

OLD V NEW

1998-'01 HONDA VFR800 ★ 2002-'05 HONDA VFR800 V-TEC

IT may be a bit slabby-looking, but plenty of you still rate the old VFR as a top-value second-hand mile-muncher



1998-'01 VFR800

- ✓ Legendary sports-touring king
- ✗ Front end a bit crude



Honda VFR800 vs VFR800

It's a controversy that continues to rage, judging by your emails: is the latest VFR V-TEC actually a worse bike than the old 'un'?

HONDA VFR800 OWNERS' PANEL

RICHARD CROFT

RICHARD is a police officer stationed in Essex. The 48-year-old has previously owned a 1999 VFR800 and currently has a 2005 V-TEC model.

BRIAN FISHER

BRIAN is in the army and is currently based near Telford, Shropshire. At 38, he has owned a 1998 VFR800 in the past and now has a 53-reg V-TEC.

MARK FLAXMAN-BINNS

MARK is a 44-year-old car salesman who lives near Peterborough. He owned a 2000-model VFR800 for over three years and has demo-ridden the V-TEC.

PERFORMANCE

Richard: "The new V-TEC is definitely faster and performs better all round than the old model. The main weakness with the old VFR800 was its front end – it was vague and lacked feedback. Riding two-up, with the brakes full on, the forks simply bottomed out and went all squishy on me. Not nice."

"I solved that on my old VFR by having the front end Maxton-ised, dropping the forks 10mm, fitting braided brake lines and an Ohlins rear shock and raising the ride height. It transformed the bike completely. But the new V-TEC has great handling and braking straight from the crate."

Brian: "The V-TEC goes better all round, but when I first got it, it felt a bit lumpy at low revs. Now I've done some miles, it's really smoothed out. "The fuel consumption has also

improved and I get 130-180 miles per tankful. I think it's hard to get brilliant fuel consumption because it's so addictive to use when it's above 7000rpm and the valves fully open."

"The V-TEC is much more sporty – acceleration and handling are better."

Mark: "When I heard there was a new VFR model coming out I was really keen to have a spin on it. I tried it twice, on my favourite roads, but I was distinctly underwhelmed."

"The brakes and comfort are about the same I think, but the problem for me was the lack of midrange performance. I didn't like the fact that you had to rev the bike past 7000rpm to activate the V-TEC valve arrangement. My older VFR was better on fuel consumption and better in the midrange than the newer bike. I was really disappointed."

RIDING

Richard: "The newer VFR is quieter – I hated the old whining cam gears on the old model. I fitted a different exhaust and K&N filters to it, just to drown out the noise."

"I found the riding position was a bit different on the V-TEC model, with the footrests set slightly further back, but the saddle is as solid as ever – not really comfortable enough for 400-mile days."

"I binned the Metzeler tyres fitted to the V-TEC as standard and put Pirellis on instead, which was a big improvement. But that said, I put Metzeler Rennsports on the old model after I'd had Maxton tweak the front end – and they were superb."

Brian: "It's a great long-distance machine. I used to ride from Germany to Luxembourg on the old VFR800

THE old VFR's gear-driven cams mean less maintenance and more reliability



THE V-TEC is a more modern proposition altogether, and the V-TEC system's accelerative rush at over 7000rpm is addictive



2002-'05 VFR800 V-TEC

- ✓ Faster, sportier, handles better
- ✗ Camchain reliability worries; not everyone gets on with V-TEC 'power step'

V-TEC

regularly, in all weathers. Apart from a couple of bolt heads rusting up, the bike kept its looks."

Mark: "One of the great trips on my VFR was to Le Mans in 2004 for the MotoGP. I had the VFR painted in Rossi's Honda colours, fitted K&N filters and an ART can, just for a nicer noise – it was a memorable ride."

OWNING

Richard: "The rectifier burnt out on my old VFR800. I think they fail when the battery is getting older, but whatever the cause it seems rare for any rectifier to last beyond 20,000 miles. I paid £230 for a new rectifier, dealer fitted, although Honda settled it as an extended warranty claim."

"Is the camchain on the V-TEC an issue? Yes – I can hear mine rattling a bit when the motor is warming up. In

every other respect the V-TEC model is a better bike, but you have to wonder why they've gone back to camchains, especially when you hear that the tensioners are failing – yet again."

Brian: "At about 10,000 miles, I heard the camchain rattling in the rear cylinders. Honda are replacing one camchain tensioner under warranty, but I'm not happy. How long before the other tensioner fails, and will it be fixed under warranty?"

"I just can't understand why Honda haven't solved this problem after all these years. One of the reasons people bought the old VFR800 was reliability."

"I love riding the V-TEC bike, but the camchain problem makes me wonder if I should keep it long term."

Mark: "What I liked about the 2000-2001 VFR800s is that the exhaust

downpipes were stainless steel, the passenger pegs had a weight fitted to minimise the vibes and the rectifier was modified to help it live longer. Mine gave me three years trouble-free riding."

VERDICT

Richard: "The V-TEC model looks modern, where the old VFR800 looks like yesterday's news. The V-TEC beats it in every way that counts, so it wins hands-down for me."

Brian: "I would say to anyone they should think about buying the last of the non V-TEC models. It's still a great bike and until the full picture emerges concerning the chain tensioners on the V-TEC, you have to be cautious."

Mark: "Without doubt the VFR800 models are best – far better than the V-TEC. Why they've fitted camchains to a great bike like the VFR800 is a mystery."

