

Ford, Chevy think small

Subcompact SUVs in the pipeline

PAGE 2



Spring has sprung

Local automotive events start thawing out.

PAGE 3



Will Bronco blow its top?

PAGE 2



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PAGE 3

TEST DRIVE

Ridgeline, Revisited

2019 Honda Ridgeline

DAN LYONS | text
Special to the Times Union

The mid-size pickup market is due for a shakeup. The players have remained the same for some time now, but that's about to change. This year will see the introduction of two new models, with two old names — Ford Ranger and Jeep Gladiator.

Those brands already in the segment can view the expansion in one of two ways. Either it's more competition, or it signals a rising tide that will lift all boats (or, you know, pickups).

Honda's Ridgeline entered the market in 2006. Production of the first generation ran relatively unchanged until 2014, when the model was withdrawn from the lineup. It returned — fully redesigned — in 2017, and year two of Gen 2 for the Honda pickup brings few changes.

Ridgeline's MSRP range is \$29,990-\$44,395. The base, RT is front-wheel-drive only, while the top two trims (RTL-E and Black Edition) are equipped with standard all-wheel-drive. All models in between (Sport,



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER

2019 Honda Ridgeline

MSRP: \$29,990 (RT/FWD); \$44,870 (Black Edition/AWD); As Tested: \$42,915 (RTL-E/AWD)

RTL, RTL-T), can swap their FWD for AWD for an additional \$1,900. My test drive truck was an RTL-E, with an as-delivered price tag of \$42,915.

Though there's just one engine/transmission offered, it's hard to argue with. Honda's 3.5L V-6 engine is rated at 280 horsepower (@ 6,000 rpm) and 262 lb.-ft. of torque (@ 4,700 rpm). That's quite a power boost over

the previous generation Ridgeline (+30 and +15, respectively) and it feels right-sized in this truck. Lively off the line, it has power to pass, and it's unstressed at highway speeds. At 65 mph, the engine is turning just 1,800 rpm. That's with a six-speed automatic transmission, when eight and 10 speeds are becoming more common, proof that the number of gears is less important than how they're spaced.

If you plan on towing the occasional trailer, the ratings for FWD and AWD Ridgelines are markedly different — 3,500 lb. with the former, 5,000 lb. with the latter.

Fuel economy is in the same (middling) ballpark as the rest of this class. EPA says you can expect 19/26/22 with FWD, and 18/25 /21 with AWD. I logged 17 in my week behind the wheel.

While not as suited to trail traversing as the Toyota Tacoma (or soon, Jeep's Gladiator), Ridgeline is nonetheless quite capable of light off-roading. And, Honda's torque vectoring AWD system proved sure-footed in wintry conditions. A traction management system on

AWD-equipped models allows the driver to fine tune their grip by choosing from Normal, Snow, Mud or Sand modes. Ride quality is good for the breed. There's a little impact harshness with an unloaded box, but it's overall smooth sailing.

Speaking of boxes, you access the Ridgeline's by means of a two-way tailgate which can either drop flat, or swing wide, like a door. Bed length is 64-83 inches (tailgate raised/ lowered) and there's 50 inches of width between the wheel wells.

Eight tie-downs allow you to secure your load. Below deck, there's a lockable trunk, big enough to fit a golf bag, a guitar, or a 20-gallon cooler — or some combination. Or, you can just turn the whole trunk into a cooler (it's got a drain plug). The only downside I see in back is the location of the spare tire, which will require that you unload the back portion of the box (and maybe some of the trunk contents) to access it, if needed.

Sure-footed in wintry conditions, Ridgeline is quite capable of light off-roading.

Continued on page 2

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