

# GEAR & GADGETS



**HEAVY METAL** At 942 pounds, the R 18 Transcontinental is a mammoth American-style cruiser with an oversize fairing.

RUMBLE SEAT / DAN NEIL



## A BMW That Quotes Freely From the Book of Hog

**THIS STEINWAY** with a license plate is the 2022 BMW R 18 Transcontinental, the German company's first American-style full-dresser motorcycle, powered by a 1.8-liter horizontally opposed engine and naked cultural appropriation.

You may wonder why? Or even, what the hell? Is the Harley-Davidson Electra Glide that good BMW felt it had to be copied? What forces have brought this dreadnought to our shores?

I can explain: BMW Group, including Motorrad, is based in Munich, capital of Bavaria, gateway to the Alps and one of the world's most popular riding destinations. And when Motorrad executives themselves would go out to ride, what did they see? A lot of people in their key demographic—wealthy, independent, European—touring on big, slobbery Harley-Davidsons.

Visitors can even rent them, *en masse*, for group rides. Believe me, a peloton of Harley baggers dragging pipes around mountain hairpins is quite a sight. It makes sparks like Chinese New Year.

Europeans dig Harleys for complicated reasons, rooted in postwar history and culture. Germans love Harleys because they're kinky. What attracts them all is the formula's stubborn, sentimental primitivism, redeemed by charm. And leather.

In many ways the Transcontinental quotes chapter-and-verse from the Book of Hog, especially where the Prophet Milwaukee sayeth, "Everything shall be shiny as hell and

### 2022 BMW R 18 TRANSCONTINENTAL



**Base price** \$24,995  
**Price, as tested** \$31,695  
**Powertrain** 1,802-cc horizontally opposed two-cylinder, with four valves per cylinder, electronic ignition and pushrod actuation; six-speed single clutch transmission with reverse assist; rear universal shaft.  
**Power/torque** 91 hp at 4,750 rpm/116 pound-feet at 3,000 rpm  
**Length/width/seat height/wheelbase** 103.9/40.9/29.1/66.7 inches  
**Curb weight** 942 pounds  
**0-62 mph** 6 seconds  
**Cargo capacity** 100 liters

heavy as sin." As kitted—including the side and top luggage cases, oversize front fairing, and optional Marshall Gold Series II audio system—this long-distance tourer rolled off the delivery truck weighing 942 pounds.

I was terrified. Throwing a leg over the Conti felt like mounting a bison. When I pulled the beast upright from its kickstand position I thought I was going to blow an O-ring. I uttered the ancient Midwesterner's chant of strength—*Uftah!*

I was white-knuckling all that first day. It took a week before I felt fully in command of *Die Königsschwein*. After two weeks I felt confident enough to take my 14-year-old daughter for a ride. I even

felt a teensy bit of pride in mastering what I think is, or close to, the heaviest series-production motorcycle. Ever.

It's not that bad, really. As it gains pace above walking speed, the Conti's ponderousness quickly evaporates. In daily traffic it exhibits surprising centeredness and controllability, in parking decks, narrow streets and the like.

However, near walking speed, it feels like Satan's own free-body physics problem, which you're in danger of flunking. In the ratio of bulk between human and machine, this two-wheeler feels more like a jet-ski or snowmobile than motorcycle.

The Transcontinental (a two-up

"dresser") and R 18 B (a "bagger") use a modified version of standard R 18 frame that accentuates the naughty: more front rake, more front caster. Thus the Conti's profound proclivity for going straight. Lane discipline is excellent. Indeed, 80 mph in sixth gear is a little bit of ecstasy, with the big boxer engine gently flatulating at 2,200 rpm, the rider enveloped in the breezeless low-pressure zone behind an extra-tall windshield and a fairing as wide as a pool table.

In its comfy riding posture (floorboards, rocker shifter), its chuffing power delivery, its glinting presence, the Conti is undeniably Milwaukee-adjacent. But there are intriguing differences. Harleys have

V-twin engines, with the crankshaft oriented east-west. The BMW, heaving to company tradition, uses a horizontally opposed "boxer" engine, with its forged steel crankshaft oriented north-south (longitudinally), and with the big silver-metallic cylinder heads jutting out to the sides, like a boss.

