

# Minnesota Motorcycle Monthly

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## Excelsior-Henderson Super X



by Victor Wanchena

Where to begin? Never in my memory has there been a bike whose birth has been so anticipated or so written and talked about. I refer of course to the Super-X of Excelsior-Henderson. So after all the speculation and wondering I finally got what I've been wanting, a chance to ride a Super X and frankly I'm a bit at a loss for words.



The Big Bad X-Twin.

Here we stand as consumers on the brink of the new millennium with an interesting problem. For the past forty years if you wanted a new street bike of American origin you had but one choice. Now in the space of only a few years we have three major motorcycle manufacturers in the U.S. and they're all based in the midwest. Among this new big three of American motorcycles, Dave, Dan, and Jennie Hanlon, who founded the new Excelsior-Henderson, are also the first people to successfully resurrect an American brand.

It was a warm sunny day and I had just received a guided tour of the E-H factory from Brad, their media relations guru. As we walked out the front doors of the plant there stood two shiny new Super-Xs just begging to be ridden. One was stone stock the other one was equipped with a set of minimally baffled (read straight pipes)

exhaust pipes. I walked towards the stocker. From a distance the Super-X doesn't appear all that big, but as you move closer you realize that looks are deceiving. The bulky muscular lines of the front end make the bike seem shorter than seven and a half feet. As you swing a leg over the true size of the bike becomes more apparent. This is a 650 pound bike before you add fuel or oil. That may be intimidating for smaller riders but the fact is that except when pushing the bike around in a parking lot its weight never is an issue.

One of Excelsior-Henderson's goals on the Super-X is to blend new technologies with the heritage of the brand. This is evidenced in the ignition key which is a strange looking thing. Instead of ridges cut on the key's edge there are dimples in side of the key. According to the factory guys this setup is almost impossible for thieves to pick, but the downside is having to order spare keys through the factory. After wasting several minutes of good riding time discussing keys I finally threw the ignition switch on.



The paint looks miles deep and so does the seat.

The electric fuel pump whirred to life and with a quick jab of the start switch the Super-X rumbled to life. The port fuel injection brought the motor to a high idle and within several seconds it settled into a gentle lope. The factory likes to call the motor an X-Twin, but don't let the name fool you, it's a 50 degree v-twin. displacing 1386cc.



Serial #326 waiting for another rider.

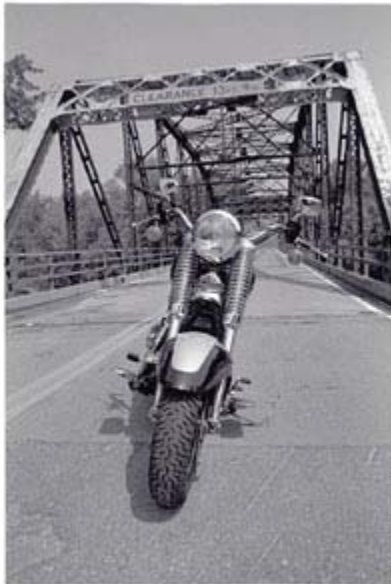
The blend of old and new is present in the motor as well. There are four valves per cylinder and dual overhead cams run by an odd mixture of chains and gears. It's air-cooled and the valves have hydraulic tappets which means no need for adjustments. Otherwise there's nothing goofy or unproven in the Super-X's motor. I wasn't able to sneak one off to an independent dyno, but deep cover moles within Excelsior-Henderson say it puts out a respectable mid-sixties for horsepower.

I pulled in the clutch and dropped the bike into gear. Despite warnings that the hydraulic clutch might feel odd, the bike pulled cleanly and easily from a stop. As I swung onto the highway I wound the throttle to it's stop. The Super-X surged ahead nicely with me stomping the heel-toe shifter as I rowed through the gears. Within just a few seconds I found that I was going well in excess of the posted speed limit, in fact I was riding fast enough to get thrown directly in jail if I were caught. The thought of getting the demo bike Excelsior was kind enough to give me impounded helped me slow down. No need to say more, the Super-X is fast enough for anything but a race track. Back in the land of legal speeds The



X just loped along gently with only a small amount of low vibration sneaking up to the rider. This is helped by the cassette style five-speed transmission which has nicely spaced ratios and features a fifth gear which is really an overdrive. That drops the engine speed to below three grand at highway speeds.

As I rolled along the country back roads I kept staring at a fisheye reflection of myself in the huge chrome headlight case. Mounted high enough to act as both a mirror and a small windshield, I was captivated by the flawless chrome. The overall fit and finish on the Super-X is very high. Excelsior has spent big money on the latest in paint technology and takes quality control very seriously. The ergonomics of the bike are not exactly to my liking, the bars are high and wide with a seat that locks you into one position, but that's personal preference. I think that many will find the X a very comfortable ride.



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That beefy front end means a stable ride.

The very unconventional front suspension is the Super-X's most distinct feature reminiscent of the Excelsiors of the '20s. Despite the age of the basic design, it has been updated to modern specs and performs quite well. The leading link style of springer forks has an added benefit besides style. They have a natural anti-dive characteristic. So even under the hardest braking they simply squat about an inch and then continue to soak up all bumps. So love or leave them, they do their job. The ride quality is rather nice with the bulk of the Super-X giving it a very stable planted feeling. The frame is very rigid with little sign of flex and this translates to a machine that's stable in corners.

But corners are where my biggest complaint about the Super-X lies. There is very little ground clearance. In even modest corners the kick stand would touch down on the left and the floorboard hits on the right. On such a pretty bike I hated to be grinding chrome off, but that's the price of building the X so low. This is still annoying, since with a reasonable amount of cornering clearance the X could be one of the better handling cruisers. The factory guys did say that several components have been repositioned on the current bikes to address this issue. My other gripe is that the floorboards vibrate horribly at high revs. Granted this bike is meant for cruising not drag racing, but the vibes are bad enough to move your feet off the boards when approaching the engine's redline.



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Ride low, sweet chariot.

The rest of the components on the Super-X are well built and perform well. The

brakes are strong and linear for the most part and the switch gear is standard off-the-shelf components. The stock exhaust on the X will most likely be too tame for most members of the cruiser set and will be dropped in favor of pipes with a little more rumble. I'm sure the aftermarket and customizers will have a field day with the Super-X.

This said, owners of America's newest cruiser will be pleased by the X. It run and rides very well and has it's own character. But if you've come in search of the height of performance and seamless comfort look elsewhere. The Super-X is still a little raw and unrefined and that's what the folks at Excelsior-Henderson feel buyers want.



With their biggest hurdle behind them Excelsior-Henderson now can be proud of the machine they've presented to the

motorcyclists of this country. It's solidly built and well engineered. It has it's flaws, but they are curable. The Super-X is a premium quality cruiser. Is it worth the 18 grand price tag? I'll let the buying public make that decision.

**M.M.M.**

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