

1952 K-model rolling chassis purchase

A K-model rolling chassis came up on eBay a few days after I bought the motor.

The price was \$3500, again. a bit high, but the bike was in fairly good shape under the dirt.

The listing was in Ohio, where I was born, and obviously rural, where you could imagine a 1953 bike being unmolested all these years.

I was going to cram the K-model engine into a late-model frame. That might be a statement on how much bulkier an Evo engine is, but this chassis could be the basis for a restored 1952 first-year K-model Harley. I tried to talk myself out of it, it was \$3500, but reason does not enter into one's thinking when old motorcycles are involved.

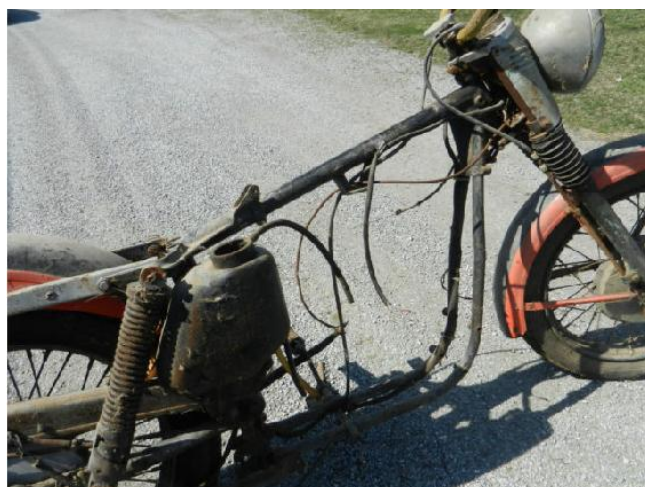


The seller wrote:

"Harley KR Flat track racing. K model front end & tire. Oil tank missing lid. Kickstand. This is an item I'm listing for a friend. I took the pictures, and will be happy to work through any questions that you may have. The frame had been blasted, and painted quite awhile ago. There are quite a few good parts besides the frame as can be seen in the pictures. I will be happy to take additional photos by request. This item will be for local pickup, or possible delivery for a fee to be determined."



The first thing to look for is the little flip on the back of the rear fender. You can get this aftermarket for 300 or 400 bucks like I did for my 1962 Sportster. This one is genuine. The front fender is supposed to have a flip on it too. This is most likely a Sportster front fender. Headlamp, dash, oil tank, and handlebars are there. Right footpeg is missing, and that's some non-Harley tail light on the rear fender. The front end is pretty early, before 1964 since the brake drum is on the side, not across the whole hub width having short little spokes on both sides.



In this picture you can verify it's a K-model

frame, not a Sportster frame. A Sportster frame has a flat spot on the bottom of the main tube behind that center motor mount perch. That was so the taller Sportster heads would not clank into the frame rail. More telling yet, that top motor mount is a casting, not stamped metal. Its got the rare K-model chain guard. The strut bolts are correct. they are slotted head, not hex-head. No shock covers, but those are 1952-era shocks. Nothing looks cut-up on the frame.



Handlebars are swung up to a funky position, but there is a lot to love in this picture. Headlamp looks right and not aftermarket. Same for the tin shroud, Both levers are period and in place. A little study of my K-model parts book shows the handlebars might even be 1952, instead of the later ones that have the slots with round ends instead of slots at the end of the bar.

I wish the seller took pictures standing on the sunny side of the bike, but I could open the pictures in IrfanView and play with gamma settings to see better.



Here is the oil bag. Its got two dents at the bottom, but looks authentic K-model. The exhaust bracket is there, but it might be a Sportster part.



Here is a key shot. I pasted it into the great free image viewer program, IrfanView. Then you can brighten it to see the stuff in the shadows. Oil bag fitting looks threaded under that hose. The voltage regulator should not be here, this is where Sportsters mounted them in the 1970s, I had to recheck this picture to see the little square boss where the regulator mounts, That is how early K-model frames look in the Harley parts book.



The fender is Sportster. See how the struts have a 2-inch flat spot where they attach to the fender? That is to accommodate the valenced fender that has side panels. K-model fenders have the rounded strut go all the way to the fender. All kinds of nice parts like the brake tube, adjuster, brake tube fender clip, lever and shackle. The front end has the bellows. A 1952 is supposed to have "cowbells," steel covers that mount on the underside of the triple tree.



