

BUYING

It's not the quickest bike in the world, but you'll be surprised how fast you can ride it

So easy to ride one quickly

Pillions love it as well

Bike chooser



250-mile
tank
range

That motor
goes on
forever

1999-05

BMW R1150GS

Big, stable, steady and composed enough to humble flightier bikes. But surely life's not all beer and skittles with an 1150GS

Words **Tim Skilton** Pictures **RiDE archive**

There are few bikes with a bigger following than BMW's R1150GS.

Owners absolutely love them. Just take a look behind the bike's ungainly façade and it's easy to see why. Robust, rugged and perfect in almost any situation. The GS will forever be a motorcycling legend.

Its roots go back to the original R80GS, created in 1980, inventing a niche of its own. Plenty have tried to emulate the GS since but none have captured its mysterious lure.

So what is it that makes them so popular? The GS is a big, comfortable road bike with attitude. It's useable, reasonably quick and exudes the same sort of 'don't mess with me' aura as a bullbar-clad Land Rover. Ride a GS and everyone will think you're heading out on a multi-thousand-mile mission. Even if you're just popping to the shop for teabags.

Ask any owner what they think and you'll usually be bombarded with praise, even if their bike's been far from perfect. Then take a shufti at the resale values. It's one of the least depreciating bikes of all-time, whether it's covered two or twenty thousand miles.

In 2004, actors Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman cemented the GS' hardy reputation by riding a pair of GS Adventures on their trans-global trip.

The GS is reputed to be as hard wearing as a ship's anchor, but in reality the build quality is dubious, particularly the painted parts, as shown by our readers' comments.

Production of the 1150 ran from July 1999 to the end of 2003, with the Adventure model surviving through 2004 and 05. It replaced the already popular R1100GS. A new front fairing, dashboard and lighter Telelever suspension sat up front. An 1130cc engine used cylinders from the R1200C cruiser while heads, cams and crankshaft came from the R1100S. A six-speed gearbox gave easier cruising with fewer revs and a redesigned rear subframe sat next to a shorter paralever swingarm.

The 1150 was sturdier, more powerful but also weighed a whopping 10kg more than its predecessor. The weight makes it the least trail-oriented of the GS family, but the power and stability make it hell of a good road bike.

It's never mentioned in the 'what's the most beautiful bike ever?' debate. Better than most BMWs, though



BUYING



Braver riders hit the trails on an 1150, but most stick to the roads

standard lights are rubbish!

check lock stops for damage

Final drive

The critical area on any Boxer is the drivetrain. Almost anything else should be reasonably cheap and easy to fix, but a broken final drive can get very expensive.

To check it's OK, put the bike on the centrestand and grasp the rear wheel. Rotate it back and forth, listening carefully all along the drive train. Using a piece of wooden dowel, as you would a stethoscope, helps as a listening aid. Knocking or grinding noises mean there's a problem, so if

in doubt get a professional to inspect the bike before buying.

A clunk in the rear bevel drive means either the crown wheel and pinion or the rear wheel drive splines are damaged. Rectifying either problem can cost around £300-£400 and it's a specialist job. Alternatively, you can find a good used replacement for £100-150 and fit it yourself. Serious clunks in the gearbox (more than the normal slack between gears) will require a rebuild or replacement box, usually costing around £400.

Engine

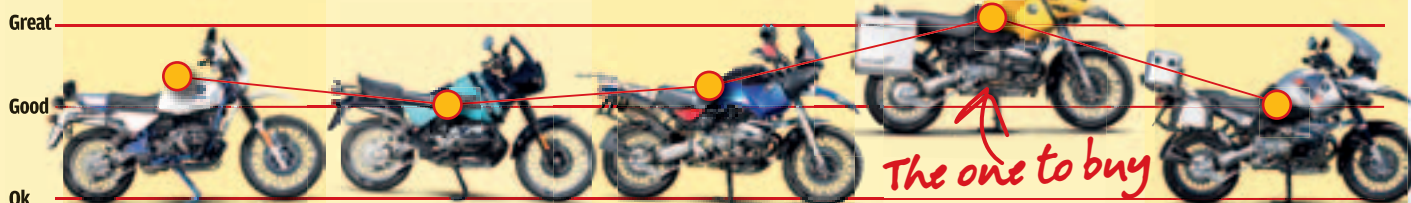
A well-maintained Boxer engine will easily do 100,000 miles before it needs significant work. We've had reports of bikes covering 300,000 miles with no serious engine work needed. A poorly maintained bike will need attention much sooner.

