

## The time is right for the Roadster

With the arrival of the new BMW F 800 R later this year, the F Series is now complete. From the fantastic F 800 S and ST sports twins and the F 800 GS and F 650 GS travel enduros, right through to the latest addition – the F 800 R naked roaster – there is now something for everyone in this phenomenally successful F Series that has brought many new riders to BMW Motorrad.



Although the new F 800 R won't be appearing in BMW dealer showrooms until May, it has of course been in the making for several years. The reason it looks 'just right' is the result of hundreds of painstaking hours spent with pen and pencil at the drawing board, and with computer aided design software in the studio, before being shaped and reshaped as a clay model prototype.

Cast your mind back more than three years to January 2006, when Chris Pfeiffer made his competitive debut for BMW Motorrad, riding a 'modified' F 800 machine in the famous Stuntwars competition in Florida, comprehensively beating all challengers to win the coveted title. The bike looked fantastic, right from the start, but it was no coincidence, as the bike was already in the advanced planning stages. As BMW Motorrad's Vice President of Motorcycle Design, David Robb explains, getting the series production model to look as good as it now



does is the result of a journey that started some time ago.

“Even when designing the F 800 S and ST models, we knew what else would be coming, so we had to taking into consideration how the bike would look with its ‘clothes off’. There are many stages of the design journey that take place before the first prototype even sees the light of day. As such, we made sure that certain components on the S and ST were ‘clean’, such as the frame tubes and the wiring. We knew that when the GS version was introduced, it would be a completely different vehicle, with another frame and longer wheel travel, but the F 800 R had to work visually, in a different way.”



So, by the time Pfeiffer had appeared on the scene on his stunt bike, the design process for the F 800 R was pretty much wrapped up, but David concedes that the association was a good one to have.

“There’s a real fascination and excitement with what Chris is doing on the F 800 and when he performs – and because of what he can do on the bike – you can see parts you didn’t even know existed! When adapting his bike for stunt use, Chris basically got the parts from us and then went beyond that in a functional way to make them work, such as ‘beefing up’ certain components for extra strength to deal with some of the more extreme tricks he does.”

The first stages of what would eventually become the F 800 R roadster actually began in 2004, thanks to a competition within the design team to present initial sketch proposals. From the six sketches that made the shortlist, two were selected to go forward to the next stage. Interestingly, both had come from the same designer – Sebastian Wilm – who gave one to his boss Edgar Heinrich to develop. At the end of this phase, it was Edgar’s interpretation of Sebastian’s early design sketch that was selected – making the development of this roadster a true team effort.

At the same time – and following Pfeiffer’s increasingly high-profile outings on his stunt bike – motorcycle magazine editors around the world had begun to take interest and had their own designers coming up with unique ‘artist’s impressions’ of how a naked F 800 might look if BMW ever planned to launch one – much to David and the design team’s amusement.



“It’s a lot of fun for us to see what the media think a possible bike might look like, but when you see their ‘Photoshopped’ efforts in print, they never really work. For us, the F 800 R was always going to complete our family of roadsters. First of all, it had to be completely different from the R 1200 R boxer, which is more for the traditionalist. The signals we got were that boxer fans like heritage, tradition and reputation, so there wasn’t any chance that the F 800 R could be tied down to that kind of heritage, as there’s a real spontaneous quality about it. We wanted the F 800 R to be pure and unencumbered, and although we knew it would have essentially the same frame and engine as the S and ST versions, we wanted to work out the best way to expose these parts and make them exciting.”

“The similarity to the K 1300 R was certainly intentional,” says David. “The K 1300 R is an intentionally scary machine. It was designed to ‘stretch the envelope’ in more ways than one, but despite that, it retains BMW character all the way through it. With the F 800 R, we wanted it to be exciting and interesting for non-traditionalists, but still appropriate. Design is always a balancing act and we wanted the R to be ‘edgy’ without going too far. It’s not a ‘friendly and cute’ bike, and it does have some edge to it. However, it’s got to be appealing for a long time.”



Often for the talented guys and girls working in automotive design, the end results can be too much of a compromise, due to the fact that it is almost always necessary to work to a targeted price point, as well as being forced to use many shared components because of the economies of scale that arise from ‘commonality. However, with the F 800 R, Robb’s department has achieved the considerable feat of designing a striking machine that works on many levels. Unusually for a naked bike, it looks great in photographs from all angles – either swiftly moving through the city or parked up by the side of the road – and even works visually with the addition of a pillion and luggage system.



Without a doubt, the 800 R adds an urban edge to the F Series, so will appeal to those who value form as much as function, yet at the same time it displays many of BMW Motorrad's excellent ergonomic solutions, making long trips a distinct possibility for those who work in the city but like to escape to the country whenever possible.

Furthermore, thanks to David's colleagues in the engineering and research departments, the F 800 R also manages to deliver an exhilarating, sporty ride with extremely low levels of fuel consumption, while offering exemplary levels of safety – but that's another story!