



# Iron Man

**The £52,560 Confederate Wraith has landed in the UK. But has it got the ability to match its undeniably awesome technology and style?**

Michael Reeves  
@baseerconsumer.co.uk

**A**MERICAN bike builders, Confederate, reckon its B129 Wraith is the 'world's most luxurious sportsbike', which is a pretty big claim when you remind yourself of the MV's, Benetton and Desmosedici R16s of the world and the Wraith, at first glance, looks like some kind of film prop. But, and I'm as surprised to writing this as you probably will be to read it, I don't actually think they're too far wrong.

On closer examination of the Wraith's gorgeous hand-laid carbon fibre, precision-machined aluminium and top notch cycle parts the 'luxury' bit is there not all to see. And with a simply stunning, two-litre V-twin showing it along I can assure you that it's sports-like-quick, too. The peak power figure of 120hp is healthy enough without exactly making your ears prick up, but much more impressive is the amount of torque it has (135ftlb). That's 44ftlb more than a GSX-R1000 K8 (and 44ftlb in turn, is about the same torque as modern super-sports 600). But the most astonishing thing of all about the Wraith – and this is a bike where superlative after superlative keeps cropping up – is that despite looking like something out of American Chopper, it actually handles and goes around corners – and they don't even have those in America.

With a set of hands in your sights you can climb all over the Wraith like a race-replica and shove into a corner as hard as your back will let you. Keep pushing harder and you'll have your knee slider grazing gently over the road surface. It's only the thought of piling 52-grand-worth of motorcycle backwards through a hedge, which stops you from crossing the magnificent Pirelli Diablo Corsa III tyres any harder. It'll even wheelie!

So, yes, the Wraith does things you'd never expect in terms of performance, but it isn't exactly what you'd call conventional – in fact it looks plain weird. Not that it really matters because it's so beautifully crafted, it's almost as if

the kings of bling, Benetton, built it. There are acres of billet aluminium and carbon fibre and only the best cycle parts have been used in its production.

The Confederate is a breathtaking mix of the sporty, the innovative, the unconventional and the all-American pie. The chassis has a curved, tubular-section carbon fibre spine frame, which holds the engine oil for the dry sump bolted to aircraft-grade billet aluminium front and rear sections. Beneath the motor sits a 16-litre aluminium Freddie Spencer upside-down NSR1000-style fuel tank, with a clear plastic Dyson-esque ribbed pipe so you can see the fuel going in when you're filling up. There's a beautifully made Ducati 916-style swingarm, again

**'As there's no tank you feel like Harry Potter riding a broomstick'**

from aircraft grade aluminium, a MotoGP-style adjustable swingarm pivot, lightweight Marchesini wheels, sticky Pirelli Diablo Corsa III tyres, billet aluminium brake calipers and Honda RC30-style lock-wired sprocket nuts. All this is very sporty, but then it gets all weird.

Conventional telescopic forks aren't used here, they're clearly too 'normal' for a machine like this, instead there's a double wishbone 'fanny' front end set-up (see Techwatch, p45) with a fully-adjustable titanium-sprung Fender shock and two huge great carbon fibre wing blades. And if all this innovation and forward thinking is too high-tech for you, you've brought back to old America with a big air-cooled, 1966cc V-twin from Race Engine, complete with Screaming Eagle carbs and a snobby side exiting exhaust. Yes! Although the motor is a bit of a lump compared to more modern designs, the Confederate team have made sure it's 'trans-centralised' so it doesn't ruin the handling.

But if the Wraith's looks are bizarre, it's even stranger to ride for the first time. For what looks like a cruiser or even a chopper when you first clap eyes on it, the riding position is more reminiscent of a MotoGP bike, which completely freaks your brain. The seat, which costs over two grand to replace, incidentally, which also contains two small slivers of red LEDs for the brake and tail light, is genuine hard. The pegs are set high and positioned right back, although there's still decent legroom for a six-footer. And there's a real uncomfortable stretch to the bars, which makes the Confederate hard work to ride.

Because the fuel tank is under the engine, all that's left between your legs is the thin carbon fibre spine frame, so you feel like Harry Potter riding a broomstick – a very fat, loud, vibrating, bad-ass broomstick with a huge V-twin engine, but a broomstick all the same. With no fuel tank to grip onto, you can't hold on with your knees under braking, so you've got to take all the focus through your arms.

But the overriding sensation when riding the Wraith is just how stiff it is. It's not actually the suspension, because when you bounce on the seat at a standstill the springs are actually quite soft and bouncy. It does ride the bumps exceedingly well, too, isolating all but the worst away from you. The hard feeling comes from the ultra-stiff carbon fibre/aluminium mix chassis. You could throw that chassis in the crops of the universe and everything would grind to a halt.

Confederate claim that the Wraith is the smoothest riding motorcycle on the planet, but they've obviously never ridden a Fireblade. The combination of the spruved out riding position, lack of wind protection and stiff seat and chassis really takes its toll of you on long distances and pounds muscles like you've been to the gym.