There should be a noticeable tappet noise. This is normal. There will also be a light ticking from the barrels. This is normal, too. Some bikes have a louder noise than others. A heavy knocking from the barrels is serious

as either the pistons are loose or the big-end bearings are knackered.

If the bike's left on the sidestand for any length of time, oil drains down into the left combustion chamber, which results in a billowing cloud of smoke when you next fire it up. This smoke is never terminal, it's the engine burning the oil out as it warms, and it should clear in a minute or two. Check for smoke again after a test ride. If it continues to smoke, or smokes from both sides, the rings, bores or valve guides are worn. The

! THE HISTORY OF THE GS



1980 R80G/S

It's 800cc, reasonably light and extremely competent. The R80GS was used on many transglobal expeditions and created a new class of machine.

1988 R100GS

A bigger engine, larger petrol tank and oil cooler took the GS theme to the next stage. Many still prefer the R80 though as it's more nimble.

1994 R1100GS

A revised engine producing another 20bhp, Telelever front suspension and Captain Beaky mudguard heralded the launch of the R1100GS.

1999 R1150GS

Extra power (now 85bhp) and more weight (219kg) took the GS to new heights. It proved a better road bike but was more difficult on loose terrain.

2001 R1150GS Adventure

Longer-travel suspension, bigger fuel tank and huge panniers. It also weighed over 250kg dry. Heave!



Pull the wheel back and problems might be revealed with oil leaking from the rubber cover

GS has Nickasil-coated bores so they can't be rebored. New barrels and pistons are the only answer.

Oil

The flat twin motor commonly consumes 500ml per 1000 miles when new. Unusually, they get better with age. Steer clear of fully-synth oil, which is better for high-revving fours.

Electrics

Check the battery as they're expensive to replace. Gel ones are less likely to leak and pump out the same power. Budget to spend about £100.

A common problem area is the electro-mechanical charging regulator. If the charging light stays on, it's likely to be this. A replacement solid-state device is £25.

ABS brakes

ABS was an optional extra. Make sure it works as failure is common and it's £1200 to replace. If the warning light illuminates, turn the bike off and on again and it should reset. The battery also needs to be well charged for the ABS to operate.

Corrosion

Owners say corrosion is common unless it's cleaned regularly. Paint is

thin and metal parts look tatty in no time. Suspension and engine paint are criticised too.

Exhaust

Akrapovic and Remus are popular replacements. They cost £600-800 for a conversion. Expect 8-10bhp extra. Both systems do away with the catalytic converter. A Remus Y-piece ditches the cat, giving a throatier sound and small power increase. This can cause a popping on the overrun.

Discs

They're prone to warping. PFM high performance discs (expensive at £400 a pair) improve stopping power dramatically and last longer.

Headlights

They're crap so many owners uprate the bulbs or fit high intensity discharge lamps (around £300).

Crash bars

Cylinder head covers suffer indrops. Bars from Touratech, Hepco & Becker or SW Motech are around £200.

Seat

The GS perch is overly hard. Sargent and Corbin seats or Airhawk pads are popular upgrades.



Many GS owners use crash bars to protect the cylinder head from damage in drops

Meet the owners...

I bought one

Oliver Newby-Robinson, R1150GS

Adventure

Mileage: 100,000

Good points: The

engines are good

for 200,000 miles

and more if looked

after. I should know having

done 236,000 on a R1100RS. Get a dealer

bike with a AUB (approved used BMW

warranty) and it will be fixed quickly and

without fuss. Owners tend to be a little more

mature so there's less chance it's been

thrashed. No matter what I do to it, the GS

still comes back for more. I've crashed it on

and off road and it's as solid as a rock. It's the

Humvee of the biking world. All-day comfy

with enough poke to keep me amused.

The Adventure tank is wonderful; 350miles-

plus I've also got the alloy wheels from a

R1150RT, which gives me a huge tyre choice

over the standard spoked rims. It's running

BT020s at present. I've tried D207s, Conti

Road Attacks and MEZ4 and Z6 and I've

always gone back to the 020s as they offer

the best mix of grip (enough to get the rocker

covers down) durability (around 10,000

miles) and wet weather grip."

