

Road Beat: Honda Ridgeline almost all new in '17



Honda Ridgeline 2017 is worth the wait. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Starting in model year 2006, the first-generation Honda Ridgeline enjoyed a long nine-year run through 2014 to be replaced by an almost entirely new vehicle in model year 2017. There was no 2015 or 2016 model. This new second generation 2017 Ridgeline was unveiled in January 2016 and production commenced in May of this year. Was it worth the wait? You bet it was and you can take that to the bank.

Almost everything is new, even more that 50 percent of the chassis is all new, something not usually done in American trucks. First the new truck while based on the new Pilot as

was the old Ridgeline, has a new curvaceous, smoother, more purposeful body. It is now a great looking ride, not like the three, distinct box design of the prior Ridgeline. Everything about this new Ridgeline is integrated with lines flowing throughout the body. It looks slicker and it is with a 15 percent reduction in coefficient of drag and an overall 18 percent reduction in vehicle running resistance.

Wheelbase is up three inches to 125 inches and overall length at 210 inches has grown by the same amount. It still stands 71 inches tall but it is a bit wider by almost an inch, now a broad shouldered 78.6 inches. Track is still a super wide 66 inches.

Finally, while lighter by about 100 (down to 4,431) pounds, the new Ridgeline through the use of more advanced materials is stronger with a 28 percent increase in torsional rigidity and tighter sealing, meaning a much quieter ride, improved handling and more comfort. But we are just beginning here.

Under the hood is essentially the same slightly undersquare 3.5L V-6 engine, but with plenty of changes. First and most important is direct injection which increases engine output and fuel economy simultaneously. It has other changes in variable cylinder management cylinder deactivation (running on less than six cylinders), drive by wire and a new, higher 11.5:1 compression ratio (up a point and a half). The bottom line is now 280 hp at 6,000 rpm and 262 pounds of peak twist at 4,700 rpm, up by 30 hp and 15 pounds respectively. Also new is a six-speeder auto cog swapper replacing the older five speed unit, helping both performance and fuel economy. It's a smoothie, but it hunts a bit.



Specifications

Engine

3.5L SOHC, 24 valve, direct injected V-6 280 hp @ 6,000 rpm

262 lb.-ft. of torque @ 4,700 rpm

Redline 6,800 rpm

Transmission

Six-speed torque converter auto transmission

Configuration

Transverse mounted front engine/FWD/AWD

Dimensions

Wheelbase 125.2 inches

Length 210.0 inches

Width 78.6 inches

Height 70.8 inches

Track (f/r) 66.0/66.1 inches

Ground clearance 7.3 inches

Fuel capacity 19.5 gallons

Weight (FWD/AWD) 4,242/4,431

Weight Distribution
57.6/42.4

Max payload 1,584 pounds

GVWR 6,015 pounds

Bed Length 64.0 inches

Wheels 18X8 inch Alloys

Tires 245/60X18
Steering lock to lock 3.0
turns
Turning circle 40.8 feet
Tow capacity (FWD/AWD)
3,500/5,000 pounds
Performance 0-60 mph 6.65
seconds
50-70 mph 3.55 seconds
50-70 mph uphill 5.06
seconds
Top speed Does anyone care,
but way beyond sane
Fuel economy EPA rated (AWD)
at 18/25/21
city/highway/combined.
Expect 26 mpg in rural
suburban driving

As to straight line performance 0-60 mph arrives in an average of 6.65 seconds, which makes the Ridgeline the quickest by far of all mid-size pickups. Passing performance backs up that number with a 50-70 mph run in just 3.55 seconds and up a steep grade (6-7 percent) only slows that time to 5.06 seconds. Throttle response is strong and linear. In comparison to the prior generation Ridgeline, the numbers were 7.73, 4.28 and 6.36 seconds respectively. Honda claims a 1.8 second improvement in 0-60 mph times. If I would have got that kind of improvement, the new Ridgeline would have accomplished the benchmark in under six seconds. The old Ridgeline wasn't that slow and the new Ridgeline is really quick.