Starting the Wraith is an event in itself. Flick the ignition on and the fuel pump whirrs like a jet plane spooling up, ready to taxi along a runway. Prod the starter and there's a heavily mechanical

Continues over



With 120hp and weighing just 177kg, wheelies are easy



Even the clocks and switchgear are in aircraft-spec alloy



Top notch parts include FD brakes and Marchesini wheels



Vacuum hose connects fuel filler cap and under-slung tank



LED tail lights built into alloy saddle. Seat alone is £2000



Lock-wired sprocket is typical of GP-spec attention to detail

# ROAD TEST



Virtually open US-spec pipes will be baffled for UK roads



The mind boggles and your bum gets soaked when it rains



Top-spec, multi-adjustable shocks are by Penske



Ridid weight-saving resulted in a dry mass of just 177kg



1946cc, air-cooled V-twin good for 120bhp and 130ft/lb

**from previous**

whirl of starter cups crashing. Then the big V-twin motor barks into life. On the left side you're acutely aware of the exposed primary drive belt spinning round like a bad saw centimetres from your left face, and on the right the side-exiting exhausts haven't been baffled for UK spec yet, so you're treated to all 110 decibels of pure off-beat American thunder spitting out the pipes and pulsing against your right ankle. Think cool-riding, had-as, opened-piped chopper and that's exactly what you get with the Wraith.

Snick down into first gear, ease the clutch out and let the Confederate have it. If you slip the clutch it will wheelie in first gear, but the idea is to short-shift through the close-ratio five-speed gearbox, and make use of all that torque for maximum acceleration. Gas it hard, and the way the front suspension works, the whole bike lifts up, and with its

curved spine frame it's like the Wraith is arching its back ready to pounce.

There's a chirp of the rear Pirelli in first as it struggles against the torrent of grunt then it's a case of holding tight and trying not to get thrown off the back with the drive of acceleration and as the speeds climb up to 100kph. Up to the ton, the Confederate would easily live with a sportsbike, above that, it runs out of puff. Between gears on and off the throttle there's a strange sensation as the bike rises and falls on its suspension, like it has a hodge in the middle, but it's all good, it's just different from a conventionally suspended bike.

**'In the right conditions, the Wraith is absolutely brilliant'**



Odd looks, maybe, but Wraith's handling is up with the best

At speed you can see the double wishbones working right in front of your eyes, the two carbon fibre wing blades bobbing up and down furiously like rocker valves, which is cool. The gearbox is as smooth as they come at speed, but around town can be stiff and crude.

For cruising (road posing) the motor idles along at barely tickover, spinning, slapping and growling in a way that only a big, open-piped V-twin can. The merest whiff of throttle gets you from the reflection of one shop window to the next in a blink of an eye.

At a claimed 177kg, the Wraith is as light as a sportsbike; it has normal sized 17-inch sparnelike wheels and a racy riding position. In corners it's sure-footed, agile and flickable. The more you ride it the less strange it feels as you get used to it. The funny front end is different to a normal set-up and doesn't give the same feel, especially when turning into a corner. That first bit of lean is a bit of a leap of faith in the front tyre, but it's very sure-footed once in, impressive since the suspension is straight out of the crate.

In the right conditions, when you're in the right mood, the Wraith is absolutely brilliant. Most will use it on a sunny day for maybe a couple of hours and that'll be it. But over two days we rode it more than any owner will probably do in his lifetime and as well as enjoying the finer things of what it had to offer, it also nearly broke my spirit.

We got caught in the rain, which was misery because our bike didn't have a front mudguard (it was left off at the factory, for some reason) and the two massive slots in

the seat give you a 50mph stream as you ride along. The front brakes needed bleeding (the bike only came out of the crate days before our test as we were in a rush to get our hands on it) so I only had the compression of the big V-twin to slow me down towards the end of the test. The handlebars swivelled around in their risers after a while, forcing them even lower and making the already useless bar-end mirrors even more hopeless. And, to top it all after an excruciatingly cold, wet and painful day of riding I got home to find I'd left my keys at work so was forced to do another agonisingly painful 20-mile round trip on the A1, when all I wanted to do was curl up in a ball on my drive. It was like the Wraith had turned it to Stephen King's Christine and was destined to inflict pain on me. Finally, right at the end of the test, a nail punctured the rear tyre.

None of this is relevant or the bike's fault, because no one in their right mind would ride their Wraith in such conditions for so long. I only mention it because it's part of the mark the Wraith left on me. I loved it one minute when we could pose along and go fast in corners and hated it the next when the heavens opened and we were going straight.

Whether you should buy one is almost impossible to say. As a bike there's no way it's worth all that cash - just think of what you could buy with £52K? But as a piece of art, a slice of soul, hecker load of exclusivity and sheer pose value, if you're stinking rich it's definitely something to park next to the DeSoto RR. Just don't take it out in the rain.



