

# WHEELS & CAR CARE

GM steals show at awards night

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With its unibody construction and unique buttressed lines flowing from cab to cargo sides, the 2008 Honda Ridgeline sets a distinctive style in the pickup truck market.

## Honda Ridgeline has plenty of bells and whistles

**ROB BEINTEMA**  
Special to The IFP

Novelty has a short shelf life.

But when radical design is based on problem solving and providing innovative answers, the result can still capture your attention long after the shine of newness wears off.

As is the case with the Honda Ridgeline.

It's been three years since Honda launched their take on the North American pickup truck. A take that was pooh-pooed in the industry as too wishy-washy for the hard-core truck market.

The pickup formula was, after all, already chiseled in stone— traditional body-on-frame construction, separate cab and pickup box, heavy-duty axles for towing, basic rear-wheel drive (also for towing) with maybe a four-wheel drive option for occasional off-road bushwhackers and snow-bound Northerners like us.

Oh, and don't forget multiple body choices and multiple

engine choices for the multiple customer classes from farmers to construction workers to weekend warriors to everyone else in between.

Honda, instead, took a clean sheet approach to the pickup truck challenge, starting with the foundation of a closed-box unibody frame that combines the strength characteristics of a ladder frame with the handling and packaging advantages of a unibody design. Look, ma, no gap between the cab and pickup box.

To this platform, they added a one-choice, transversely mounted 3.5-litre VTEC V-6 engine, harnessing a respectable 247 hp and 245 lb/ft of torque.

This J35A91 engine is mated to a five-speed electronically-controlled automatic transmission with power transferred through Honda's Variable Torque Management four-wheel drive system (VTM-4) that can send up to 70 percent of power to the rear wheels but that, during normal cruising, operates mainly as, ye gods, front-wheel drive.

And did I mention a four-wheel independent suspension

system instead of the normal load-lugging leaf springs on a live rear axle?

Yikes. What the heck were they thinking?

Well, what they were thinking was that, according to research, the majority of pickup truck owners, more than three quarters of them in fact, rarely use their trucks to their full capabilities.

Rather, they use them for occasional trips to gardening and home reno centres, hauling light loads, usually towing less than 5000 lb. load recreational trailers and are generally more concerned with passenger priorities of elbow room and long haul comfort and, yes please, any storage innovations possible.

Well, there's no shortage of either in Honda's version. Inside, the Ridgeline seats five in a comfy cabin with all the usual user-friendliness of Honda interior design. Even the old-style column shifter, which was really crappy in the initial 2006 model, seems to have been improved upon.

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