With all that performance, you would think it would suck gas like a full-size pickup, but it doesn't. Where other mid-size trucks get similar fuel economy to their larger full size brethren, maybe an mpg better, this Ridgeline actually gets significantly better fuel economy. Rated by the EPA at

18/25/21 mpg city/highway/combined, the Ridgeline averaged 25.2 mpg in 385 miles of testing which included all kinds of driving with very little time spent on the freeway except for its highway fuel economy test at 70 mph in which the Ridgeline averaged 31.6 mpg! Amazing for an AWD pickup. But the improvement in fuel economy becomes more dramatic when compared to the prior generation which averaged only 16.8 mpg overall and just 22.5 mpg on the highway. That's a 9-mpg pick up (no pun intended)!

In a round trip to South Lake Tahoe and back to Placerville the Ridgeline averaged 28.2 mpg and on the way up the western slope to Echo Summit of 7,382 feet it averaged 20.5 mpg during its 5,500-foot ascent. Tell Honda engineers to release the emergency brake during fuel economy testing because it seemed to average 4 to 6 mpg better than the window sticker. Fuel capacity is down a couple of gallons to 19.5.

Handling is excellent, especially considering what the Ridgeline is. It has great credentials, super wide track as mentioned above, a reasonably quick electric power steering rack (three turns lock to lock), four-wheel state of the art independent suspension, coils in all four corners, stab bars at both ends and both the front and rear systems all mounted to subframes to a rigid chassis. Wheels are 18 x 8 inches shod with 245/60 series rubber exclusive to the Ridgeline. All this adds up to agile handling with some understeer. It certainly doesn't handle like other pickups, especially full size units. Ridgeline handles much better, like a tightened up full sized sedan. Turning circle for the Honda is just under 41 feet.

Ride quality is also car like. No rear end skipping out during cornering in the bumps. No jarring over deep, large potholes. No jiggling, even on smooth roads, as in other small pickups. Just a smooth compliant ride which probably mirrors the new generation Pilot. It is quiet on the road except for coarse roads when some tire noise intercedes. The engine spins just under 2,000 rpm at 70 mph and the cabin remains a place for

introspection and solitude or maybe some good, old fashion rock or country. It is a nice place to spend time.

Safety is second to none with about every acronym ever thought of, including blind spot detection, rear cross traffic monitoring, rear camera and more. Large disc brakes over a foot in diameter with ABS, etc., are strong. LED headlights are fantastic. Of course, there are a plethora of airbags.

We are not done yet and maybe I left the best for last, the interior. The front chairs are the best ever encountered in a pickup. The shape and form densities are perfect for my average body and passengers who rode shotgun agreed as to their remarkable comfort. In my loaded Black Edition, both front seats were powered. Rear seating is almost as comfortable and roomy. I recently spent some significant time in an Avalanche which is a Suburban based vehicle now out of production, but I would rather spend time in the second row of the Ridge line. Seats are better and there is more room. That's saying something.

Instrumentation is complete with a big tach and speedo flanking an info/trip computer center. Not fancy or like a NASA inspired cockpit, but very nice and extremely legible and useable nonetheless. The center stack is reasonably easy to use but I prefer actual buttons as opposed to a touch screen system which the Ridgeline has. A very minor deficiency.

Finally, we get to the huge cargo bed. While only 64 inches long plus the tailgate, it is deep (17 inches) and almost as wide as it is long (60 inches wide) with a scuff proof liner. It is well done and there still is the huge hidden compartment below the cargo floor. Perhaps, a consequence of that is a rubber donut spare tire, but how many times have you used a spare tire in your lifetime? Tires today are almost bullet proof.

Pricing starts for a base RT 2WD model at \$29,475. My fully

loaded Black Edition AWD steps that number up to \$42,870 plus \$900 for the train/truck from its Lincoln, Ala., assembly plant. This is a fantastically versatile motor vehicle. If I had one I could sell my F-150 4X4 and RX8. For my kind of driving it would be perfect plus 25 plus mpg. This vehicle does it all and checks all the right boxes. It is by far the best non-full size pickup on the market. Its only real limiting factor is a 5,000-pound tow capacity, which it should do with ease meaning at least nice 22-foot day cruiser or a two-horse trailer, but no three horse or bigger goosenecks, leave those to the diesel duallys. This is my third Honda I have tested in three months (one was an Acura TLX, no offense) and all three were very impressive motor vehicles. Honda has really got it together.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.