THANKS to the many VFR800 owners who responded for this piece – sorry we couldn't use all your comments.

MODEL GUIDE

1998

VFR800 replaces VRF750. It has a new fuel-injected 781cc V4 motor, based on RC45 race engine. All-new chassis, linked brakes.

2000

Catalytic converter, stainless steel downpipes, new rectifier.

2002

New VFR800 V-TEC: variable valve timing, chain drive to cams replaces gear drive, sleeker bodywork, beefier forks, underseat exhaust. ABS option.

2005

Honda announce detail improvements to VFR800 for 2006: new colours, fuel injector tweaks, etc.

AN EXPERT SAYS:

Geoff Pritchard, MD at Colwyn Bay Motorcycles: "We've sold plenty of V-TEC models and everyone seems to love them. The camchain issue is there, but the V-TEC is such a better bike than the old one, it's selling well. Forget stories about the 16,000-mile service costing over £500 – it would only cost about half that. Owners tend to be older and look after 'em well. Not many VFR800s go for less than £2500-£3000, regardless of the mileage."



ONE DAY WITH... ELECTRIC MOTO BLADE T6

NO petrol required – this baby runs on batteries



Electric dirt bike soon leaves you feeling flat

WHAT IS IT?

IMAGINE the offspring of a top-spec downhill mountain bike and an invalid carriage and you'll be close. The Blade T6 is a battery-operated motocross bike.

Claimed power is 18bhp from the single-speed electric motor, with a four-second 0-30mph time and 40mph top speed. The makers won't say what the engine is usually used in, but it's guaranteed for 7000 hours. Chassis parts include hydraulic disc brakes front and rear mounted to wheels like those you'd see on a top-line downhill mountain bike, plus full Ohlins suspension.

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO RIDE?

THE motor makes no noise at all, which takes a little getting used to – it's no noisier than a push bike. There's also no clutch as it's a single-speed motor, and no engine braking either – these combine to make the bike feel a little strange getting in and out of tight corners.

Once you get into the swing, it's great fun and feels more like a mountain bike than a motorbike. It handles, turns and jumps well, thanks to the light weight and quality suspension.

The power feels a fair bit less than the 18bhp claimed for it, though.

HOW LONG WILL IT GO BETWEEN CHARGES?

THIS is one of the bike's two main Achilles heels (the other being its price). A full charge lasts around 25 minutes. But after just five minutes, full power is lost. It then tails off for the next 15 minutes, then crawls along for the last five. There is a switch to reduce it to half

ON full power it's fun – but after five minutes the batteries start to run down



power to allow it to run for up to 50 minutes, but at this level it is painfully slow.

The standard charger takes around six hours to fully charge the four batteries. A fast charger can be bought separately and takes less than an hour from totally flat, but adds £300 to the price.

WHAT'S THE POINT? MOTOCROSS tracks and clubs are finding it ever harder to keep running due to noise complaints. The Blade is totally silent so one day (though probably not tomorrow) bikes like this may save off-roading. Certain BMX tracks are considering allowing the Blade to use their facilities and there could be scope for riding it on limited mountain bike trails.

WHERE CAN I BUY ONE? THERE'S no dealer network as the bikes will be built on a supply and demand

basis, ordered through the importer (www.goblade.co.uk). The bike we tested is still pretty much a prototype and the firm expects both performance and battery life to improve in time for the bike's release in early 2006.

CAN I RIDE IT ON THE ROAD?

NO. The company are looking into making it road legal, at least for daylight hours in the same way as a trials or enduro bike. The headlight is purely for off-road 'stealth' riding at night!

ELECTRIC MOTO BLADE T6

★☆☆☆☆ COST: £4300 (TBC)
POWER: 18bhp
WEIGHT: 80kg

Available: January 2006
Colours: Black
Insurance group: N/A
Info: www.goblade.co.uk

TECHNICAL SPEC

Engine: Electric motor with single-speed transmission. Programmable control unit to adjust power characteristics.
Chassis: Steel cradle frame. Ohlins USD forks adjustable for rebound and compression damping. Ohlins rear monoshock adjustable for rebound and compression damping.
Brakes: 200mm discs front/rear.
Tyres: 3in x 24in MTB-type

THE V-TEC's camchain tensioners are a possible worry. Some have failed at 10k miles



1998-'01 HONDA VFR800

COST NEW IN 1998: £8675
USED PRICES:
1998-1999 £2500-£3700
2000-2001 £3400-£4400

Insurance group: 14
Servicing: £90 minor, £280 main

TECHNICAL SPEC

Engine: V4, four-stroke, 781cc
Power: 108bhp
Chassis: Alloy twin-spar
Weight: 208kg
Top speed: 160mph
MPG/Range: 40-45/130-150 miles

2002-'05 HONDA VFR800 V-TEC

COST NEW (NON-ABS): £8000
USED PRICES (NON-ABS):
2002-2003 £4000-£5600
2004-2005 £5200-£2000

Insurance group: 14
Servicing: £100 minor, £280 main

TECHNICAL SPEC

Engine: V4, four-stroke, 781cc
Power: 102bhp
Chassis: Alloy twin-spar
Weight: 213kg
Top speed: 165mph
MPG/Range: 40/140 miles

MCN SAYS:

- ✓ Won't upset the countryside Nazis
- ✓ Unintimidating for off-road novices
- ✗ Runs out of juice way too quickly
- ✗ Petrol MXers loads better (and cheaper)

