

## 2004 HONDA Valkyrie Rune



*Tracing the path  
to this wild  
showcase of styling  
and engineering*

No manufacturer, including Honda, has ever constructed a motorcycle like the Valkyrie Rune. The conceptual forces driving the shape and face of the Rune were pure flights of imagination, a designer's dream come true. Unfettered by budget or engineering restraints, Honda's R&D group was free to push past conventional boundaries, taking the Rune squarely into uncharted territory. The result is the amazing machine you see

here, street legal and available for sale. A stylish and strong diamond-shape aluminum frame stretches over a massive 68.9-inch wheelbase, the longest in Honda history. The largest disc brakes fitted to a production Honda motorcycle can be found at both ends—dual 330mm discs up front, with a 336mm unit in back—and they are integrated by Honda's Combined Brake System. Then there's the Rune's innovative suspension system, a trailing bottom-link

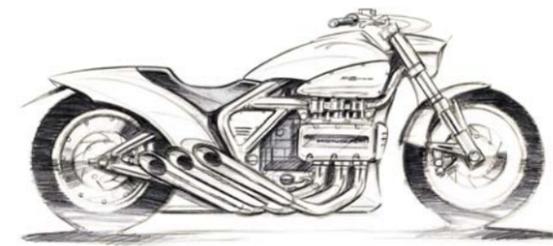
fork in front, and single-shock Unit Pro-Link rear system that first saw action in the MotoGP wars.

This innovative chassis wraps around a muscular 1832cc six-cylinder engine that's been hot-rodded for serious road work, and rigid mounted to help impart a direct mechanical feel, and complement the Rune's solid handling manners. Throw in an exquisite seamless 6.2-gallon fuel tank, ultra-low seat, a choice between two

handlebar options, flush-mounted LED taillights, plus a unique remote steering lock that unlocks automatically when you turn the key on, and you know without a doubt you've got your hands on something special indeed.

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CONCEPT SKETCH



ZODIA CONCEPT



T1: CONCEPT TYPE 1



T2: CONCEPT TYPE 2



T3: CONCEPT TYPE 3



T4: CONCEPT TYPE 4



### DEEP ROOTS RUN TRUE

For all its innovation, however, the roots of the Rune can be traced back to earlier designs and models in the Honda arsenal. In conceptual terms, much of the Rune's spirit was inspired by the Zodia, a stunningly gorgeous concept cruiser first unveiled at the Tokyo Motor Show in 1995.

Beyond its sensuous lines, the Zodia also brought a host of forward-thinking engineering concepts into the spotlight, and more than a few of the most prominent elements have now become reality in the Rune. Trailing-link front suspension. Single-side swingarm. Prominent custom wheels. The Zodia was a harbinger of all this and more.

In 1996, Honda unfurled another stunning flight of fancy, but in this case it was a genuine hands-on production model with a commanding presence: the six-cylinder Valkyrie, the first genuine OEM power cruiser. Boasting a hot-rodded 1520cc engine derived from the legendary GL1500 Gold Wing, the first Valkyrie demolished existing performance standards by churning out more than 100 hp and 100 lb-ft of torque—right off the showroom floor! The Valkyrie's modern hot-rod custom styling, confident handling and startling acceleration placed this breakthrough motorcycle in a class of its own.

### ART BECOMES REALITY

The strong response to the Valkyrie inspired exploration into new spheres of design, all revolving around the horizontally opposed six-cylinder engine. What new designs could these creative minds dream up, given enough latitude? Three years after the Zodia, Honda revealed another concept machine, T1, based on the Gold Wing's horizontally opposed six cylinder engine. This would be followed by three more concept bikes in the T-series, each seemingly more radical than the previous one. While all four began as Honda Research America (HRA) ideas and sketches, outside sources—including a master fabricator not connected with motorcycling in any way—were also tapped to push the boundaries of design beyond the usual limits. All the T-series concept bikes were shown to the public, and Honda carefully gauged public reaction. Of the four, T2 clearly triggered the most response. In fact, so strong was

public opinion, saying Honda should build a motorcycle exactly like T2, that this perspective became the core objective of the Rune. Not surprisingly, the Rune and its T2 concept forebear are nearly identical.

### MASANORI AOKI, ENGINEER

As Large Project Leader on the Valkyrie Rune, Masanori Aoki was challenged to make a personal and professional odyssey of sorts. Originally a specialist in Honda sport bikes, Aoki brought to bear related high-performance tricks of the trade while designing the new-generation Gold Wing, the GL1800, which incorporated more sporting appeal and ability than most people may have expected.

Armed with an intimate knowledge of F6 design and production, Aoki was called upon to work his engineering magic once more with the Rune. He reveals much of the process in this Q&A:

*Usually new models begin with an engineering design, but the Valkyrie Rune was created from a prototype model. Has Honda ever done this before?*

**AOKI:** There were some production machines that started with styling models, but the Rune is the first model that reproduced the original design fully and faithfully.

*I thought it would be impossible to mass-produce the product without changing the styling design. It was just too radical. As an engineer I thought the process was completely backward; we've never seen anything like this before.*

*What other vehicles did the T2 remind you of?*

**AOKI:** Because the Rune/T2 mock-up is a new design with a full measure of originality, no other motorcycles come to my mind. When I think about automobiles, however, it brings the images of American cars from the 1940s and 1950s.

