

REVIEW: '09 BMW F800S

REVIEW BY HEIN JONKER

What's this? A BMW twin that isn't a boxer - has the world gone mad? Apparently not, though not so many years ago it was unthinkable that the German company would dare seriously contemplate placing a parallel twin in the showroom - no matter how good - and seriously expect them to buy it.

But times and attitudes have changed, or at least that's what the company is gambling on. It's been working hard over recent years to broaden its traditional sports touring market footprint, and part of that quest has been the development of the F800 twin series, which promises to be light, punchy and, perhaps most importantly, affordable.

Meet the "Twins" ...



The F 800 ST (as in 'Sports Touring') has outstripped sales of the F 800 S (as in 'Sports') by some margin, which really isn't that surprising – the ST is still a remarkably sporty bike, while a few other changes give it the broader appeal we've come to associate with sport-tourers.

The all-new parallel-twin, which BMW claims is good for 62.5kW (at 8000rpm) and 86Nm (at 5800rpm). It's BMW's first parallel-twin, and it is immediately obvious after taking an F 800 for a spin that the company has done its homework. Matched with a 182kg claimed dry weight, there's ample go here to plaster a smile to your dial. It's not intimidating, there is just plenty of useable 'oomph' over a broad spread of revs, in an engine that's equally happy to sprint along or get through revs all the way to its 8500rpm redline. BMW has pulled a rabbit out of its hat here – the F 800 S is manageable enough for relative newcomers or those returning to biking after a break, yet entertaining enough to also keep seasoned veterans coming back for more.

I just love the way the F 800 S carves up a winding road. It's relatively light and nimble, and while it's no razor-sharp super-sport machine, its lively and involving ride had me howling with delight. Those front twin-discs, four-piston stoppers offer ample power and feel, and the rear is quite powerful too – more than enough to keep you happy on the road or at a track day.

I found the ride position suited me perfectly. At 190cm I'm on the taller side, but the 820mm seat height still gave me decent legroom and the 'bars were an easy stretch away. For those on the shorter side, a lower 790mm seat is also available. The instrumentation is smart and the overall level of finish is of BMW's typically high standard. Given its cheap (for a BMW road bike) price tag, it's really difficult to see where any compromise has been made. Downsides? Nothing major. The gearbox is on the clunky side, but to be honest this doesn't affect its efficient operation, although you'll notice it at low speeds, like when filtering through traffic. But these aren't actually issues, more characteristics.

The F 800 S and F 800 ST both share the same chassis, suspension and engine, but there are a number of differences between the two which give the 'S' a sportier outlook on life. The 'ST' has a taller screen, making it better for long distance work, plus more bodywork. The S also has clip-on 'bars, which give it a slightly more aggressive ride position. Finally the pair sport different alloy wheels, and the ST weighs in at about 5kg heavier than its sportier stable-mate.

In the F 800 S, BMW has produced a consummate all-rounder. It'll rip through city traffic; it'll sweep up a winding road; it'll take you on a transcontinental epic – and you'll be grinning non-stop.

PRICE:

Basic: R88 500.00 - Incl. 14% VAT

ABS & Heated Grips: R94 925.00 - Incl. 14% VAT



Ryder Motorrad

Tel: (031) 765 8877

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