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Sportster History - Sub-01A

VIN Changes for Sportsters

- **The only legal VIN number for Harley's produced from 1970 and up is on the frame.** It doesn't matter if the engine case number matches your registration papers or not, if the frame VIN doesn't match the registration, it's not legal. It also should be noted that any alteration to the VIN is illegal. This goes for re-stamping frames or adding the original VIN to a replacement frame. If you replace the frame, you need to have a new VIN assigned to your Harley. ¹⁾
- **A VIN isn't cut and dried as some guys perpetuate it to be.** There are circumstances when a VIN number can be legally re-applied to a later motor by the owner if he is fixing his bike legally. Once he gets signed off by the authorities, he is under no obligation to retain the original VIN stampings. So, when he sells that bike with the later motor with the home stamped early serials he has obeyed the law, and the bike is legal. Back in the day, it was very common to see KH bikes with new XL factory motors carrying the orig KH numbers. ²⁾
- **In April of 1981,** the MoCo issued a service bulletin acknowledging that the "6" and "9" characters used in the stamping of engine and crankcase numbers could be interchanged. If that turned out to be the case on factory stamped numbers, this would still be a legitimate and acceptable number. Also included with this bulletin is a chart showing legitimate characters used for VINs by the MoCo. ³⁾
- **Early or Late 1984 Models cannot be deciphered from the VIN.** You need to depend on the parts that are on it for that. For instance, look at the lower front of the engine. E84 has a generator, an unmistakable, easy to identify component. L84 should have an oil filter in the same location. ⁴⁾
- **Preserving your VIN while painting / powder coating frame.** Leave a small area with the numbers bare and mask the numbers before painting the frame. Pulled the tape off when done and apply a clear coat over the frame and the small bare area with the numbers. Not too noticeable and you will be able to see the frame numbers. ⁵⁾

Charts of VIN Changes Over the Years for Sportsters

1957-1969	Example: (57XL 12345) indicates a 1957 XL model and is stamped on Left Engine Case Between the Cylinders ⁶⁾									
	Year Model First 2 Digits		Sportster Model Next 2 Digits (up to 4) XL - Standard Sportster XLH - Sportster with High Compression XLC - Competition Sportster XLCH - Competition Sportster w/ High Compression XLRTT - Specialty Racing XLR				Sequential Serial Number Remaining Digits			
Example VIN Reads	57		XL				12345			
1970-1978	Example: (4A13675H0) indicates a 1970 XLCH and is stamped on the right side engine case and on the frame with the addition of a label on the steering head showing the VIN and date of manufacture. ⁷⁾									
	Sportster Model Code First 2 Digits 3A - XLH 4A - XLCH 2G - XLT 9B - XLRTT 1C - XR-750 4D - XLA 7F - XLCR 4E - XLS		Serial Number Next 5 digits 10,000 and up		Manufacturer Second to Last Digit H = Harley Davidson		Model Season Last Digit 0 - 1970 1 - 1971 2 - 1972 3 - 1973 4 - 1974 5 - 1975 6 - 1976 7 - 1977 8 - 1978			
Example VIN Reads	4A		13675		H		0			
1979-1980	Example: (3A 11790 H9) indicates a 1979 XLH (XL)⁸⁾ appearing on the engine right case and the right side of the steering head on the frame ⁹⁾									
	Sportster Model First 2 Digits 3A - XLH 4A - XLCH 4E - XLS		Serial Number Next 5 Digits 10,000 and up		Manufacturer 2nd to Last Digit H - (1979 Harley Davidson) J - (1980 Harley Davidson)		Model Season Last Digit 9 - (1979) 0 - (1980)			
Example VIN Reads	3A		11790		H		9			
1981-1985	Example: (1HD1CAH16BY112016) designates a 1981 XLH 1000 appearing on the steering head and the right front frame downtube. The abbreviated VIN appears on engine right crankcase (CAHB 112016) ¹⁰⁾									
	Motorcycle Origin	Manufacturer/Make	Motorcycle Displacement Type	Model Designation	Engine Size	Introduction Date / Special Models	VIN Check Digit	Model Year	Assembly Plant	Serial Number 010000 and up

