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Mazda's big gamble Can the second-gen CX-9 compete with no third-row seat? PAGE 3

#### **TEST DRIVE**

# Ridgeline Redux 2017 Honda Ridgeline

DAN LYONS | text Special to the Times Union

Mall trucks used to be a big deal in the U.S. At the end of the last century, while computer consultants were busy cashing in on Y2K paranoia, consumers were snapping up plenty of compact pickups.

The Ford Ranger led the way, notching nearly 350,000 sales in 1999. Ten years later, Ranger sales had slumped to 55,000 units. The cooling of the small pick-up segment was traceable to two sources. Fuel economy of six-cylinder, full-size trucks had grown to rival that of the (underachieving) smaller trucks. At that point,

### 2017 Honda Ridgeline

MSRP: \$29,475 (RT FWD) - \$44,870 (Black AWD) As Tested: \$42,270 (RTL-E AWD)

the larger truck's greater functionality tipped the scales, and paved the way to a downhill run. By 2012, Ford ceased production of Ranger — an unthinkable concept just a few years earlier.

These days, small pickups are more specialized, with the top-selling model (Toyota Tacoma) known more for its off-road prowess than its traditional, truck traits. The market is substantially smaller, too. Consider that Honda's estimate for total sales (theirs and everybody else's) in this segment for 2016 is 350,000 units — the same number of Rangers that Ford sold in 1999.

Honda introduced its Ridgeline compact pickup in 2006, and it ran (largely unchanged) through 2014,





**HONDA'S RIDGELINE PICKUP** is back for 2017 and fully redesigned. In addition to a full, 50-inch wide bed, the Ridgeline holds a trunk below deck (left) that's big enough for a golf bag or oversized cooler.

when production ceased. The truck's unorthodox styling (as if it was designed from a pickup's job description, without ever having seen one) remained the same throughout its long, first generation. Ridgeline is back for 2017 and fully redesigned

for 2017 and fully redesigned. Three inches longer and slightly wider than the former version, Ridgeline 2.0 is decidedly more truck-like this time 'round, with a steeply-raked windshield, bigger (18-inch) rims and a lower profile for the box. down (like a tailgate). The only miss here is the lack of a rotary damper (a la Toyota), so if you don't hold it, it drops hard. There's 50 inches between the wheel wells, and 63"/70" of bed length (tailgate raised/lowered);

Beyond updating the styling, it's clear that Honda has focused on maximizing Ridgeline's functionality.

PROGRAM

enough room for the traditional 4'x8' sheets of building materials to lay flat.

A substantial trunk lies below the deck. The lockable space is large enough to swallow a golf bag or an oversize, 82-quart cooler. You have to unload the

Beyond updating the styling, it's clear that Honda has focused on maximizing Ridgeline's functionality. Starting in the box, Honda takes a cue from an old school station wagon design — the dual action tailgate. The gate can be either swung wide (like a door) or lowered back half of the pickup box to reach the spare tire. If you're full up and you get a flat, this won't improve your mood.

Ridgeline has a single (crew cab) body style, with four

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Continued on page 2

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