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1959 Sportster

Model Production Numbers

- XL 42
- XLH 947
- XLCH 1059
- XLR 5
- XLRTT 13

Colors ¹⁾

- Skyline Blue - tank top Blue, sides Birch White.
- Calypso Red - tank top Red, sides Birch White.
- Black - tank top Black, sides Birch White.
- Options (no charge):
 - Any standard solid color.
- Options (extra charge)
 - Hi-Fi Turquoise - Tank top Turquoise, sides Birch White.
 - Hi-Fi Red - Tank top Hi-Fi Red, sides Birch White.
 - Spring Special: Hi-Fi Coral and White.

Vehicle Identification

Frame Numbers

There was no frame identification for purpose of ownership on 1957-1969 model Sportsters. However, there were stampings on the different parts of the frame combined with certain features that can be used to date the frame.

[Click Here](#) to view Ironhead Frame Identification in the Sportsterpedia.

Engine Serial Numbers

The only numbers for the purpose of identification were on the engine case.

- For 1957-1961 models, the engine serial number is stamped on the left side of the engine case between the two cylinders.
First 4 or 5 digits are the year and bike model followed by a series of 4 or 5 numbers that established the individual serial number for each bike.

[Click Here](#) for more specific information on serial numbers and VINs in the Sportsterpedia.

Engine Serial Number for 1959 Sportsters		
Model Year (first 2 digits)	Model (next few digits) (up to 4)	Sequential Serial# (remaining digits)
59	XL XLH XLCH	(example) 12345
Example: (59XLH 12345) indicates a 1959 XLH model and is stamped on the Left Engine Case Between the Cylinders ²⁾		
Example Serial Number on Engine Reads: 59XLH12345		
59	XLH	12345

Related Manuals and Documentation

Below are some suggestions for manuals for your ride.

You should have, at minimum, a Factory Service Manual (FSM) and a Factory Parts Catalog for your year model.

Factory Service Manuals (FSM);

The FSM will have the most accurate information, procedures and specs.

Clymer and Haynes make service manuals also for Sportsters but some of the information is in error to the factory FSMs.

And some of the information in the aftermarket manuals is vague in information or procedures but they may have more pictures.

So it is generally said you can get use from both an aftermarket manual and the factory service manuals but get the factory manual first.

[Click Here](#) to view the Factory Service Manual page in the Sportsterpedia.

Parts Catalogs;

The Parts Catalog has part numbers of course but it also has exploded parts views.

However, IT IS NOT INTENDED TO BE AN ASSEMBLY MANUAL.

And some of the exploded views are confusing or not related to each other on the same pages.

But, all in all, the exploded views do help finding what goes where.

Most of the fasteners listed in the relevant parts catalog individual pages have thread sizes and lengths also in case you need those.

Note: ALL 1957-1978 PARTS CATALOGS LIST PARTS FOR PREVIOUS YEARS.

Below is a simple list of original and "latest edition parts catalogs. The in-between year books may show different part numbers for the same year model bike.

[Click Here](#) to see the Factory Parts Catalog page in the Sportsterpedia for parts catalog uses and a full list of parts catalog numbers from 1957 to present.

(complete list of other parts catalogs and supplement catalogs that pertain to each year model on the bottom of that page)

Some often acquire several year model parts catalogs and that page will help you decide which ones are right for you.

Suggested Manuals:

- **Factory Service Manual (FSM):**
 - **Original:** 1959 Sportster Service Manual (99484-59) in a loose leaf binder
 - **Latest Edition:** 1959-1969 Sportster Service Manual (99484-69) in book bound form
- **Factory Parts Catalogs:**
 - **Original:** 1952-1959 Spare Parts Catalog for all Sportster and K Models (99451-59)
 - Issued September 1, 1958.
 - Full parts catalog and lists parts available in 1959 for 1952-1959 models.
 - Lists closest to original parts available for 1959 models.
 - [Click Here](#) to download a PDF from Harley K Model site (19.5mb)³⁾
 - **Latest Edition:** 1954-1978 Sportster XLH/XLCH-1000 Parts Catalog (99451-78B)
 - Issued in 1989.
 - Full catalog and lists parts available in 1989 for 1954-1978 models.
 - Includes some parts that were not available in the -78A catalog.
- **Factory Owners Manual:**
 - 1959 Sportster Rider Handbook (99466-59)

Pics of Manual Covers.

