

REVIEW: '09 BMW F800GS

REVIEW BY HEIN JONKER

BMW is continuing its assault on every market segment with a bike that is beautifully behaved on-road, and very effective off-road given the proper tyres. The F800GS is so seductive that you find yourself wondering if it isn't the ideal size for an urban bike as well as for virtually every type of touring, especially solo.

The GS concept (Gelande Strasse) - bet you didn't know that or Off-Road/On-Road features longer travel suspension and a spring/shock combo that gobbles up bumps and ruts with the greatest of ease.

The vertical Twin in the F800GS delivers 85 ponies and produces readily available torque right off the 2,000 rpm mark. Smaller and lighter than the R-Series older brothers, it uses a balancing connecting rod on a third crankshaft pin to reduce the vibrations produced by the two pistons moving in unison. Combustion occurs at each revolution, producing a smooth, turbine-like effect.

Thanks to the six well chosen gear ratios, a light clutch and the absence of heavy masses high on the frame, the bike is significantly easier to ride and change direction than the heavier R1200GS. The electronic injection and ignition systems seem flawless, delivering immediate throttle response whatever the rpm.

The F800GS clearly loves uneven roads, with which we are all too familiar with in our part of the world. You can hear the tyres working hard to gobble up holes and bumps, while you sit undisturbed and the bike never seems to be jumping around unduly. The ABS brakes work well on normal road surface, as you would expect, but also on more slippery surfaces, ensuring your safety on wet or dirty roads. And if you decide to hop off the road for some playtime in the dirt, the system can be deactivated in order to allow you to use the appropriate braking and sliding techniques.

The driving position is rather straight up, allowing your hands to fall effortlessly on the grips, and the levers and controls are easy to use. Let's talk about the seat, well proportioned but a bit stiff for my taste. I even wonder if you can actually get used to it. The rather small wind deflector blocks the storm up to shoulder height, leaving your head to deal with headwind and turbulence, which is what some riders prefer. For wimpier riders, a larger windshield is available at no extra cost, as well as the hand guards missing from the bike we tested.

Its torque, agility, comfort and easy-to-use controls make it an ideal bike for those who learned the basics on a 125 or similar bike and want to upgrade to a large machine. The 85 ponies won't scare anyone, and the brakes and suspension know how to win your trust. For the older, oops, more experienced among us, the F800GS delivers enough performance for 99% of our solo activities, and it also easily accommodates a passenger. On the road, the 800GS can quickly accelerate to illegal speeds. Throttle response is instantaneous, and passing a car is done effortlessly and more often than not without having to downshift.

Comments on the looks of the bike have always been positive: it's simple and well proportioned, and without the somewhat spidery look associated with its older, well known and well loved sibling, the R1200GS. The F800GS hits the bulls-eye with enthusiasts looking for generous performance, easy comfort and a motorized toy at home in town, on the road and off. And if the devil pushes you towards sportier activities, it won't embarrass you!

Now all this come at a price, but it won't take you long before you realise that you are at the top of the world when it comes to sheer riding pleasure when the adventure takes you places you've only dreamt of; the choice is yours!

PRICE: Basic @ R101 000.00 or with ABS and Heated Grips @ R106 000.00 - Incl. 14% VAT



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Heritage Market (underneath the Keg Restaurant)
Old Main Road, Hillcrest