1981-1985	Example: (1HD1CAH16BY112016) designates a 1981 XLH 1000 appearing on the steering head and the right front frame downtube. The abbreviated VIN appears on engine right crankcase (CAHB 112016) ¹⁰⁾									
	Made in USA	Harley Davidson	1 = 901 cc & up	CA = XLH 1000 CB = XLS 1000 CC = XLX 1000 CD = XR 1000	H = 1000 CC ENGINE	1 = Regular Intro 2 = Mid Year Intro 3 = Special E1984 Intro	Can be 0 - 9 or X	B = 1981 C = 1982 D = 1983 E = 1984 F = 1985	Y = YORK, PA	
Example VIN Reads	1	HD	1	CA	H	1	6	B	Y	112016
Abbreviated VIN Reads				CA	H			B		112016

History of Sportster VIN Changes

- **Vehicle Identification Numbers (VIN)** have changed over the years for the sake of theft deterrent and inventory. Modern VINs have Government mandated information as well as an individual (one only) number that pertains to one certain bike. Policy, parts and service have been issued by the MoCo based on these numbers as well. For instance, an upgraded part may be substituted for all future use at the local dealership by communication from the MoCo as in, "Use this new part number instead of the original part for all future models beginning with engine serial number 45678". There are likely many other uses and reasons for the distinction changes in the VIN also. Below is a list of changes in the VIN and how to decipher them.

1957-1961

- **In 1957, the VIN was simply stamped**, starting with the first four digits, into the left side crankcase with the year and bike model followed by **a series of 4 or 5 numbers that established the individual serial number for each bike**. The bike models are abbreviated with the denotation for a standard Sportster being (XL). In theory, the MoCo should know everything that was installed on each individual bike as it left the factory right down to the paint color. But records are scarce the farther you go back it seems.

1962-1969

- **From 1962-1969, VIN numbering was the same as before with an added twist.** Models with 4 digit production (serial) numbers have an **even-numbered first digit for even years and odd numbered first digit for odd years**. Models containing a 5 digit production number will have the first two digits even for even years and odd for odd years. ¹¹⁾
 - If the VIN does not follow this even or odd numbering sequence, you can almost guarantee that the VIN has been altered. It is extremely common to find mismatched engines in these early bikes with different VIN numbers than the title paperwork. ¹²⁾
- **The first VIN of a new pre - '62 model year** was always, for instance 66XLCH1001 (if the first model stamped of that year were to be a Sportster..and a XLCH). All 69 and earlier model year vins

all have a minimum of 4 sequence numbers. These #'s were stamped sequentially regardless of model. For example it is possible to see 66XLCH4996, and then see 66FLH4997. Although the engines were made in batches, so in this theoretical instance the XL would have been the last of a batch, and the FL engine being the first of a batch. ¹³⁾

- **The first VIN of a '62-'69 model, all else the same would be something like this:**
 - **For the first 1962 XLCH** - 62XLCH2001 ¹⁴⁾
 - **For the first 1963 XLCH** - 63XLCH1001 ¹⁵⁾
- **For matching serial numbers against number of bikes sold that year:**
 - 68XLCH14001 would be bike production number 12000 ¹⁶⁾

Examples of Good and Bad Serial Numbers ('62-'69)

1962-1969 Odd / Even Rule - Remove the model code and last 3 numbers of the Serial Number (which leaves the bold numbers in VINs below)				
The remaining digits in the serial number(s) must be even for even years and odd for odd years ¹⁷⁾				
Engine Numbers	4 Digit Serial	5 Digit Serial		
63 XLH 8 133	Vin becomes 63...8		Check numbers 63 vs 8	1 even & 1 odd number = failed the rule test
63 XLH 81 336		Vin becomes 63...81	Check numbers 63 vs 81	Both odd numbers = passed the rule test
68 XLCH 6 729	Vin becomes 68...6		Check numbers 68 vs 6	Both even numbers = passed the rule test
68 XLCH 67 295		Vin becomes 68...67	Check numbers 68 vs 67	1 even and 1 odd number = failed the rule test

1970-1978

- **Starting with the 1970 season**, the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) is stamped on the right side of the engine crankcase between the cylinders (except '70-E'71 - see below) and on the right down tube below the neck ¹⁸⁾. In addition to these numbers, an identification label is located on the frame below the stamped VIN ¹⁹⁾ giving the VIN and date of manufacture. This label was required by law for identification. ²⁰⁾ However, the only legal VIN acknowledge by the law (1970 and up) is the one stamped on the frame.
- **However, 1970 is a one year engine with exception of some early 1971 models** with cases carried over from the 1970 batch. The VIN pad is in a different position from every other year which is between the front two lifters. 1970 was the last “pre nose cone” engine (Flatside ?). 1970 frame is one year as well, but the later cam covers and rockers can be substituted so you can't be sure what you have just by a casual glance. ²¹⁾
- **Early 1971 models with the 1970 cases** didn't have the star cast before and aft of the VIN but the frame did have them. ²²⁾
- **Not all 70 or e71 had** motor or frame stars, but all 71s did have the frame stamped though. Some 1970 frames were bare. ²³⁾

1979-1980

- Just as in '70-'78, the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) is stamped on the right side of the engine crankcase and on the right down tube below the neck ²⁴⁾. In addition to these numbers, an identification label is located on the frame below the stamped VIN ²⁵⁾ giving the VIN and date of manufacture.