With no tank to hold with you legs the Wraith takes some getting used to

**WRAITH RELATIONS**

The Confederate Motorcycle Company are probably best known recently for getting themselves back on two feet after their factory in New Orleans was destroyed by hurricane Katrina. They're now based upstate in Birmingham, Alabama in a brand new, purpose-built factory, well away from the Mississippi delta.

Founded in 1991 by businessman Matt Chambers, the company (slogan: The Art of Rebellion) is the self-proclaimed purveyor of avant-garde, high-end, hand-built motorcycles with a current line-up of two models, the B120 Wraith and the P131 Hellcat Combat (right) which MCN tested back in January.

One testament to the success of the firm is the number of Hollywood A-listers who have been tempted by their bikes. Film stars Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt both own Hellcats and

there's a rumour Cruise has a Wraith, too.

But the biggest news for us Brits is that Confederate is now, for the first time, officially available in the UK. No longer do you need to self-import from the US as Confederate UK have gone through all the hassle of paperwork and the SVA (Single Vehicle Approval) for

you. You'll also get a one-year warranty.

Incidentally, the Wraith tested here was still American spec, UK bikes will have a baffled exhaust system, the headlights reconfigured and the rear light and numberplate centralised across the rear tyre with a BMW GS-style mini-bugger.



The [slightly] more conventional Confederate P131 Hellcat

SEAT HEIGHT 770mm	FUEL 16 litres	RAKE/77 TRAIL 30°/100mm
----------------------	-------------------	-------------------------------

<b>&gt; SPECS</b>
<b>CONFEDERATE B120 WRAITH</b>
Cost: £12,560
Power (claimed): 120hp
Torque (claimed): 120kg
Weight (claimed, dry): 177kg
Availability: Dec 2008/delivery by order/delivery only
Colours: Black
New for 2008: New model
Insurance group: 8 (special arrangement with broker)
Info: www.confederateuk.com Sales: 01779 407716

<b>TECHNICAL SPEC</b>
Fuel capacity: 16 litres/Seat height: 770mm/Rake: 27°/Trail: 30.1mm/Wheelbase: 1515mm/Engine: Air-cooled, 1946cc/134.3mm/24mm-cars 42°/4-bar, 2.350rev/min/Eagle carburettor, 5.5mm-gears/Chassis: Carbon fibre/also includes main suspension frame, dual shock absorbers, fully adjustable Penske shock, fully adjustable with titanium spring, single rear Penske shock, fully adjustable with titanium spring/Brakes: 2x320mm front disc with four-piston F0 calipers, 240mm rear disc with twin-piston Brembo caliper/Tyres: 120/70s 17mm, 190/50s 17mm

## TECHWATCH

**Kevin Ash explains exactly what's going on with the Wraith's vintage-looking 'funny front end'**

**T**HE Wraith is distinguished by a variety of features, price and looks being just two of them. It also boasts an unusual design of front suspension, essentially the same as BMW's Duolever, itself pioneered by British designer Norman Hossack in the early 1990s. The suspension comprises upper and lower U-shaped arms, nearly parallel to each other, which pivot on the bike's headstock at one end and on the fork legs at the other. The result is a four-sided shape, almost rectangular although the sides aren't quite parallel, which allows the forks to move up and down. The movement is controlled by a shock absorber mounted between the lower arm and a fixed point on the headstock, so when the forks move upwards the spring is compressed.

suspension either a small amount or not at all, allowing it to deal much more effectively with bumps as it slows.

The fork legs themselves may look strange but this is simply a consequence of using carbon fibre instead of steel or aluminium. Carbon fibre can be made much lighter and stronger than its metal counterparts, but only if the design takes into account its very different properties. To be effective, carbon components need to be large, box-type structures, and that's exactly what the Wraith's forks are. The

**'The forks' looks are a consequence of using carbon fibre'**

It's a more costly system than BMW's Telelever, which uses just one pivoting wishbone, but BMW has patents on Telelever while there are none with the Hossack design as they lapsed during the 1990s. There are technical advantages too when the suspension is compressed in a Telelever system the wheel moves forward as it goes up, leading to a harsh ride at speed. With the Wraith's Duolever-type system the wheel moves slightly back improving ride quality and the ability to deal with poor surfaces. More obviously, this system can be designed to have inherent anti-dive properties, so even the most severe braking compresses the front

flattened shape means the forks are stronger longitudinally than laterally, which is as they should be for dealing with the braking forces.

The disadvantage of the system for anything with real sporting pretensions is that the unsprung weight is greater than telescopic forks, as is the steered mass. Telescopic forks are not only very compact, they carry their mass very close to the steering axis, which gives a bike better steering response. On the Wraith, the whole wishbone assembly turns with the bars and the fork legs themselves are sited well forward from the steering head, adding significant inertia to the steering system. Sell, it looks funky.

**MCN**  
**GIVE YOUR AD THE EDGE**  
**30-THEFT CHECKED**  
Reassure buyers that your bike isn't stolen - Get your bike theft checked for just £4.99  
Book now at [www.motorcyclenews.com](http://www.motorcyclenews.com)