

# Con más fuerza

Bolder, tougher build evokes Baja runs by Joe Sage

We feel quite familiar with Honda Ridgeline, though as we look back, we've had it here only three times—for a quick presentation drive in 2005 and a week each in 2017 and 2021. We have, however, driven it in various comparos for their typical 20-30 intense minutes each. And yet, it has made a big impression, as it may have for you, too.

When Ridgeline was introduced, it was a bit of an odd man out. But by now, the midsize pickup segment is chock full of innovative builds, utility mixes and other variants, all of which raise its own profile. And it has also become more pickuqlike.

A significant thing on Ridgeline's structural engineering (variously shared over time with Acura MDX, Honda Odyssey minivan and Honda Pilot, its closest visual twin)—the L-shaped pickup profile has to be specifically addressed. Without the upper structure of an SUV's full roof, nor the free flexing of a separate cab and bed on a frame (even tiny Japanese pickups 40-50 years ago had this),

the stresses where bed meets cab are immense. On the gen-one Ridgeline (from 2006), this was addressed with a dominant triangulated buttress from the cab to the sides of the bed (itself also sloping and angular—styling in response to engineering demands), for a body like one solid ingot. On gen-two (since 2017), any such treatment is gone, or at least not visible, as it now bears a more traditional pickup profile. (A light vertical seam where cab seems to meet bed is basically cosmetic.) The vehicle now extensively uses high-strength steel, the C-pillar (rear cab wall) is particularly strengthened,

and the platform is a "three-bone" design—a unibody with integrated frame. The emphasis of this approach is on SUV-like rigidity, not flexibility.

And it has gone on to prove itself. We've driven plenty of SUVs in extreme conditions, anyway, and we keenly noted Ridgeline's growing list of entries—and category wins—in Baja off-road racing. So in 2021 we took one into rough terrain, loose surfaces and climbs northwest of Phoenix, a couple of months after a few of its Baja runs—confirming it is certainly up to the task and dubbing it "the exception that redefines the rules."

Strengthening Ridgeline's truck credentials further is the new TrailSport version, with most specs unchanged, but adding off-road-tuned suspension,



Gen 1 (2006)



Gen 2 (2017)



Baja wins (2021)

steel underbody protection, an even more rugged mesh grille, all-terrain tires, and sand, snow, mud and paved modes atop its normal drive and sport options (plus a button for eco), plus upgraded cab-in tech. In a current four-trim lineup from \$39,750 to \$46,350, TrailSport is next-to-top at \$44,980.

The Ridgeline TrailSport's two areas of intent—trail and sport—are delivered in moderate ways. In town, it is useful and very drivable, with nice

steering and handling in a convenient size. Even with its solid suspension, we passed smoothly over parking lot speed bumps. Handling was precise on freeway ramps and flyovers. Our dirt time was fairly minimal, as yours may or may not be.

We did play with its two traditional drive options—Sport or normal (the D in D/S in the shift area—but without the off-pavement mode added. Sport seemed to make the suspension and steering a little too lively while running errands, but will be worth a try on a long, open road.

Honda Ridgeline was originally conceived not so much to take on the pickup market as to add a new type of activity vehicle. As it evolves, Ridgeline is still, to a degree, a bit of both. But as the midsize pickup market has grown and diversified, it increasingly finds a home within it. ■

*From bones to beauty to brawn, Honda Ridgeline was stated at birth as being intended not so much to tackle established pickups, rather simply to give any Honda owners who might be considering adding a pickup a chance to stick with their favorite brand in a "two-Honda garage." Ridgeline continues to get more trucklike, giving it a solid position in an ever more varied midsize pickup world. Front styling has evolved accordingly.*



## SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Lincoln, Alabama
ENGINE/TRANS BUILD	USA / USA
PARTS CONTENT	US/Canada 70%
ENGINE	3.5L V6, SOHC 24v i-VTEC, variable cylinder mgmt (VCM), high capacity radiator w 2 high power fans
HP/TORQUE	280 hp / 262 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	11.5:1
TRANSMISSION	9-spd auto, shift by wire, paddles, heavy duty transmission cooler
DRIVETRAIN	AWD Intelligent Variable Torque Mgmt (i-VTM4)
MODES	(Intelligent Traction Mgmt): normal, snow, sand, mud
SUSPENSION	F: MacPherson strut, 25.0 solid stblzr bar; R: multi-link, 26.5x4.5 tubular stblzr bar
STEERING	elec power asst rack & pinion
BRAKES	F: 12.6 vented, R: 13.0 solid
WHEELS	18-in Pewter Gray machine-fin alloy
TIRES	245 / 60R18 105T all-terrain
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	210.2 / 125.2 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	7.64 in
APPR / BRKOVER / DEPART	20.4 / 19.6 / 19.6°
TURNING CIRCLE	43.4 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	39.5 / 38.8 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	40.9 / 36.7 in
BED LENGTH	64.0 in (5 ft 4 in)
BED WIDTH	at wheel wells 50.0; walls 60.0 in
CARGO CAPACITY	In-Bed Trunk 7.3 cu.ft 2nd row underseat storage 2.9 cu.ft
WEIGHT	4495 lb
TOW CAPACITY	5000 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	reg unl / 19.5 gal
MPG	18/23/20 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	<b>\$44,980</b>
PAINT: Radiant Red Metallic	455
DESTINATION CHARGE	1395
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$46,830</b>

## 2024 HONDA RIDGELINE LINEUP

Sport	\$39,750
RTL	42,580
TrailSport	44,980
Black Edition	46,350

**THE SHIFTER:** Honda's electronic shift interface is not our favorite—a set of rectangles, circles and trapezoids that you variously push or pull. It is potentially very distracting, even in regular use, but seems especially so for a stand-in driver—say a sober teen, or a golfing or camping buddy, called upon to take the wheel for a safe ride home or emergency run to the ER.