

Though far from our first encounter, this one seems to have intrigued us anew, as we had pages of notes on features and interfaces, format and purpose, power and precision. It made an impression, and its lasting impression is good.

The midsize-to-compact pickup market has expanded exponentially. Competing with conventional cab-bed-body-on-frame trucks, others are reinventing the concept—some derived from SUV siblings, some clean-sheet designs—revisiting the basics of build and utility.

For a lot of people, Ridgeline may in fact work as an SUV, but one with another great trick. And even the diehard pickup buyer's profile is starting to expand and redefine itself around the edges.

Honda Ridgeline is the key pioneer of this "alt-pickup" direction, a unibody closely related to the

Honda Passport SUV. (While forgoing a long roof requires adding strength by other means—the first Ridgeline bearing notable triangulation from rear of cab to bed and beyond—remarkable engineering now accomplishes this internally, delivering a conventional pickup shape.)

The proof is in the field. Off-road, Ridgeline has all the same strengths and attributes that have had Honda's SUVs run as Baja champions.

Refreshed in 2024, the new TrailSport trim was also added, with certain more rugged styling cues, better dirt capability with off-road tuned suspension, steel underbody protection and all-terrain tires. In most other key areas, Ridgeline has the same specs across the lineup—same 280-hp 3.5L V6 engine, high-capacity cooling, drive modes, 5,000-lb towing, even ground clearance. Weight is

very close on all, though TrailSport takes a small ding in MPG (one point each highway, combined).

The biggest difference in the TrailSport is in its attitude—telegraphing a taste for sporty trail-running, not as a major rock-crawler, but in line with its Baja off-road competition credentials.

Notable features lineup-wide include a huge console bin; a moonroof (on all but base trim), all the better for having an opaque cover, as we had this in summer; and an unconventional shifter that is far from intuitive, as is the parking brake. Full-time owners will adjust to these.

As a lesson in relativity (that you, too, may have on a first test drive), we came to this straight from a high-performance car with very tight brakes, drivetrain, steering and handling, as well as lively power. Thus our Ridgeline notes at first reflected

perceived deficits in these. However, as the week went on, our perception of all of these rose notably. We did generally wish it had about 20 more horsepower (300 is a common aspirational point, and this smallish truck does weigh 4,495 pounds).

Those Baja wins are a completely different animal from daily driving. More than just the roads, speed and competition, it's that all-out pedal-to-metal power, use of brakes and steering nothing like in town, and power really to optimize and stay there. A great credential, racing is not necessarily always a benchmark for the daily drive. Then again, it's always a good foundation for engineering.

We've had Ridgelines in our local fleet before, and we've also driven them in multiple regional off-pavement comparos with extreme conditions, where they have always done well. This time, we cruised dirt roads at decent speeds, figuring this would tap its high capacity cooling, knowing TrailSport does not add additional ground clearance,

overall concluding it's more of a dirt trail-runner than a rock-crawler. And as with prior experience, it's quite good at this, much the same as its SUV equivalent. Back on our twisty, climbing four-lane highway after our session, we were equally satisfied with its power and handling.

Ridgeline comes to you in a convenient package and size. It's somewhat of a Transformer—easy to maneuver in tight parking, like a smaller crossover, then a load-carrying, dirt-running pickup when you need it, the rest of the time transparently all-purpose. This is where a lot of pickup buyers may face how realistic they want to be with themselves about their actual specific needs versus emotions, fun quotients, personality and other less tangible (but equally defensible) factors. Even as longtime conventional pickup owners, Honda Ridgeline puts a smile on our face every time we walk out to it and puts a smile on our face when we drive it. As they say at Circle K, what else do you need? ■

READY FOR ANYTHING

BY JOE SAGE



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY.....	Lincoln, Alabama
ENGINE/TRANS BUILD.....	USA / USA
PARTS CONTENT.....	US/Canada 75%
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.....	off-road tuned:
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.....	TrailSport 18-in Pewter Gray 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.....	\$45,380
PAINT: Diffused Sky Pearl.....	455
DESTINATION CHARGE.....	1395

TOTAL.....\$47,230

Note: sticker price varies from info below.

2025 HONDA RIDGELINE LINEUP

Sport.....	\$40,150
RTL.....	42,980
TrailSport.....	▼ 44,380
Black Edition.....	46,750

ALT-PICKUP POSITIONING

Among the most obvious unibody pickups (at least one not using a different term for its form), Ridgeline has the longest and arguably most useful bed. Providing 50 flat inches between wheel wells means you can stack 4-foot-wide building materials meaningfully at bed level (with tailgate down). None, of course, have an 8-foot bed, but then neither do the midsize body-on-frame pickups nor any but a very few special-niche big pickups (generally the very simplest utilitarians or the biggest duallies).