

A workhorse of a different color

The all-new Honda Ridgeline does things utilities can't and a few things other midsize pickups don't by Joe Sage

The Honda Ridgeline has always filled a different niche in the pickup realm. The first was revealed in 2005, billed as the reinvention of the pickup. Reinvented anew for 2017, Ridgeline now fills its different niche differently—much more like a pickup truck, and a clever one, at that.

The modern pickup has been reinvented before—Ford Ranchero, Chevy El Camino, Subaru Brat, Chevy Avalanche, Cadillac Escalade. From B- or C-pillar forward, they are virtually indistinguishable from the car or SUV they derived from, while in the back is a bit of an open pickup bed.

As with gen one, the second-generation Honda Ridgeline shares fundamentals with the seven- or eight-passenger Honda Pilot SUV, which itself had entered a new generation (its third) for 2016. We

welcomed the Pilot's restyling, less chunky than its predecessor—nicer on a crossover, but less trucklike—and wondered how it would translate to the Ridgeline, which would inevitably follow.

Here it is, and it's a beauty, trucklike or not.

Unlike a traditional pickup with separate cab and bed on a ladder frame, Ridgeline is unit-body-built, enhancing aerodynamics. Lacking the rigidity of a full-cabin SUV, the gen-one Ridgeline added strength with a full-blown buttress structure from cab to bed (somewhat like Avalanche and Escalade). The new Ridgeline uses ultra-high-strength hot-stamped steel, aluminum and magnesium, with fully boxed frame members for body sides and tailgate. An unobtrusive high-strength hoop surrounding the rear edge of the cab and connect-

ing to the bed also plays a role. It all adds up to a 28 percent more rigid chassis, for handling, safety, ride comfort and better fuel efficiency.

Ridgeline rides on fully independent front and rear suspension with reactive dampers and has earned the highest 5-Star NHTSA crash rating.

We first drove the new Honda Ridgeline off-road at the highly competitive Texas Truck Rodeo, on the full off-road course, where the toughest pickups and utilities compete. They wouldn't designate it for that unless they knew it could meet or beat every challenge, and it did.

We then drove it for a week back home in Arizona. It's well known that a lot of people buy pickups without any strict, traditional need for them, and in fact sales are on the upswing. The new



Ridgeline feels like a crossover and provides a very enjoyable daily drive, with 70 percent of the inside utility of the Honda Pilot and a thousand percent of the outside utility, by virtue of its bed.

The interior is much like the Pilot, ours with leather seats, 8-inch touchscreen with Apple/Android, clean and intuitive controls, and some of the best backup and surround cameras in the business. You buy the Ridgeline instead of the Pilot for its bed. And here, a great deal of extra attention has been paid to design and execution. Of note are its outdoor audio system, power outlet, in-bed trunk, large flat load surface and tailgate.

The audio system won Best Technology Award at the Texas Truck Rodeo. No need to crank up the tunes and leave the doors open at the barbecue—top trims get 540-watt audio with six weather-proof audio exciters, two each in the bed side and rear walls. Their resonance turns the bed walls into speakers, controlled via the head unit inside.

A 400-watt AC power outlet is also built in.

Ridgeline's weather-tight 7.3 cu.ft. locking in-bed trunk is perfect for travel, projects, golf bags and coolers and includes removable dividers, bag hooks and a drain plug for washing it out. It also contains the jack, tools and spare.

The bed in the Ridgeline is not eight feet long, as in the biggest pickups, but unlike midsize pickups, it's over four feet wide—flat. For carrying building materials, professionally or for weekend projects, this is indispensable and quite a coup.

Ridgeline's dual-action tailgate can drop down flat for extended loads or open like a door.

A Class III tow hitch and high-capacity radiator are standard. AWD models add a heavy-duty transmission cooler and 7-pin wiring harness and can tow 5000 pounds. 2WD models tow 3500 pounds. The hitch also doubles as an attachment point for a Honda accessory bicycle rack.

The original Ridgeline turned heads and generated questions. The new one did the same all week, but with a clear layer of buyer's lust added. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

BODY/CHASSIS...integrated closed-box frame with unit-body construction; seats 5
ENGINE ...3.5L SOHC 24v I-VTEC direct inj V6
DRIVETRAIN...AWD (FWD avail lower trims)
HP/TORQUE280 hp / 262 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION6-spd auto
SUSPENSION: F: MacPherson strut; R: multi-link; stabilizers: F: 25mm solid, R: 26.5 tubular
STEERING...motion-adapt elec rack & pinion
BRAKESF: 12.6 vented / R: 13.0 solid disc
WHEELS/TIRES ...18x8 machine-finished alloy
TIRES.....245/60 R18 / compact spare
LNTH/WB/TURN CIRC210.0" / 125.2" / 44.4'
BED WIDTH.....50" wheel wells, 60" bed walls
BED LENGTH...64.0" / 83.0" (tailgate up/down)
IN-BED TRUNK7.3 cu.ft
APPRCH/BRKVR/DEPART ...20.1° / 19.6° / 22.1°
WEIGHT(RLT-E AWD) 4515 lb
PAYLOAD / TOW CAPACITY.....1499 lb / 5000 lb
MPG.....18/25/21 (city/hwy/comb)

INCLUDES: Leather, 8-spkr premium audio, 8-in touchscreen, nav, rear camera, 4.2-in multi-info display, Apple/Android, next-gen HondaLink, tri-zone climate, keyless, heated seats, power rear window, power moonroof, front/rear park sensors, traction mgmt, fog lights, remote start, more

BASE PRICE.....\$41,370
DESTINATION CHARGE.....900
TOTAL.....\$42,270