Bad points: "The gearbox seals have gone

more times than I can count. It's a bad design

fault but there isn't anything I can do about it

so I just replace them when they go."

I bought one

Mark McArthur-Christie, 47

R1150GS

Year: 2000

Mileage: 50,000

Good points:

"So many.

Comfortable for

mega-mileage

days (once you've

replaced the crappy stock

seat) and it'll sit at 90 all day long. It has a

250-mile tank range too. It handles well,

although it won't embarrass any sportsbike

riders with me on board. It's as simple to

work on as my old Series II Land Rover and a

home mechanic's joy. It's got real road

presence and is incredibly practical too (I

don't own a car because I don't need to with

the GS). Heated grips make a real difference

in the winter, and the screen and cylinders

keep the rest of you warm. The owners club

is fantastic (www.ukgser.net). I don't think

I've ever known such a friendly group of

people. I've fitted panniers by Caja Sahel.

Bloody great ally things. I'd recommend

engine bars as if you drop it, it's going to

cost. GPS is handy too as you'll be doing the



mileage. Upgrade the lights as well as the stock ones are like a candle in a hurricane."

Bad points: "A few issues with fork-brace corrosion and a major issue with lurching the gearbox and shaft as I was in the middle of overtaking an HGV. That underpant-filling moment cost £1200 to sort out. Not a squeak of a problem since. Just use 20w 50 oil (a fiver a pot) and change it often."

I bought one

Tony Williams, 47

R1150GS

Year: 2003

Mileage: 28000

Good points: "It's

brilliant for touring

and comfortable for

long days in the

saddle. Panniers

and a Hein Gericke

tankbag mean I can

carry all my camping

necessities - including a chair!

It has lots of road presence so is unlikely to

be overlooked or ignored. It has good tank

range and reasonable fuel economy.

If you want a big trailer this is the one. I've

test ridden the R1200GS and I found it lacked

the stature and presence of the 1150. I also

test rode the 1200 Adventure which certainly

looked and went well but it wasn't worth my

bike plus another £6000."

Bad points: "Corrosion on the fork brace. It

was replaced under warranty but it's

beginning to suffer again. It had an

expensive wiring problem, which kept

blowing headlight bulbs. The lights aren't

much good but I haven't upgraded as I rarely

ride at night. It's a heavy bike. I've only

dropped it once with a full fuel tank and I

couldn't lift it. I had to walk three miles to the

nearest village for help."

I sold one

Dennis Skilton, 37

Mileage: 4000

Why did you sell it? "I bought mine in New

Zealand and rode it there on a long holiday. I

left it in NZ for a year, but it didn't sell so I

shipped it back and sold it because I've got

an 1100GS and didn't need another GS."

Good points: "It's comfortable, looks

purposeful and deals with anything you can

throw at it. It has great road presence, which

is important in today's dog-eat-dog road

system. The residual values are impressive. I

lost a few quid, but it would have been much

worse on a Japanese bike."

Bad points: "Weight. The GS is a monster

once it's loaded with full panniers. I found it

unraveling at low speeds, particularly taking

it on and off the side stand. I'd hate to drop

one as it'd need a winch to get it back up."



Still want one?

Spares costs

OE new part prices

Brake lever	£56.50
Front disc	£136
Indicator	£23.50
Mirror	£35.60
Exhaust can (excl. cat)	£439.63

All prices are inclusive of VAT
(Source: Balderstone BMW)

Aftermarket part prices

Front pads	£24
Brake lever	£21.50
Remus exhaust	Can £199
Tall screen	£89
Hugger	£95
Air filter	£35

(Source: www.nippynormans.com)

Breakers

Don't expect to see a plethora of GS parts at your local breakers as they rarely get scrapped. Because of their tank-like constitution (most have been fitted with protection bars) even crash-damaged examples are hard to come by. Best source for used parts is eBay. We found the following asking prices for 1150 spares.

Crash bars	£30
Front shock	£30
Touratech fork brace	£75
Rear caliper	£47
Speedo drive and cable	£23.50
Subframe	£65

Recalls

Chassis numbers:

ZH000000000050000 to
ZH000000000057192

Under certain conditions it is possible for the inner section of the rear brake hose to rupture, leading to a loss of brake fluid. This could result in the rear brake becoming inoperative.

Affected machines were recalled and fitted with a modified rear brake hose and connections.

Servicing

6000 miles

Cost: Approx £150.