Below are pics of used manual covers (original and latest editions) related to 1959 model Sportsters. See the full list of pertinent catalogs in the link above. Click on any pic below to enlarge:

1959 FSM (99484-59) ⁴⁾ loose leaf inside and outside covers (original)		1959-1969 FSM (99484-69) book bound cover (latest)
		
1952-1959 Parts Catalog (99451-59)	1954-1978 Parts Catalog (99451-78B)	



The Ironhead Multi-Year Parts Catalog Curse

Below is a summary of an article on the Sportsterpedia Parts Catalogs page regarding parts book errors. You can also read the full article from this link: [The Ironhead Multi-Year Parts Catalog Curse](#).

Due to all of the errors and non corrected editions, it's always a good idea to acquire several year parts catalogs surrounding your year model.

Which year catalogs you'll need will depend on many factors but the main Parts Catalog page in the Sportsterpedia will help you decide which ones you need.

[Click Here](#) to see the Parts Catalog page. A full chart of all the parts catalogs made for Ironheads is at the bottom of the page.

- Not all multi-year catalogs will list factory installed parts on your bike.
- You may need several year catalogs to determine factory installed parts for your year model.
- Some parts first appeared or only appeared in Parts Supplements, Service Bulletins or other literature
- Later catalogs may show parts for older models that were never factory installed on them.
- Some catalogs have missing parts and/or missing models in some parts listings.
- Some illustrations do not have a part number listed.
- Drawings may or may not look like your part number.
- Some exploded parts diagrams show the assembly in the wrong order or missing pieces.
- There may be misleading information about parts that fit your year model.
- Fastener lengths and thread pitch may change depending on catalog used.
- The MoCo knew about and tried to correct at least some of the parts catalog mistakes.

Search the Sportsterpedia

See the Navigation menu on the upper left of this page.

From there you can go to the main Ironhead section menu, the Reference section for general and in-depth procedures, and the Misc Resources for documentation.

Specifications

[Click Here](#) for the main technical menu in the Sportsterpedia.

Also see the "Misc Resources" section on the bottom of that page for technical docs and information.

Model Designations

- XL, XLH, XLCH

Dimensions

- Weight: 495 lb / 225 kg ⁸⁾
- Wheelbase: ⁹⁾
 - XL/XLH, 56.5 in / 143.51 cm
 - XLCH, 57 in / 144.78 cm
- Overall Length:
 - XL/XLH, 87 in / 220.98 cm
 - XLCH, 83.25 in / 211.45 cm
- Overall Width:
 - XL/XLH 34 in / 86.36 cm
 - XLCH, 29.5 in / 74.93 cm
- Overall Height:
 - XL/XLH, 40-1/2 in / 103 cm
 - XLCH, 42 in / 106.7 cm
- Saddle Height:
 - XL/XLH, 26-7/8 in to 29 in / 68.26 cm to 73.66 cm
 - XLCH, 30-1/2 in / 77.47.2 cm
- Road Clearance:
 - XL/XLH, 2-1/2 in to 4-5/8 in / 6.35 cm to 11.74 cm
 - XLCH, 4-1/8 in to 6-1/2 in / 10.47 cm to 16.51 cm

Engine

- Engine type: 4 cycle Overhead Valves, 45 degree V2 ¹⁰⁾
- Hemi-spherical style heads
- Displacement: 53.9 ci / 883 cc (900 cc advertised)
- Compression Ratio:
 - XL 7.5:1
 - XLH, XLCH 9:1
- Bore: 3 in / 76.2 mm
- Stroke: 3.8125 in / 96.8 mm
- Horsepower:
 - XL 42 @ 5,500 rpm

- XLH, XLCH 55 @ 6,300rpm ¹¹⁾
- Taxable Horsepower: 7.2
- Torque:
 - XL 48 ft/lb @ 3.600 RPM
 - XLH, XLCH 52 ft-lb @ 3800 RPM
- Weight:
 - XLCH - 188lbs.
 - XL, XLH - 204 lbs.
- 4 Cams
- **Gear driven type oil pump.**
Oil pump pressure (gauge mounted in place of oil pressure switch):
 - Idle, with spark retarded (Min: 3-7 psi)
 - Normal riding conditions: 10-14 psi (6 psi at 20 mph)
- **XL, XLH Ignition:** Battery Ignition System (circuit breaker/points/timer/distributor)
 - Point Gap: .020"
- **XLCH Ignition:** Magneto Ignition System
 - Point Gap: .015"
- Dwell: 90° at 1000 RPM
- Ignition Timing
 - Advanced - XL, XLH, XLCH: 45° (11/16") BTDC
 - Retarded - XL, XLH: 15° (5/64") BTDC
- Spark Plugs
 - #4 for everyday use.
 - #5 for hard service.
 - Gap
 - XL / XLH: .025"- .030"
 - XLCH: .020"
- **Fuel System:** Linkert DC carburetor.
- Starter (all): Kick start only