- **1979 Exception:**

[Click here to download/view Service Letter ML-110](#)

- For a period of one month from January 9 to February 8, 1979, (1200, 1340 and 1000cc) motorcycles were produced with the crankcase number stamped on the engine number pad instead of the VIN (frame) number in this location. This change was introduced to allow replacing engines in motorcycles at the factory without the cumbersome - and within some states - illegal re-stamping of the original VIN on the replacement engine crankcase pad. ²⁶⁾
 - Additionally, this change would have deterred organized theft rings because they would have no knowledge of the correct match-up of the frame VIN and the engine pad number. ²⁷⁾
- Following this change, it was pointed out that the engine to frame numbering would have better traceability if the numbers matched. Also pointed out was that any deviation in characters or numbering would create suspicion from officials that the numbers may not be valid, indicating a stolen and/or renumbered engine. ²⁸⁾
 - Upon a considerable investigation and analysis, it was felt that the advantages of the old system out-weighed the advantages of the new system and it was decided to revert to the duplication of the engine and frame VIN numbers which had been in effect since 1970. ²⁹⁾
- Motorcycles produced in which the engine pad numbers do not match the frame VIN's are: ³⁰⁾
 - Frame VIN 43000H9 to frame VIN 48199H9. ³¹⁾
- The frame (VIN) numbers for all VIN model prefixes within the above range are in numerical sequence; however, the engine pad numbers are mixed. ³²⁾
- For the purpose of cross checking numbers, the correct VIN's and corresponding engine pad numbers were recorded on the retail sales and warranty registration information form F-314, mailed to the dealers when these motorcycles were shipped to them. ³³⁾
- Also, the vehicle identification number records were maintained by the Highland Insurance Service at Harley-Davidson Motor Co., Inc. Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201 and the National Automotive Theft Bureau divisional offices. ³⁴⁾
- Regardless of the engine case number, the title must always match the frame VIN. ³⁵⁾

1981-1985

- **In 1981**, the full VIN was expanded to include country of origin, maker, bike weight, engine displacement, introduction date, a check digit and which factory made it ³⁶⁾. The engine number was no longer stamped the same as the frame. An abbreviated version was stamped into the right side engine case which is the exact same as the frame numbers but certain designations were left out. including country of origin, maker, bike weight, intro date, check digit and plant of origin.
 - The new 17 digit Vehicle Identification Number(VIN) is used on all models including the Classic Sidecar. This new nationwide system is designed to provide improved theft protection and more specific vehicle information to Harley-Davidson Motor Co. Inc. and government

agencies.

- The full 17 digit VIN is stamped on the steering head and on a label located on the right front downtube. The abbreviated version consists of the model designation, engine displacement and model year codes followed by the serial number.
- The number itself is different, but it's location didn't change from the previous year models.
- **In 1984**, the right crankcase number (not to be confused as a VIN) moved to the lower face below the gear case (near and under #4 cam) on the outside of the engine. ³⁷⁾

Engine # / VIN Pics

1962-1969 Engine Number Pics

Click on a pic to enlarge:



