

Bike Reviews - BMW F800 ST

By InsureMyRide

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There's no doubt about it, BMW is on a roll. Even since the thoroughly revised and subsequently top-selling R1200 GS was released at the start of 2004, the Bavarian powerhouse of innovation has been pumping out great new models one after the other – and in quick succession too.

The R1200 RT, the R1200 R, the new K-series rockets and now this – a parallel twin of all things – the F800, launched in the latter part of last year in S and ST guises. Producing an all-new machine with an all-new powerplant is going out on a limb to say the least, but with the F800s it's evident as soon as you've ridden off down the street that BMW has certainly done its homework.

As a bike journalist who's lucky enough to sample a great number of machines each year it's easy to fall into the trap of getting blasé about yet another 'latest and greatest', but I found the F800 ST to be one of those special cases – one where you start looking rather critically at you bank balance and think, 'I really wouldn't mind owning one of these...'. Obviously your choice of bike is a very personal thing, but I didn't just like riding the F800 ST, I loved it. Why? Well, let me tell you – but first let's look at what distinguishes the ST from the F800 S.

Basically, the ST is a sports tourer and the S is the sportier version of the same bike. The S has clip-ons, the ST doesn't. The ST also has a slightly taller screen, a slightly different ride position care of its 'bars, different alloy wheels, more bodywork and it weighs 5kg more – and that's about it. They both share the same alloy frame – where the engine is utilized as a stressed member – the engine itself.

Now, back to the F800 ST, and why it's got my bank account shifting its weight nervously from one foot to the other, and looking rather nervous. In a nutshell, it's simply a pure delight to ride. It's light, nimble and relatively agile. It's comfortable, with a ride position you can live with all day long. It's fun, with a punchy engine, plenty of zing and superb brakes. And it's – in my opinion – beautiful, with BMW's characteristically top-notch finish from top to bottom.

The new parallel-twin engine is a winner. At first you do need to take care not to stall it at low revs – it must have a fairly light flywheel – but once you've got your head around this it's a real hoot from go to 'whoa'. It's got a raspy, vibey feel to it, but it isn't annoying or unrefined, it just gives it some character, while the engine format itself offers heaps of useable torque around town. There's still enough go on tap though for some seriously sporty fun, and it'll happily rev out to its 8500rpm redline in most of its six gears – if you're in the upper levers of that gearbox you'll be seeing some pretty quick speeds too.

Actually, that gearbox is one of the few things that won't impress you outright. Although it's efficient, light and responsive while you're on the go, in stop start traffic it's a bit clunky, especially when you're engaging first – which is something of a BMW trait. The clutch can be clunky too – at walking pace speeds you can hear it engage and disengage as you pull or release on the lever. Neither of these points has any affect on your riding pleasure, but they are things you'll notice nevertheless.

The suspension, for what I look for in a bike, was incredible. It's actually relatively basic, being non-adjustable at the front but with preload and rebound adjustment at the back (both via easy-to-use

wheels), and together this package offers a wonderfully compliant yet responsive ride. Stiffen things up a little at the rear if a good sprinting charge is on the agenda, and you revel in just how well it soaks up the bumps and holds a line through a corner.

With a four-piston, twin-disc set-up at the front you'll find the brakes are well up to the job of stopping the F800, and there's certainly nothing to complain about here when it comes to both power and feel. The rear brake is quite strong too, which is good if you spend most of your time on a public road, rather than a racetrack.

The fuel is held down under the seat, hence the rear filler cap, and although it only has a 16lt capacity, the F800 is a frugal beast, averaging around 18 to 20km/lt – giving it a range of well over 250km.

As you'd expect, BMW has laid on a veritable smorgasbord of other options and accessories with which it can slug your bank balance, including panniers, topbox, tankbag, ABS, GPS, heated grips, trip computer, centrestand, white or LED indicators, alarm – the list goes on.

BMW has admirably developed the depth of its model range yet again with the addition of the F800. The company's obviously not afraid of thinking outside the box, and more often than not in recent year's they've hit the bull's-eye bang on, in field where the other manufacturers never even knew a target existed. With the F800 ST it's done it again, and at \$15,000 plus ORC it's an absolute winner!

BMW F800 ST

Engine: 798cc, liquid-cooled, four-stroke, DOHC, eight-valve parallel-twin

Bore and stroke: 82 x 75.6mm

Compression: 12.0:1

Fuel system: electronic fuel injection

Power: 85bhp @ 8000rpm

Torque: 86Nm @ 5800rpm

Transmission: six-speed

Frame: bridge-type aluminium frame, engine as a stressed member

Front brake: twin 320mm discs with four-piston calipers

Rear brake: single 265mm disc with single-piston caliper

Front suspension: 43mm forks, non-adjustable

Rear suspension: monoshock, adjustable for preload and rebound

Wheels: five double-spoked alloy

Tyres: Bridgestone Battlax BT020; 120/70ZR17 front, 180/55ZR17 rear

Seat height: 790mm or 820mm

Wheelbase: 1466mm

Claimed dry weight: 187kg

Fuel tank: 16lt

Price: \$15,000 plus ORC

Colours: Blue Metallic or Graphitan 2 Metallic Matt

Warranty: 24 months/unlimited kilometres

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