

The **K1200GT** is the most luxurious Superbike ever designed. It offers a long list of comfort features including heated seats and cruise control, wrapped around a 152 hp power plant.





**BY SHAHRAM SHIVA**

**BMW Motorrad** has undergone a major transformation in the past 2 years. They have placed every one of their well-handling, highly engineered bikes on a strict diet and exercise routine. They managed to shed as much as 85 lbs on some bikes and gain up to a whopping 37 horsepower on others. This total overhaul has brought about a renaissance for this time-honored brand and their efforts seem to be paying off. BMW bikes are appearing in major Hollywood movies and on prime time TV shows. The push for hipper and more powerful bikes has also been very well received by the print media. For the first time in recent memory BMWs are receiving much-coveted “Bike of the Year” awards. Their new sexier models have appeared on dozens of global two-wheel publications’ Top 10 lists and BMW’s most popular machine, the R1200GS was picked as the 2005 International Bike of the Year.

# A New Renaissance at BMW Motorrad

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BMW



This year BMW Motorrad turned 83, although they are one of the oldest manufacturers of motorcycles, they offer some of the youngest fleet of bikes anywhere. Almost all their 2005/2006 machines are completely revamped from the ground up. Their latest offerings sport new frames, engines, final drive, electronics and comfort options.

“Change or die” is the new mantra for old time automotive manufacturers. For a brand to survive the shift in demographics and market trends it would need to completely revamp its product line every 15 years or so. The alternative is too grim to think about. The automotive history is paved with the carcasses of well-known marques that failed to shift with the times.

Most major American and European automobile and motorcycle brands have had to deal with the recent shift in

**The R1200GS is BMW's most popular bike. New from the ground up for 2005, it has proven its dominance on and off-road with a 100 hp engine and a maintenance-free final shaft drive. The buyer has the option of alloy or wire rims, ABS, heated grips and unique expandable hard luggage.**

demographics. The problem is the leading edge of the baby boomers is approaching 60 and the younger buying public requires a complete new thinking in product and performance design. In the same way that in 1960s, the youth flocked to the new Mustang and the “muscle cars” to establish their own identity and avoid driving their father’s Oldsmobile, today they rather not drive their father’s BMW, Cadillac or Harley-Davidson either. The first 10 years of this century can be dubbed the “decade of the big shift” for automotive manufacturers.

In addition to BMW Motorcycles, another prime example of a successful metamorphosis in the automotive industry is the new line of Cadillac’s. Cadillac totally embraced the younger buyer with brand new styling, more powerful, better performing cars and spiked their advertising with the help of Led Zeppelin. This shift of focus to younger buyers adopted by BMW and Cadillac is being exercised across the board by most other brands. Harley-Davidson’s average rider is 57, and they have actually chosen a two-fold approach for the same dilemma. Harley released a new line of faster, water-cooled modern cruisers to appeal to the younger buyers and is now embracing the minority riders (African-Americans, Hispanics and women) to expand their falling growth rate.

Back at BMW the focus is to compete globally. It is no longer adequate that their motorcycles can outlast others; they should outperform them as well. Dominance on and off-road is the new key phrase. BMW's new K1200R, which was named Bike of the Year by a few major two-wheel publications, has the privilege of being the most powerful naked bike on the planet. With 163 HP and a top speed nearing 170 MPH (with little wind protection), it has raised the bar for the entire industry. BMW's other new 4 cylinder machine the K1200S set a world land speed record in the 1000-1350 cc stock, partially streamlined, naturally aspirated motorcycle class at Utah's famed Bonneville Salt Flats in 2005.

BMW's push for performance-driven bikes is not yet complete. Following the trend set by their automobile division, they plan to offer a smile line of "M" bikes. These new high performance bikes are tagged aptly "HP." HP line of motorcycles

**The K1200R has been voted the Bike of the Year by several two-wheel publications. Boasting a high revving inline-4 engine with 163 hp, it is the most powerful naked bike on the planet.**

will be offered along side production bikes as performance-enhanced, race-ready models. Similar to the "M" cars, they will fetch a premium price, but in return they will offer exclusivity combined with higher performance. The first of such bikes was released in 2005 as R1200GS-HP2 (2 is for 2 cylinder). The HP2 is about 80 lbs lighter, yet offers 5 more horsepower than the R1200GS it is loosely based on. It retails for about \$20,000. The price may seem steep, however this premium desert-runner is ready to go racing right out of the box. In fact it was so successful racing off-road in Europe and in Mexico's Baja 1000 that it is now scheduled to compete in 22 off-road events in 2006.

Other HP models are on the way. Although it is unclear at the time of writing this editorial if most of their models will be offered in this high-performance package, it is safe to assume that at least 3 or 4 models, such as the new R1200S will carry the HP badge in the future.

Lighter weight and more power heal most marketing pains, but BMW is not stopping there. They are also launching bikes with groundbreaking comfort features. This spring BMW offered the second generation K1200GT. The GT's list of comfort, safety and weather protection options surpasses even that of Honda's 1800 cc Gold Wing. The K1200GT which weighs only 620 lbs fueled up, is about 300 lbs lighter than the Gold Wing, yet it offers, heated seats,



heated grips, electric windshield, electronic cruise control, electronic suspension adjustment, ABS, electronic tire pressure monitoring system, Xenon lighting, GPS navigation and color-matched hard luggage, all wrapped around a 152-horsepower 4-cylinder engine. The new K1200GT is the first motorcycle to match such amenities with superbike performance numbers.

The youth market hasn't been left behind in BMW's master plan either. They've also launched a brand new lighter, less expensive, smaller sport bike geared



**Below left: The new for 2006 R1200S is the fastest two-cylinder BMW has ever designed. With the optional, selectable ABS and 122 HP at the crank, this bike can be taken straight from the showroom floor to the track.**

**The R1200GS-HP2** is BMW's latest desert-racer. Introduced late last year, it already has several off-road victories to its credit. The HP2 puts out 105 hp on a very light 385 lbs body.

directly at the Generation Y. F800 has a new parallel-twin engine (boasting about 80 HP) that sends the power to the rear wheel via belt final drive. F800 due to release by early 2007, may have a MSRP as low as \$10,000. ABS, trick luggage and heated grips are offered as options.

Although BMW motorcycles have traditionally been known for their durability, reliability, long distance comfort and safety, their successful new renaissance has placed them at the top of performance charts as well. BMW seems to have successfully recreated itself as the motorcycle brand to beat in the 21st Century. ❖



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