

REVIEW: '08 BUELL 1125R - Final Ride

REVIEW BY HEIN JONKER

Yes, what a shame it was to part with this great bike the way I did!!

For the past 25 years, Buell motorcycles have been big on distinctive design and efficient engineering. But the company's missing link, at least in terms of performance, has been their engines: the air-cooled V-Twins supplied by parent company Harley-Davidson offered nostalgia and low-end grunt, but Buell was never able to venture into ultra-high performance territory... until now. Enter the 1125R.

Boasting the first water-cooled engine in a production Buell, this new V-Twin powered motorcycle seeks to compete with the big boys on the superbike scene. How does the 1125R compare? Read on!

For his past 25 years or so in the motorcycle business, Erik Buell has prided himself on doing things a little differently. His "trilogy of tech" is a sort of manifesto for Buell's engineering goals, and incorporates three basic tenets: low unsprung weight, mass centralization, and chassis rigidity.

Though a dry sump system prevents oil from being stored in the swingarm (as with air-cooled Buells), mass centralization is utilized in the 1125R's underslung exhaust and fuel-in-frame design, which boasts over 21 litres of capacity.

Low unsprung weight is evident in the Zero Torsional Load front brakes and the rear brakes, which are mounted directly to the swingarm. Other unconventional choices for a superbike include a belt drive, which is 75% lighter than a traditional chain.

A pneumatic slipper clutch offers reduced clutch lever effort and diminished wheel hop

by requiring

less moving parts than standard spring-operated systems.

Externally, the 1125R boasts some fresh shapes without losing Buell's distinctive look. Due to the bike's dual radiators, two large, curved radiator housings were incorporated for air scooping. Though the bike's front end might recall the Buell Firebolt from certain angles, other angles emphasize the tall frame which houses fuel, one of Buell's visual trademarks. The 1125R's wide, distinctive fairing makes itself visible from afar, but the whole package starts to look less odd as you spend more time with it. In fact, after two days with this Buell, its quirky looks grew on me quite a bit. Though a certain love it or leave it aspect of the 1125R's styling remains, I wouldn't be surprised if the 1125R develops a cult following simply because it looks so different from typical sportbikes.

Friendly Ergos; Ergo, Comfort

Unlike certain severely focused Italian superbikes which will go unnamed, the Buell 1125R is ergonomically biased more towards comfort than outright performance. Footpegs are relatively low (in order to prevent lower leg scrunching), and the handlebar is in a forward position, but not so dramatically as to cause long-term discomfort. After several hundred k's of riding, I found the 1125R to strike an excellent balance between comfort and sportiness. Though the somewhat thinly padded seat becomes more forgiving when rider weight is shifted towards its rear, it never felt punishingly uncomfortable. A rear seat is hidden underneath the rear cowl, which

provides a sporty one-up look when in place.

The

1125R's fairing, whose shape looks wide, squat, and ungainly from certain angles, does an excellent job of providing protection from buffeting and excessive wind noise. An analog tachometer and digital speedometer convey information effectively, though the speedo might be positioned a bit low for some riders.



Overall, the 1125R's ergonomics are more welcoming than one would expect for a 146 horsepower motorcycle.

Riding the Black Beast on the Road...

While thoughtful ergonomics make the Buell 1125R easy enough to ride over long distances, the bike's true test comes under more demanding circumstances: high-performance riding, it is a tremendously capable motorcycle.

Though it's not small in size, the 1125R weighs only 190kg dry and Buell. Maneuver the bike at low speeds, and its light weight is immediately apparent. The bike changes direction easily, and generally feels willing to comply to rider input. It's no 750 or 600 by any stretch of the imagination, but the 1125R is relatively nimble for its displacement and overall size.

At higher speeds, the 1125R feels as though it needs a tiny bit of a tug at the handlebars in order to instigate a turn; this isn't so much a handling issue as much as it is a symptom of the bike's good directional stability. After initial turn-in, the 1125R stays committed to turns and feels utterly stable under the steepest of lean angles.

The bike's 8-piston brakes work well and offer plenty of stopping power, though sportbike purists might miss the feel of traditional radially mounted calipers.



Past Buells have earned a reputation for serious engine vibration, and the 1125R sticks to that tradition between the mid-range and the 10,500 redline: the vibes first become evident in the handlebars at around 5,000 rpm, and travel down to the footpegs at around 8,000 rpm. Though high revs can be easily avoided during street riding, the track demands usage of the entire powerband, which can make for a ticklish ride at best. The roar of the V-Twin also becomes more pronounced during aggressive riding, which is consistent with the 1125R's hardcore edge.

The pneumatically operated slipper clutch worked wonderfully on the track, absorbing the shock of sudden downshifts with ease. Brakes were strong, and always felt up the task of slowing the bike down for dramatic twisties.

Buell's 1125R is Ready for the World; Is the World Ready for it? The superbike market is saturated with Japanese and, thanks to Ducati's 1098, Italian contenders that offer some extremely competent motorcycles. Buell has taken a big risk by stepping outside of its comfort zone and creating a high-performance, water-cooled bike, and its efforts to build a world-class bike are largely successful.

It might lack the polish and finely-tuned characteristics of some of the standard-setting bikes that have benefited from decades of evolution, but for a first effort, Buell's 1125R is a notable achievement from the American manufacturer that has long been satisfied to be a big fish in the relatively small pond consisting of boutique, air-cooled motorcycles.

At R115 000.00, the 1125R is priced attractively enough for buyers who might choose it over more tried and true sport bikes. Whether or not they bite will depend on whether they're willing to stick out from the crowd.

I'm betting they will.

PRICE - R115 000.00 Incl. 14% VAT

**Gateway - Tel: (031) 566 3204
1000 Hills - Tel: (031) 767 5350**