*With the sport bikes you've worked on and even the GL1800, you probably began the projects with a certain engineering mindset. How did you approach the Rune assignment, which was styling oriented above all?*

**AOKI:** Since there were no distinct function or performance goals that had to be met, we were free to focus on capturing the styling and design from the mock-up. That included all elements such as the location

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of the front and rear tires, and the location, position and dimension of the engine. To that end, we had to spend a significant amount of time creating a clay model to maintain the original design. Also, we had to incorporate 11 new technological and production methods to achieve our goals—that's a significant amount of new production technology.

*Was it easy for you to relate to the Rune/T2 from the start, or did you have a time when you finally embraced the concept in full?*

**AOKI:** Honestly speaking, when I first saw the T2, I said to myself, "Are we really going to produce a motorcycle like this?" It was pretty wild looking. But when I attended the *Cycle World* motorcycle show held in Long Beach and saw the reaction from the customers on a first-hand basis, I completely grasped the concept. We were hoping that the T1 mock-up would be most popular because new-model development had already begun based on the T1. Frankly speaking, people at the show who saw the T2 mock-up expressed a most unusual degree of excitement. In fact, the customer response was so strong it was difficult for many Japanese to understand such enthusiasm. The T2 was nearly four times more popular than any of the other designs—far and away the overwhelming favorite. I remember how one person even said, "I will bring \$30,000 in cash, so please sell it to me right away."

**Masanori Aoki**



**Ray Blank**



*How did your GL1800 experience help with the Rune?*

**AOKI:** During the development time I spent in preparation for the GL1800, I learned how Americans enjoy riding motorcycles. The Rune has similar aspects such as "enjoying the appearance" and "enjoying the exhaust sound" besides the more measurable aspects of a motorcycle such as accelerating, stopping and going around curves.

#### **RAY BLANK—A VIEW FROM THE TOP**

As VP of the Motorcycle Division at American Honda, Ray Blank carries a full load of responsibilities. However, there are those special occasions when he can revert to being a motorcycle enthusiast, plain and simple. And the decision to move forward with the Rune was such an occasion, one that used as much heart for motorcycles as business foresight. Here, Ray fills us in on some of the decisions and details that made the Rune a reality.

*How did the idea of producing the Rune originate?*

We were looking to take the original Valkyrie to the next level. When it was first introduced, this bike, which had been derived from the 1520cc Gold Wing, had a significant impact on the motorcycle market. The Valkyrie was the first genuine power cruiser, a custom-styled motorcycle that had plenty of muscle, great handling and long-distance touring abilities to go along with its good looks. It really expanded the notion of what a cruiser's functional capabilities could encompass, and in doing so the Valkyrie built an unusually strong following. So we wanted to extend this concept once again and take another cutting-edge motorcycle into uncharted territory, establishing new directions

that no other manufacturer had ever attempted. We wanted to set the bar higher than ever, erecting standards that no one else had yet imagined, while also exploding old limitations on what an original equipment manufacturer could mass produce.

*Were there any precursors that contributed to the Rune's design?*

Yes, of course. When our R&D department develops concept models, everyone within the company looks these things over very carefully, and the enthusiast within every person naturally tends to pick favorite elements and models. It's the same kind of reaction all motorcyclists experience when viewing a cool concept bike, but we can add the caveat-sometimes-of, "What if."

*What was the result of the concept work?*

The design that HRA called T2 proved to be a truly exceptional accomplishment. There was a strong positive reaction from within Honda circles. We then revealed T2 to the public, and their reaction was the same. The most amazing thing about this reaction was the overwhelming consensus from all parties that the entire T2 design should be retained as a whole; it wasn't just a few parts that struck people's emotions, it was the entire bike. So we decided to preserve the design intact through production. You have to remember that Honda's greatest strength is its engineering ability. Function, horsepower, performance, durability—a lot of very measurable qualities. But now here we were, championing the production of what was essentially a one-off custom special, a show bike with a whole set of gut-level aesthetic qualities that are impossible to measure. The Rune concept is extremely extravagant, because it places the highest priorities on style rather than measurable science and engineering, and that created challenges during product planning. It is a very emotional product. But when a gut feeling is so

strong, avid motorcyclists can communicate with one another on a different level. We accomplished a lot on this new concept after hours, at restaurants, just motorcycle guys talking to each other, scribbling on napkins, waving our hands around.

*What was it that finally clinched the idea of producing the Rune?*

A lot of people looked at the T2 and said, "Great bike, but it could never be produced." That's the kind of challenge that fueled this project. Honda has a long history of building improbable machines, and making them successful. The CB750, the Gold Wing, the RC211V—there is nothing conventional about these machines, and building them expanded Honda's capabilities. The Rune expands our capability in yet another direction, blurring the line between concept and reality, and pushing our production capabilities to new levels. In the end, that's what makes the Rune unique beyond its elegant design and styling.

#### **MODELS, COLORS, PRICES**

The Valkyrie Rune is available with Spec47 Wheels for \$24,499, or with Chrome Wheels for \$26,999.

Either version is available in three colors: Double Clear-Coat Black, Illusion Blue, or Candy Black Cherry. ■

