

# Harley Davidson Super Glide Performance Portfolio 1971 1981

## Harley-Davidson Super Glide Performance Portfolio: 1971-1981 - A Decade of Evolution

The Harley-Davidson Super Glide, introduced in 1971, marked a pivotal moment in the history of American motorcycles. This article delves into the performance portfolio of the Super Glide across its crucial decade of production (1971-1981), examining its evolution, key features, and the enduring legacy it forged. We'll explore the engine specifications, handling characteristics, and the cultural impact of this iconic machine, encompassing topics like its **early Shovelhead engine**, **chassis modifications**, and its role in shaping the **custom motorcycle scene**. This exploration will illuminate the Super Glide's journey from a relatively raw machine to a more refined and powerful motorcycle.

## The Genesis of an Icon: 1971-1976

The original 1971 Super Glide, based on the FLH Electra Glide chassis, represented a radical departure for Harley-Davidson. It stripped away the touring amenities of the Electra Glide, resulting in a leaner, meaner machine. The heart of the Super Glide was the legendary Shovelhead engine, a significant upgrade from its predecessors. This **early Shovelhead engine** initially displaced 74 cubic inches (1200cc) and offered a raw, powerful performance unlike anything else on the market. However, early models struggled with certain reliability issues, a common trait of early iterations of a new design. The handling, while improved over previous models, still felt somewhat crude by modern standards, reflecting the technology of the time.

This initial period saw incremental improvements. Harley-Davidson constantly tinkered with the carburetor settings and ignition systems, striving for better fuel efficiency and smoother performance. The chassis, while robust, remained relatively unchanged, focusing on functionality over sophisticated engineering. This era reflects the Super Glide's roots as a stripped-down, powerful motorcycle, prioritizing performance over luxurious comfort.

## Refinements and Evolution: 1977-1981

The latter half of the Super Glide's first decade witnessed significant refinements. Harley-Davidson addressed some of the initial reliability concerns and progressively improved the engine's performance. The **Shovelhead engine** benefited from ongoing development, leading to increased power and torque output. Engine capacity remained

at 74 cubic inches for most of this period, but improvements in internal components and carburetion resulted in noticeably better performance. This involved careful attention to details like improved valve trains and upgraded ignition systems.

Furthermore, subtle changes to the chassis and suspension contributed to improved handling. These modifications, while not drastic, noticeably enhanced the riding experience, making the Super Glide more stable and predictable at higher speeds. The introduction of better shock absorbers and revised geometry played a crucial role in this evolution. This period also saw the emergence of a vibrant **custom motorcycle scene**, with many owners customizing their Super Glides, further showcasing the bike's adaptability and potential for personalization.

## Handling and Performance Characteristics

The Harley-Davidson Super Glide, throughout its 1971-1981 production run, maintained a unique riding experience. While not known for its nimble handling compared to modern sportbikes, it possessed a solid, planted feel that many riders found appealing. The heavier weight contributed to stability at higher speeds but made it less agile in tight corners. This characteristic, however, added to its unique personality.

The powerful **Shovelhead engine**, while not always the smoothest, delivered considerable torque, making acceleration satisfying and low-end power impressive. The sound alone contributed to the Super Glide's iconic status. It wasn't just a motorcycle; it was a statement. The raw power, coupled with its distinctive styling

and the undeniable "Harley rumble," established the Super Glide as a legend.

## The Cultural Impact and Legacy

The Harley-Davidson Super Glide's impact transcends mere motorcycle specifications. It became a cultural icon, heavily influencing the burgeoning custom motorcycle movement. Its raw aesthetic and powerful engine inspired countless modifications and customizations. The Super Glide's image appeared in films, TV shows, and popular culture, solidifying its place as a symbol of freedom and rebellion. The versatility of the platform contributed to the machine's long-lasting appeal, with countless variations and custom builds appearing over the decades. The bike's legacy continues to this day, influencing both Harley-Davidson's designs and the broader custom motorcycle world. Its influence is evident in many current Harley-Davidson models and the ongoing popularity of custom bikes across the globe.

## Conclusion

The Harley-Davidson Super Glide's performance portfolio from 1971 to 1981 demonstrates a significant evolution. From its raw beginnings to its refined later years, the Super Glide consistently delivered a powerful and distinctive riding experience. Its influence on motorcycle culture remains undeniable, solidifying its place as a true icon in the history of motorcycling. The changes made to the **Shovelhead engine** and **chassis modifications** showcase Harley-Davidson's commitment to improvement, whilst the bike's inherent appeal ensured its enduring legacy.

## FAQ

### **Q1: What are the main differences between a 1971 Super Glide and a 1981 Super Glide?**

A1: While the basic design remained consistent, several key differences exist. The 1981 model generally benefited from improved engine reliability, smoother power delivery, and refined handling thanks to evolutionary improvements in the Shovelhead engine and chassis components. Cosmetic changes also occurred throughout the decade, reflecting evolving styling trends. The 1971 model was more raw and less refined, showcasing the early stages of the Super Glide's development.

### **Q2: How reliable were the early Shovelhead engines in the Super Glide?**

A2: The early Shovelhead engines, while powerful, were not always the most reliable. Issues such as oil leaks, points failure, and carburetor problems were relatively common. Harley-Davidson continuously improved the engine's reliability throughout the decade, resulting in a more dependable machine by 1981. Regular maintenance was, and remains, crucial for optimal performance and longevity.