1964 XLCH Engine VIN ³⁸⁾



1968 XLCH Engine VIN ³⁹⁾



1968 XLCH Engine VIN ⁴⁰⁾



1969 xlch vin ⁴¹⁾

1970-1978 Engine Number Pics

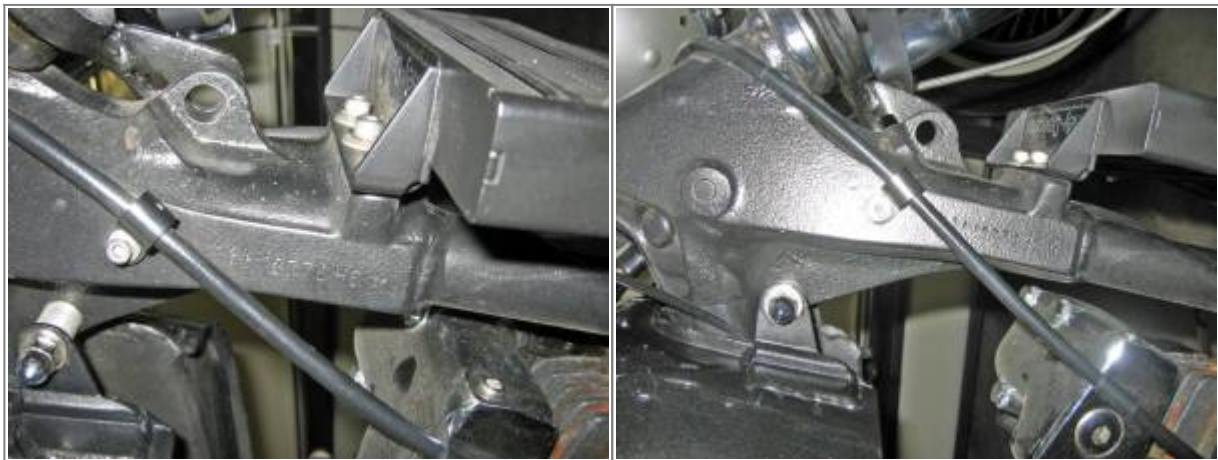
Click on a pic to enlarge:



Early 1971 Factory Engine Identification Numbers ⁴²⁾



1976 Factory Engine Identification Numbers ⁴³⁾



1976 Factory Frame VIN ⁴⁴⁾

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1) , 11) , 12) , 35)

<http://www.harley-performance.com/harley-vin.html>

2) , 23)

Dr Dick of the XLFORUM <http://xlforum.net/forums/showthread.php?t=1863261&highlight=vin&page=3>

3)

HD Service Bulletin #M-828 dated April 21, 1981

4)

IronMick of the XLFORUM <http://xlforum.net/forums/showthread.php?t=1964151&highlight=VIN>

5)

Just John of the XLFORUM <http://xlforum.net/forums/showthread.php?t=1960427&highlight=VIN>

6)

1953-1963 HD Parts Catalog backside of front cover

7)

Shop Dope Service Bulletin #596 dated September 16, 1969

8) , 9)

1979 Harley Davidson XLH/XLCH/XLS-1000 Parts Catalog

10)

1979-1985 HD Sportster Parts Catalog

13)

Murdog1968 of the XLFORUM <http://xlforum.net/forums/showthread.php?t=707989&highlight=VIN>

14) , 15) , 16)

joestuff of the XLFORUM <http://xlforum.net/forums/showthread.php?t=707989&highlight=VIN>

17)

DR DICK of the XLFORUM <http://xlforum.net/forums/showthread.php?t=1876619&highlight=VIN>

18) , 24)

Whitewalls of the XLFORUM <http://xlforum.net/forums/showthread.php?t=2000060&highlight=VIN>

19) , 25)

Yoshi of the XLFORUM <http://xlforum.net/forums/showthread.php?t=2000060&highlight=VIN>

20)

HD Service School service bulletin #596 dated September 16, 1969

21)

Ferrous Head of the XLFORUM

<http://xlforum.net/forums/showthread.php?t=1936551&highlight=VIN&page=2>

22)

Whitewalls of the XLFORUM <http://xlforum.net/forums/showthread.php?t=1863261&highlight=vin>

26) 27) 28) 29) 30) 31) 32) 33) 34)

HD Service Letter #ML-110 dated March 2, 1979

36)

HD Service Bulletin #M-800

37)

HD Service Bulletin #M-885 dated April 10, 1984

38)

photo courtesy of eric123 of the XLFORUM

39) 40)

photos by Dr Dick of the XLFORUM <http://xlforum.net/forums/showthread.php?t=1862513&page=3>

41)

photo by brianbbs67 of the XLFORUM <http://xlforum.net/forums/showthread.php?t=1862513&page=5>

42)

Photos courtesy of Whitewalls of the XLFORUM

<http://xlforum.net/forums/showthread.php?t=1863261&highlight=vin>

43)

Photo courtesy of 4th of July of the XLFORUM

<http://xlforum.net/forums/showthread.php?t=1612475&highlight=vin>

44)

Photos courtesy of 4th of July of the XLFORUM

<http://xlforum.net/forums/showthread.php?t=1612475&highlight=vin>

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