

Honda captures chopper vibe in smooth-riding Spirit

by Joe Taylor

With its low-slung saddle, forward foot controls and street-rod-style handlebars, the 2008 Honda Shadow Spirit C2 gives motorcycling newcomers a chopper feel without the chopper price. Or the chopper discomforts.

HONDA SHADOW - Honda's entry-level Shadow Spirit has a customized appearance in the tank's flame paint scheme, the taillight integrated with the fender and staggered pipes. CNS Photo courtesy of Scott Linnett. The wide, gunfighter-style seat is positioned deep in the frame and 25.7 inches off the deck, so even the shortest rider can feel tall in the saddle. It's soft as well. As my initial ride of about 90 miles was winding down, I didn't have to get up off the seat at a stoplight to restore feeling in my hips or tuchis. Give credit to the five-position adjustable shocks, too.

The forward pedals let the rider stretch the legs and lean back a little. But I found the peg-shifter relationship somewhat tight, which caused a distressing moment when my boot got stuck while downshifting on approach to a stoplight. I momentarily lost my balance, nearly dropping the bike. Blame operator error.

The narrow front tire at the end of the long, raked forks has a bigger diameter than the rear, reminiscent of the Harley Dyna Wide Glide. The long wheelbase and light weight give it responsive road manners, requiring little input from the rider to keep it in line. Twin calipers on the front disc brake and the rear drum were plenty strong to bring me to a stop.

The 749cc V-twin engine is plenty willing. Even in the top fifth gear, there was ample power funneled through the new constant velocity carburetor to keep the shaft drive humming on I-15's long uphill grade north of San Diego. There was plenty of pull off the line from a stop, and shifts were smooth. The Spirit makes its case for commuters: On my first tank of 87-octane, I averaged 42 miles per gallon.

Controls are basic, which is to be expected on an entry-level machine that is tagged at less than \$7,000. The tank-mounted speedometer is a little low; I had to bow my head slightly to take a peek, and that could be enough time for some road gremlin to sneak up and disrupt the ride. I also missed not having a tachometer. The digital odometer includes two trip meters.

This Honda takes on qualities often seen in customized rides, such as the tank's flame paint scheme, the taillight integrated with the fender, chrome handlebars, air cleaner and side covers. The staggered pipes complete the chopper look and produce a subtle, throaty roar that won't threaten a decibel meter.

The Ultra Blue Metallic test bike did not carry any accessories, but there are plenty available from Honda, including a windscreen, three styles of leather saddlebags and other pouches, backrests, guards and a digital audio system, among other items. Expect an abundance of goodies from the aftermarket companies, too.

After all, that's what the chopper spirit is all about - making your ride your own.

Joe Taylor is a Union-Tribune copy editor for the Wheels section and a motorcycle enthusiast.

SPECS

2008 Honda Shadow Spirit C2

Engine: 745cc, SOHC liquid-cooled V-twin with three valves per cylinder

Transmission: wide-ratio five-speed

Fuel tank: 3.7 gallons, including 0.9-gallon reserve

Seat height: 25.7 inches

Base price: \$6,799; with tank flames, \$7,099

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