**Europeans dig Harleys for complicated reasons. What attracts them is the primitivism, redeemed by charm. And leather.**

The arrangement has one fairly startling dynamical effect. When sitting at a stop, if you rev the enormous engine hard from idle, the momentary gyroscopic precession of the crankshaft is sufficient to pitch the bike sideways along a force vector of surprising magnitude—like a 30-knot crosswind with your name on it. Whoooooaa, bike! *Was die scheisse!*

The Conti uses the same 1,802-cc boxer engine found in the R 18 line (air/oil cooled, four valves per cylinder, dual ignition, intake manifold injection). Uniquely, these engines are fitted with overhead valve cylinder heads—pushrods in exposed tubes, the whole lot. BMW claims this retro-engineering pays tribute to the company's highly regarded OHV engines in icons like the R 5. I'll allow it, counsel.

In any event, when you roll on the BMW's throttle at highway speeds, the old-school pot-walloping quickens, gets wider and louder, with just a touch of Bavarian. Max torque lives at 3,000 rpm; you can twist harder but you won't go much quicker. The six-speed, single-clutch transmission shifts gears like I play Ultimate Frisbee—slowly and methodically.

You're not winning any deeds to biker bars down at the drag strip, anyway. BMW lists the 0-62 mph acceleration as 6 seconds; and that's in the hands of its best muleskinner.

The Transcontinental's aesthetics are about as subtle as black-powder mining. The First Edition's "Black Storm" paint scheme references the lacquered grandeur of prewar BMW motorcycles, with notes including the white pinstripping and frenched fenders. Its hard-tail profile (achieved with a central cantilever rear suspension strut, all but hidden in the works) is meant to recall the R 5's "rigid frame." The fairing obviously pays tribute to some of the era's finer airships.

If the R 18 Transcontinental wanted to shed a few pounds, it could lose the Marshall audio system. Those things are so rude. Riders cannot hear the music at cruising speed, over the engine and through a helmet, even with the volume at 11. However, others can, for miles around, as your classic-rock playlist spreads across the landscape in Doppler-shifted rings of jackassery.

What's German for "option delete"?

## Well Worth the Weight

New exercise clothing with poundage sewn directly into the fabric helps build muscular endurance even during a light workout

**WHY JUST LIFT** heavy weights to get strong when you can improve your gains during cardio, or even build forearms of steel while simply washing the dishes? That's the premise behind a new category of workout clothing that strategically disperses additional mass across your body through weights sewn into the fabric.

The key, fitness experts say, is putting the extra load on active muscles. Run in weighted leggings like those from Omorpho's Mad Max-looking collection—which have half-spheres of weights dotted across the shins and thighs—and you'll feel that extra resistance every time your feet push off the ground (\$275, *omorpho.fit*). Play tennis in weighted arm sleeves like Kilogear Cut's power shrug (from \$75, *kilogearcut.com*) and you'll work harder with every swing. Do a push up in Lila's body armor-