### **Q3: What type of maintenance did a 1970s Super Glide require?**

A3: Regular maintenance was essential. This included frequent oil changes, points adjustments (before electronic ignition), carburetor cleaning, and general inspection of mechanical components. Compared to modern motorcycles, these bikes required more frequent attention and a deeper understanding of their mechanical workings.

**Q4: What made the Super Glide so influential on the custom motorcycle scene?**

A4: Its relatively simple design and powerful engine made it an ideal platform for customization. The combination of readily available parts and a strong, durable chassis allowed for extensive modification without compromising structural integrity. The Super Glide's rugged aesthetic perfectly complemented the custom culture's ethos of individuality and self-expression.

**Q5: Are 1971-1981 Super Glides still rideable today?**

A5: Yes, with proper maintenance and restoration, these motorcycles are still very rideable. Many enthusiasts keep these machines on the road, demonstrating their enduring durability and appeal. However, finding parts can sometimes be challenging due to their age.

**Q6: How does the Super Glide compare to other motorcycles of its era?**

A6: Compared to Japanese motorcycles of the same era, the Super Glide offered a significantly different riding experience. Japanese bikes often prioritized fuel efficiency and nimble handling. The Super Glide, in contrast, emphasized raw power, a distinctive aesthetic, and a more visceral riding sensation.

**Q7: What is the value of a well-maintained 1971-1981 Super Glide today?**

A7: The value varies greatly depending on condition, originality, and modifications. Well-maintained and original examples command significant prices in the collector's

market. However, customized or heavily modified bikes might fetch a different price, depending on the quality of the work.

**Q8: Where can I find more information on restoring a 1970s Super Glide?**

A8: Numerous online forums, enthusiast groups, and specialized motorcycle repair shops provide extensive information on restoring these motorcycles. Many books and manuals dedicated to vintage Harley-Davidsons also offer invaluable resources and guidance. Engaging with the online community of Harley-Davidson enthusiasts can be a great starting point.

## **Harley-Davidson Super Glide: A Decade of Performance (1971-1981)**

The Harley-Davidson Super Glide's story from 1971 to 1981 is a fascinating period in motorcycle evolution. This time witnessed the genesis and evolution of a legend, a machine that would permanently shape the landscape of American motorcycling. This article will explore the Super Glide's performance characteristics throughout this pivotal decade, revealing the engineering improvements and style decisions that characterized its character.

The Super Glide's beginning in 1971 marked a substantial change from Harley's previous models. Prior to its debut, the manufacturer primarily built heavier, more traditional-styled motorcycles. The Super Glide, however, embodied a move towards a sleeker profile, influenced by the increasingly popularity of custom bikes and the

growing chopper culture. Its foundation was the robust FLH Electra Glide structure, but with a stripped-down appearance. This stripped-down philosophy produced in a motorcycle that was both equally nimbler and speedier than its ancestors.

The original Super Glide boasted a strong Shovelhead V-twin engine, providing a satisfying rush of raw power. Nonetheless, its performance wasn't perfect. The relatively basic suspension system often left the rider feeling every imperfection in the road. Over the next ten years, Harley-Davidson would incrementally refine the Super Glide's performance, focusing on improving several key aspects.

The development of the bike's maneuverability was a central focus. Changes to the frame, suspension, and configuration of the front wheel all contributed to a significant betterment in ride throughout the decade. This included applying more sophisticated damping systems and tweaking the rake to balance control and agility.

The powerplant, too, suffered several changes during its duration. While the Shovelhead remained the heart of the Super Glide, mechanics continuously toiled on enhancing its power, reliability, and effectiveness. This involved modifications to fuel systems, firing systems, and engine elements.

Furthermore, the design of the Super Glide also witnessed subtle changes over the years. While the essential design remained largely consistent, small updates to fuel tanks and other aspects assisted to enhance its look and general attraction.

By 1981, the Harley-Davidson Super Glide had evolved a true symbol of American biking. Its capabilities had improved significantly since its launch in 1971, thanks

to numerous engineering developments. It had cemented its place in biking legacy, and its effect on subsequent Harley-Davidson models and the broader biking culture is irrefutable.

In summary, the Harley-Davidson Super Glide's performance history from 1971 to 1981 demonstrates a remarkable journey of evolution. From its unassuming beginnings as a comparatively simple machine, it evolved into a advanced and powerful motorcycle that defined a generation. The ongoing refinement throughout this decade highlights Harley-Davidson's resolve to advancement and its enduring impact on the biking world.

#### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):**

**Q1: What were the major performance differences between early and late Super Glides (1971-1981)?**

**A1:** Early Super Glides had less refined handling due to simpler suspension. Later models saw significant improvements in suspension, frame geometry, and engine tuning, resulting in better handling, control, and overall performance.

**Q2: How reliable were the Shovelhead engines in Super Glides during this era?**

**A2:** Shovelhead engines, while powerful, were known for requiring more maintenance than some competitors. Reliability varied depending on maintenance and riding conditions.

**Q3: What made the Super Glide so influential in motorcycle culture?**

**A3:** The Super Glide's stripped-down, custom-inspired aesthetic played a significant role in shaping the chopper culture and influenced numerous custom motorcycle builders and subsequent Harley models. Its blend of performance and style was highly appealing to riders.

**Q4: Are Super Glides from this era collectible today?**

**A4:** Yes, depending on condition and originality, Super Glides from the 1971-1981 period are highly sought-after by collectors and enthusiasts, often commanding significant prices.

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