

That first G/S was updated as the R80 GS in 1988, alongside the one-litre R100, before the all-new oilhead (as in oil-cooled) R1100 GS in 1993. The old-generation 'airheads' carried on for a while, but the 1100 grew into the 1150, then the 1200 GS, with the optioned-up Adventure models for those who really did want to take one off-road, or look as if they might.

In its 25 years of production, the BMW GS has become a milestone bike, fully deserving its tag of the 'two-wheeled Range Rover'. Just like drivers of that eponymous 4x4, most owners will never take their GS off-road, but like the image that goes with it, not to mention the side benefits of comfortable, long-travel suspension and fine ground clearance. In 2004, Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman's Long Way Round proved that the BMW GS could walk the walk as well. Buy one, and you won't just be owning a practical, comfortable, long-lived bike, but there's the suggestion that you could – if you felt like it – head off across the Sahara tomorrow.

Acknowledgements

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Asian Skies) and to Les Madge of Travel-Dri Plus for giving me their bikes to photograph. Also to Ted Simon, who rode a friend's R100 GS around the world in 2001, reliving his original 1970s trip, at the age of 72. Finally, I'm grateful to any other owners whose bikes appear in this book, but whom I wasn't able to track down!



Some GSs lead adventurous lives!

Essential Buyer's Guide™ currency

At the time of publication a BG unit of currency “●” equals approximately £1.00/US\$2.00/Euro 1.50. Please adjust to suit current exchange rates.

R1150GS – 1998-2004 **R1150GS Adventure – 2001-06**

As BMW's entire line-up adopted the bigger 1130cc version of the oil-cooled flat-twin, so did the GS, the 1150 launched in 1998. It offered slightly more power and torque than the 1100, with 85bhp and 72lb/ft, though this was offset by another weight increase to 249kg. Admittedly that was with a full tank of fuel, but this was the heaviest GS yet. The motorcycle press weren't impressed by that, or that the GS wasn't as quick as 100bhp machines, or that the gearchange still wasn't up to chain-drive standards. But everyone agreed



R1150 is heavier than the 1100, but offers more power and torque.

that despite its weight and size, the latest GS handled better than ever. The wide handlebars gave fine control and the bike had plenty of ground clearance, gaining a following among hard riders who found it as fast on twisty roads as many sports bikes.

The standard 1150 was joined in 2001 by the GS Adventure, capitalising on the fact that the GS was still the most capable adventure tourer off-road, even if most owners rarely ventured off tarmac. The changes were small, but included 20mm extra suspension travel, to 210mm front, 220mm rear, giving even more ground clearance and bump-swallowing ability than before. There was also progressive rear damping, a taller and wider screen, a bigger front mudguard, and crashbars to protect the fairing. One option was the Overland pack, which added a bigger 30-litre tank, knobby tyres and, for picking ones way along boulder-strewn tracks, a lower first gear.



R1200 was very different to the 1150.



Paintwork is generally good quality, and lasts well.



Many bodywork parts are plastic.



Alloy will corrode if neglected.

good sign (of an owner prepared to put in time and money) so long as the coating was properly applied – if the metalwork isn't cleaned first, powder coating will eventually flake off.

There's lots of plain alloy on the GS – it looks good and can be wiped clean. But like any other alloy, it will corrode if not washed regularly. On oilheads, the bottom fork legs and rear hub are especially prone, and one R1150GS seen in research for this book had serious corrosion on the crankcase, with the protective coating bubbling up. GS alloy rims last well though, as do the spokes.

Bodywork

In one respect, buying a secondhand bike is far easier than purchasing a used car – there's far less bodywork to worry about. Crashbars to protect the cylinders are a popular option on all bikes, and make sure these aren't bent or scratched – if they are, quiz the owner as to how it happened. On the right-hand side of R100 airheads, the oil cooler is crashbar mounted, making it vulnerable to damage. Upper crashbars to protect the fuel tank and fairing are also well worth having. Also check the bashplate underneath the bike – damage here suggests that, unlike most GSs, the one you're looking at really has been used off-road. If the bashplate is scraped

Paint/alloy

Ex 4 Gd 3 Av 2 Po 1

BMW's are renowned for their quality finish, but don't let that lull you into a false sense of security – a GS neglected over the years will start to look tatty, just like any other bike. One thing you shouldn't need to worry about is chrome, as apart from the exhaust system there isn't any to speak of, and that on the exhaust is pretty good – in any case, many older bikes will have had downpipes, collector box or silencer, or all three, replaced by now.

Tank and panel paint finish lasts very well. On older bikes, expect it to be

faded and with the odd scratch, but that's hardly a serious problem. Airheads are more likely to have a tatty frame – again, it doesn't affect how the bike rides, but it's a good bargaining counter. If the frame has been powder coated, that's a

good sign

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Ex 4 Gd 3 Av 2 Po 1

Exhaust

The first part of the GS exhaust system to succumb to rot isn't the downpipes or high-mounted silencer, but the collector box underneath the gearbox. In fact, the pipes and silencer



The downpipes and silencer last well.

Luggage

Despite their off-road pretensions, BMW GSs are often used as long distance tourers, and it's quite rare to come across one without some sort of hard luggage. Many GS riders do serious miles, and the accessories they buy tend to be of the practical kind – BMW's own heated grips, for example, are one such, and well worth having.

Although generic luggage, such as Givi, is available for the GS, most owners pay more for BMW's own factory luggage, the BMW-approved Touratech or the UK-made Metal Mule aluminium



Ex 4 Gd 3 Av 2 Po 1

last pretty well. Get down on the ground and poke the collector box with a screwdriver.

If it does need replacing, then the ultimate answer is a complete stainless steel system, replacing the pipes, box and silencer in one go. The popular Keihan system can do away with the collector box altogether, using a Y-piece instead. If a previous owner has spent around ●x500 on a complete stainless steel system, that's a good sign of someone prepared to invest in the bike.



The collector box is prone to rot.

Ex 4 Gd 3 Av 2 Po 1



A topbox is a useful addition – check for signs of water ingress.

Aluminium luggage often acts as a travelogue display board!

15 Problems due to lack of use

– just like their owners, GSs need exercise!



Like any piece of engineering, and indeed like human beings, BMW GSs deteriorate if they sit doing nothing for long periods. This is especially relevant if the bike is laid up for six months of the year, as some machines are.



Rust attacks damp metal.

Rust

If the bike is put away wet, and/or stored a cold, damp garage, the paint, metal and brightwork will suffer. Ensure the machine is completely dry and clean before going into storage, and if you can afford it, invest in a dehumidifier to keep the garage atmosphere dry.

Seized components

Pistons in brake calipers can seize partially or fully, resulting in binding or non-working brakes. Cables are vulnerable to seizure too – the answer is to thoroughly lube them beforehand, and come into the garage to give them a couple of pulls once a week or so.



Lack of use can result in sticking pads and dragging brakes.