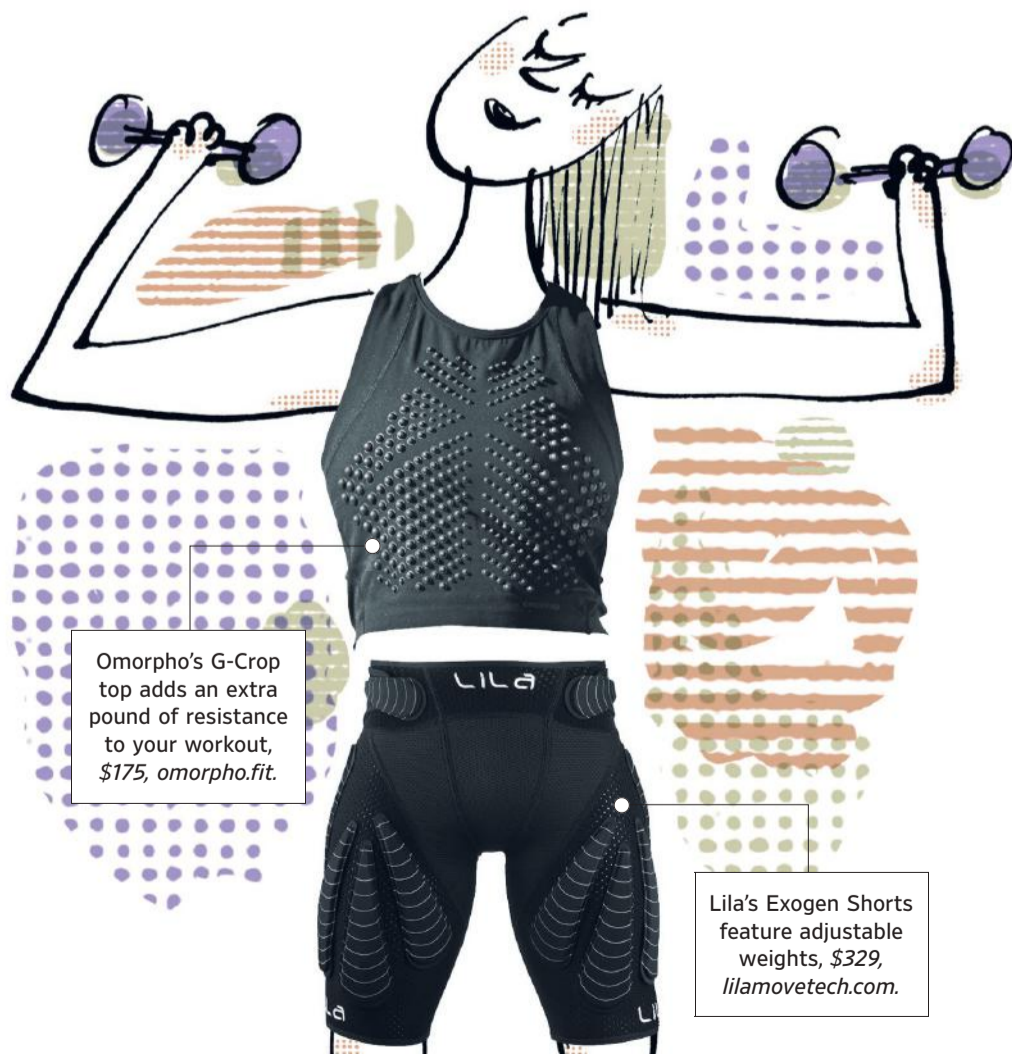
like Exogen top (\$329, *lilamovetech.com*) and your arms will have to lift an extra one to 18 pounds of weight around your torso. (Adjust the resistance by slipping included weights of different sizes into the pockets.) Bonus: When you're *not* wearing resistance, those moves will feel easier.

Stuart Phillips, director of the Physical Activity Centre of Excellence at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, says weighted apparel may be useful for building muscular endurance (that is, how long a muscle can work before it tires). But the gear can be especially useful during high-intensity training. As Paul Macadam, a former exercise science researcher at the Auckland University of Technology, explained, when you add a very small amount of weight to an exercise that's performed at high intensity, you'll exert roughly the same amount of effort as you would

with a heavier weight at slower speeds.

We found the apparel easy to work out in and comfortable, even if the weight was barely noticeable when we ran in the Omorpho leggings. But the benefits aren't only anecdotal. A 2019 study in the *Journal of Australian Strength and Conditioning* found that adding resistance to one runner's thighs during practice made him 2.4% faster in his 40-meter sprints. Warming up with lower-body resistance similarly improved sprinting and horizontal jumping performance in 31 soccer players, according to a 2020 study in the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*.

The gear is less useful if you're looking to show off bodybuilder-level quads, said Mr. Phillips—it's meant to yield more subtle gains, not replace traditional strength training. —Ashley Mateo



Omorpho's G-Crop top adds an extra pound of resistance to your workout, \$175, *omorpho.fit*.

Lila's Exogen Shorts feature adjustable weights, \$329, *lilamovetech.com*.