Capacities

- Fuel Capacity: ¹²⁾
 - XL, XLH 4.1 gal / 15.52 l ¹³⁾
 - XLCH 2.25 gal / 8.51 l
- Oil Capacity: 3 qts. / 2.83 l
- Transmission Capacity: 1.5 pints / .71 l

Clutch

- Multi-Disc dry clutch-pack with alternate steel and fiber friction plates. ¹⁴⁾

Drivetrain

- Constant Mesh - right side foot shift ¹⁵⁾

- Speeds - 4 Forward
- Number of Sprocket Teeth
 - XL/XLH:
 - Engine: 34
 - Clutch: 59
 - Transmission: 21
 - Rear Wheel: 51
 - XLCH:
 - Engine: 34
 - Clutch: 59
 - Transmission: 20
 - Rear Wheel: 51
- Standard Gear Ratios (XL,XLH)
 - 1st: 10.63 to 1
 - 2nd: 7.69 to 1
 - 3rd: 5.82 to 1
 - 4th: 4.21 to 1
- Standard Gear Ratios (XLCH)
 - 1st: 11.16:1
 - 2nd: 8.08:1
 - 3rd: 6.11:1
 - 4th: 4.42:1

Tires

Tire pressure (based on a rider weighing app. 150 lbs or more).

For each 50 lbs of overload, increase rear tire pressure by 2 lbs, front by 1 lb ¹⁶⁾ but not exceeding manuf max tire pressure.

- XL / XLH:
 - Front: 3.50 x 18 (tire pressure: 14 psi / .96 bar)
 - Rear: 3.50 x 18 (tire pressure: 18 psi / 1.24 bar)
- XLCH:
 - Front: 3.25 / 3.50 x 19 (tire Pressure: 14 psi / .96 bar)
 - Rear: 4.0 x 18 (tire pressure: 18 psi / 1.24 bar)

Models

XL 883

- \$1,175 when new with only 42 ever produced. ¹⁷⁾

XLH 883

- \$1,200 when new with 947 produced ¹⁸⁾

XLCH 883

- \$1,285 when new with 1059 produced ¹⁹⁾
- New Features ²⁰⁾
 - New dual exhaust with twin mufflers.
 - Nacelle 5 ¾ in headlamp with eyebrow on
 - Trip-o-meter

XLR

XLRTT

Back to [Sportster History Index](#)

1)

<https://www.harleykmodel.com/technical/colors/index.html>

2)

1953-1963 HD Parts Catalog backside of front cover

3)

<https://www.harleykmodel.com/literature/spare-parts-catalogs/documents/99451-59/99451-59.pdf>

4)

pics from a collection by The French Owl of the XLFORUM

5)

illustrations from various academic journals

6)

Dr Dick of the XLFORUM

<https://www.xlforum.net/forum/sportster-motorcycle-forum/sportster-motorcycle-era-specific-and-model-specific/ironhead-sportster-motorcycle-talk-1957-1985/148782-animal-mother-reigns/page4?postcount=58#post3178758>

7)

illustration from a collection by The French Owl of the XLFORUM

8)

<http://www.motorcycleclassics.com/classic-american-motorcycles/1957-harley-davidson-sportster.aspx>

9) , 10) , 11)

Harley-Davidson 1957 - 1969 Service Manual

12)

Harley-Davidson 1957 - 1969 Sportster Service Manual

13)

HD 1960 Sportster Service Manual

14)

1957-1969 HD FSM pg 4A-3

15)

1957-1969 HD FSM pg 1A-3

16)

1959-1964 HD FSM pg 1A-3

17) 18) 19) 20)

<https://www.xlforum.net/forum/sportster-motorcycle-forum/sportster-motorcycle-general-discussion-and-problems/19467-sportster-timeline?t=32308>

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