Here you can see the correct side-mounted brake drum. I think the fork sliders are supposed to be cadmium plated. Maybe they are under that black paint. This must have been in a barn. A bike left outside gets way rustier.



The brake switch is not supposed to be on the chain guard, it goes on the back of the engine primary cover. This is very coherent with this being a KR race bike, The flat-tracers did not use the stock primary cover. Oops, the strut bolts are Phillips head, that's not right. Brake rod is there, nut on the rod, lever is correct. Axle and shock hardware are there and looks correct.



That bracket and tail lamp never came on a Harley. Left footpeg, brake lever and kickstand seem good and authentic.

I later learned the tail lamp is an old Drag Specialties item and they come up on eBay now and then.



The grips look a little like the 1952 ones in the parts book, but those looked more checkered. Steering damper is there and looks original. Definitely the K-model center motor mount. Headlamp looks genuine. The brake cable is there, this thing might have working front and rear brakes. That would never happen with hydraulic brakes after 60 years.



OK, people decide someone is attractive after 7 seconds. More than anything, it was this one picture that got me hot for this bike. The little swing-out covers over the ignition and light switch are not made aftermarket. I see all kinds of restorations that claim to be "done right," but every one of them has the Taiwan 140-dollar chrome

tin up front. The switches never line up with the holes and it is obvious because there are no spring-loaded covers to hide it. The speedometer is there. A good one sells for \$500. This one looks funky, but it is there, and all the hardware to mount it is there too. You can see the adjuster on the clutch cable housing. The headlamp is definitely genuine, with two indicator lights and those rivets next to them.



There is the funky tail lamp. You can get a reproduction (aka re-pop) tail light for a couple hundred bucks. Thing is, its a tiny little light. I got a broken collarbone from getting rear-ended by a station wagon. I like big bright tail lamps. So I might try to find a lens for this baby and make the restoration a little more interesting.

There was no buy-it-now for this auction. Nobody was bidding on it. One wrote asking why it was a KR (race) frame, and the seller maintained there was a stamp on the frame starting with KR. Problem is, Harley did not stamp serial numbers on the frame. Maybe they did for KR's. If this is a verifiable KR frame, I guess it is worth \$3500 just for the frame.

I kept going through the pictures, trying to add the parts value up. I kept doing this until I convinced myself there was \$3500 in parts here. Since there was nothing rational going on, I soon got to that number. The seller promised to add more pictures if no one bid. One guy wrote griping about the pictures, but they really showed everything you needed to know. I waited until 5 seconds before the auction ended and I was the only bid. Lets face it, this thing deserves to be mated to my 1952 engine.

Once I won there was a tinge of stress about shipment. Thing is, I had been working with the guy who owned the motor I won the week before and he was the greatest guy on Earth. I figured a rural guy from Ohio was the same. I was right.

Here is a restored 1952 K-model from over in the Smörg section of this site.



The 1952 K-model engine is only 45 cubic inches (750cc). In 1954 Harley introduced the KH model, with a stroked flywheel. It boosted displacement to 61 cubic inches (883cc).



Here is another restored 1952 K-model, also from the Smörg section of this website. I hope mine looks this good, but I really just want to get it running first. That is my theory anyway, get the bike running, and then worry about cosmetics. You can see the K-model DNA in modern Sportsters. The reason Sportsters have 4 camshafts in a line is because in a K-model you need to do that since the cams are operating directly on the valve tips.

My buddy Ralph, aka Pigpen says to get the motor running first when you put a bike together. He says that is the heart of the bike and that is what you should work on first. I can see his point, but I think in a case like this, where I am not building a bike from scratch, it might be a little different. For one thing, you want to be able to wheel the bike around inside the garage. Two flat tires are making that a pain, so maybe I should get the wheels restored first. For now I just want to get all the parts in once place.

Date	Descript	Cost	Shipping	Total
03/21/12	Engine, uncrating	\$2,500.00	\$464.56	\$2,964.56
03/23/12	Rolling chassis, uncrating	\$3,500.00	\$669.00	\$4,169.00
		\$6,000.00	\$1,133.56	\$7,133.56

Here is the table as I buy parts for this project. The two big-dollar entries are in, but all the little stuff will cost at least as much. At least that is my prediction. Stay tuned.