension before you may initially be put off by this lack of feedback. It's true that, in terms of high performance, conventional telescopic forks give better feel from the front tyre. But overloaded with luggage and a pillion the system comes into its own. What you lose in feel you gain in stability and precise handling. With brake dive close to zero, you get consistent stability from the chassis even when fully loaded and braking into bends. Useful on unfamiliar roads when you're loaded with luggage and the missus.

After two full days in the saddle, the ST gave no aches or pains even for my 6'5" and 15-stone bulk. The seat, screen, lever span and bar height are all adjustable to suit the rider. There is a lower seat option too. The manual mechanism for adjusting the screen is clunky and very un-BMW, but overall the ergonomics are truly outstanding. A 21-litre tank gives a 200-mile range.

The brakes are linked and servo-assisted. The handlebar lever operates both front and rear calipers while the foot pedal applies the rear brake only. Two fingers can haul the bike up rapidly with plenty of feel at the lever. Braided hoses are standard but ABS is £795 extra.

The ST's individual styling may not be to everyone's taste but it looks much better in the metal. There are three colours: metallic red, blue or grey, with a choice of light or dark grey for the fairing's upper section and front mudguard. BMW's heated grips are also available as a £195 option and a centrestand is £70.

In summary, the ST is a sports tourer in the purest sense. It may not be the fastest or sharpest handling in its class, but the mix of a flexible engine, capable chassis and excellent ergonomics makes the ST a good choice for riders who want a bike that is as effective loaded with a pillion as it is ridden solo on a twisty A-road.

● For more BMW news see page 6.

**'The R1200ST is a sports tourer in the purest sense'**



BMW have got the mix right in the new ST





**WHERE THE R1200ST SITS  
IN THE BMW RANGE**



**R1100S £8760**  
The sportiest boxer twin BMW make but soon to be replaced. Overshadowed in performance terms by the ST and even the GS.



**R1200ST £9060**  
Uniquely styled and slimmed down version of the RT. More on the touring side of sports touring.



**R1200GS £9275**  
Adventure tourer with genuine off-road potential. As happy commuting to work as it is crossing continents.



**R1200RT £10,710**  
Full-on tourer capable of massive distances in sublime comfort. Comes with a huge options list.

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↓  
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## FIRST TEST

BMW R1200ST

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## Technical highlights

THE ST's eight-valve boxer engine is nearly identical to the unit in the recently launched R1200RT. This engine has an increase of 10bhp over the R1200GS, achieved by a 500rpm increase of the rev limit and a modified intake manifold. The only other difference for the ST is an improvement in the gearbox, where the shift mechanism has been made shorter between the gears allowing faster and smoother gearchanges.

The chassis is also virtually identical to that of the RT, with a two-part steel tubular frame that bolts

directly on to the engine and gearbox. Larger 41mm forks increase stiffness and stability over the RT forks. Otherwise, the biggest difference is the ST's weight - all up, it's 205kg, the same as the R1100S and 23kg less than the RT. The suspension, too, is carried over from the RT and has adjustable preload and rebound damping at the rear.

The lighting is state-of-the-art, with two high-power headlights that both operate in low and high beam. The geometric design of the clear headlamp gives the bike a unmistakable face.



CLOCKWISE from top left: linked servo-assisted brakes, but ABS is a £795 option; clocks are the same as on the R1200GS; single pipe is huge and sounds good; sculptured rear light certainly stands out

## VERDICT

THE ST is more tourer than sports. The engine, chassis and suspension are all going to struggle when compared to the latest performance-orientated sports tourers like Honda's VFR800 and Triumph's blindingly good Sprint ST. But where those bikes are leaning towards performance, the BMW is more capable loaded up and doing big mileages in comfort. And as soon as you hit the twisties there is enough performance to enjoy them. The biggest issue may be the price. ABS adds another £795, making a total of £9810. A tad pricey compared to £8649 for Triumph's Sprint ST and £8499 for Honda's VFR800 - both those prices include ABS.



### MCN SAYS:

- ✓ Better than the R1150RS
- ✓ Suspension good two-up
- ✓ Adjustable riding position

- ✗ Not the sportiest tourer
- ✗ Pricey next to its rivals

## WHERE'S IT AT? SPORTS TOURERS

SPORTS tourers are all about compromise. If you're after a bike that can tussle with a sports 600 and do 500-mile days then the Triumph or Honda is the best. But if touring ability is far more important, the ST should be higher up the ratings.

- 1 Triumph Sprint ST
- 2 Honda VFR800
- 3 Ducati ST3
- 4 BMW R1200ST
- 5 Ducati ST4S
- 6 BMW R1150RS
- 7 Aprilia Futura
- 8 BMW R1200RS

### BMW R1200ST

★★★★★  
COST: £9060  
POWER (claimed): 110bhp  
WEIGHT (claimed): 205kg  
TORQUE (claimed): 85ftlb

Available: In dealers this Saturday (March 12)  
Colours: Metallic blue, red, grey  
Insurance group (est): 14 (of 17)

### TECHNICAL SPEC

Engine: Air-cooled, 1170cc, (73mm x 101mm), 8v four-stroke flat twin  
Chassis: Tubular steel spaceframe with load-bearing engine. Telelever front suspension, Paralever rear suspension (adjustable for preload and rebound), 2 x 230mm front discs, 265mm rear disc (ABS costs an extra £795)  
Tyres: 120/70 x 17 front, 180/55 x 17 rear