Engine oil and filter	change
Brake fluid	check
Brake pads	check
Clutch fluid	check
Sidestand	grease
Sidestand switch	check
Spark plugs	check
Valves	adjust
Throttle cables	check
Throttle bodies	synchronise

I sell them!

Gary Evans

Balderston of Peterborough
(01733 565470)

"The 1150GS is one of our top sellers.

Secondhand models don't stay in the showroom for long. I've seen quite a few with over 100,000 miles on the clock.

What do I look for? The paralever bearings can wear so check there's no oil leaking from behind the rubber boot on the drive shaft. Spin the back wheel and listen for any grinding noises, as it means the trunion bearings are on the way out. Expect a clutch to last around 50,000 miles. Look for a bike with full service history so you'll know it's been well looked after."

12,000 miles

Cost: Approx £330.

Transmission gear oil	change
Battery fluid level	check
Battery	electrolyte level, clean/grease terminals
Air filter	change
Wheel bearing play	check
Swingarm bearing play	check
Spark plugs	change

24,000 miles

Cost: Approx £330.

Transmission gear oil	change
Rear drive gear oil	change
Fuel filter	change
Battery fluid level	check
Battery	electrolyte level, clean/grease terminals
Air filter	change
Alternator belt	change
Wheel bearing play	check
Swingarm bearing play	check
Spark plugs	change

Tyres

Metzeler Tourance is the most popular choice by far. They're hard wearing and allow decent lean angles. Sizes are 110/80 x19, 150/70 x17.

	F	R
Avon Distanza	£65	£80
Bridgestone Battlewing	£68	£92
Bridgestone BT020	£78	£99
Bridgestone Trailwing	£62	£92
Continental TKC80	£57	£64
Dunlop D607	£64	£90
Metzeler Tourance	£68	£88
Metzeler MCE Karoo	£62	£66
Michelin Anakee	£69	£86
Michelin Pilot Road	£72	£93

Prices are mail order.

Source: SMD tyres (01942 604511)

Used prices

Year	New	Dealer	Private
2000	8200	5730	4985
2001	7595	6440	5770
2002	7595	6940	6460
2003	7995	7350	6850
2004	7995	7945	7360

Prices taken from Parker's Guide

Insurance

The following Norwich Union quotes are for a 2002 R1150GS, worth £6500, garaged and fitted with an approved alarm. All quotes are based on the owner having five years' no-claims, in a rural town and city centre location.

TPFT	Town	City
25-year-old	£229	£472
35-year-old	£98	£201
45-year-old	£73	£149
Comprehensive	Town	City
25-year-old	£347	£715
35-year-old	£148	£305
45-year-old	£110	£226

Specification

1999-2003

BMW R1150GS

Engine	a/c, 8v, Boxer twin, injection, 1130cc
Power	85bhp @ 6575rpm
Torque	72ftlb @ 5250rpm
Chassis	steel spine
Dry weight	228kg
Seat height	840-860mm
Fuel capacity	22 litres (4.9 gal)
Tyre front	110/80 x 19
Tyre rear	150/70 x 17
NU insurance	13

*Thanks to Balderston BMW (01733 565470) and Norwich Union for their help compiling this article.



BMW R1150GS 2003/03, 7375 miles, full BMW SH, Graphitan grey, ABS, panniers, heated grips, tall screen, a very reliable bike in excellent condition, bargain at £5895. Ellesmere, Shropshire



BMW 1150GS ADVENTURE 2003, 10500m, 12mths MoT, 6mths tax, ABS, BMW extras, full BMW aluminium pannier set, c/bars, h/grips, fog lights, £7695ono, LUTON

OGS

2004/54, 1650m, mint condition, BMW fitted a/s full Remus system, BMW lockable expandable side panniers, alarm/immobiliser, heated grips, engine guard, ABS, genuine reason for sale, £8200, HANTS



BMW R1150GS 2000/X, mandarin yellow, 36000m, full BMW service history, ABS, heated grips, hand guards, BMW tank bag, recent £400 service, good condition. £4795, London, London



2003/03 29500m, £6495ono, special BMW paint, blue/white, integral ABS heated grips, side panniers + top case, adventure windshield, handguard Denso alarm, adjustable seat/suspension, white indicators, full BMW service history, I owner since new, absolutely fantastic condition, weekday or weekends, no canvassers, Hertfordshire/London