

Honda takes a step into the sunshine with a touring variant of its Shadow cruiser that is surprisingly brilliant.

SOMETHING WE'VE LEARNED NOT TO expect from Honda Shadows is long-distance comfort, roll-on power and simple practicality, virtues that are outside the realm of a custom cruiser whose aptitude is *attitude*. How surprising, then, to encounter the '97 ACE Tourer, a mildly elaborate reworking of the Shadow package that produces an eminently practical touring machine with voluptuous good looks—and there's even a serious helping of torque from the revised engine. While not inexpensive, the new ACE Tourer has functional and styling attributes that might be compared against more costly bikes like the Royal Star Tour Classic or Harley FLHT. Honda's execution of the ACE Tourer has taken it well beyond our expectations of how a Shadow can perform.

Part of the reason for that, admittedly, is that our expectations had sunk rather low for Honda's custom V-twin. As you might have read last month in our test of the ACE Shadow 1100, Honda has successfully endowed the single-crank V-twin with a Milwaukee-style sound and feel, but the engine has gained a soul at the expense of power. The ACE engine, in its original form, would have been unsuitably lazy for a touring bike, especially one with a passenger and loaded saddlebags.

Consequently, Honda has reverted to its

**Honda Shadow ACE Tourer**  
Cycle Canada test

# Out of the

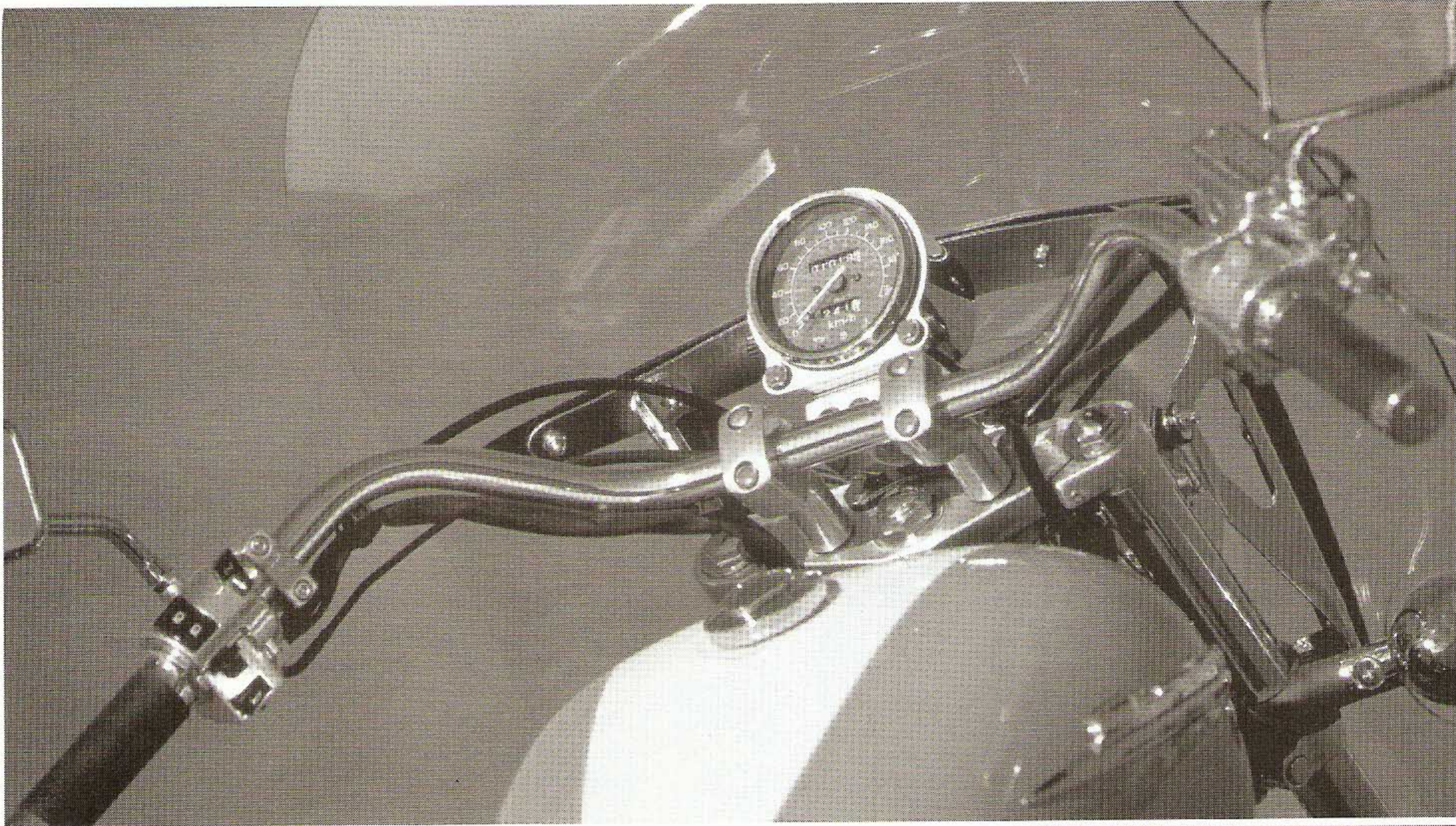


# Shadow



The ACE Tourer has much-improved engine performance compared with the original ACE model. It handles well, too, thanks to a reinforced swingarm, recalibrated suspension and cast wheels with radial tires. The seating has been modified for more comfort, and the windscreen provides decent wind protection. It deserves to carry the Tourer name, except perhaps in fuel range.





earlier-generation Shadow engine, whose offset crankshaft design allows the 45-degree V-twin to behave like a 90-degree engine with perfect primary balance. The smoother engine has a higher rev potential without the danger of damage from vibration, and more power comes with the extra revs.

Rubber engine mounts help isolate the engine's remaining vibration, and the Tourer is comfortably smooth, with pin-sharp mirror images at highway speeds. Some low-frequency pulsing throbs through the footpegs, not unpleasantly, and the rubber-mounted handlebar is free of tingling, unless the engine is revved well beyond its normal operating range. There's no tachometer, but it doesn't take a sophisticated ear to determine the revs.

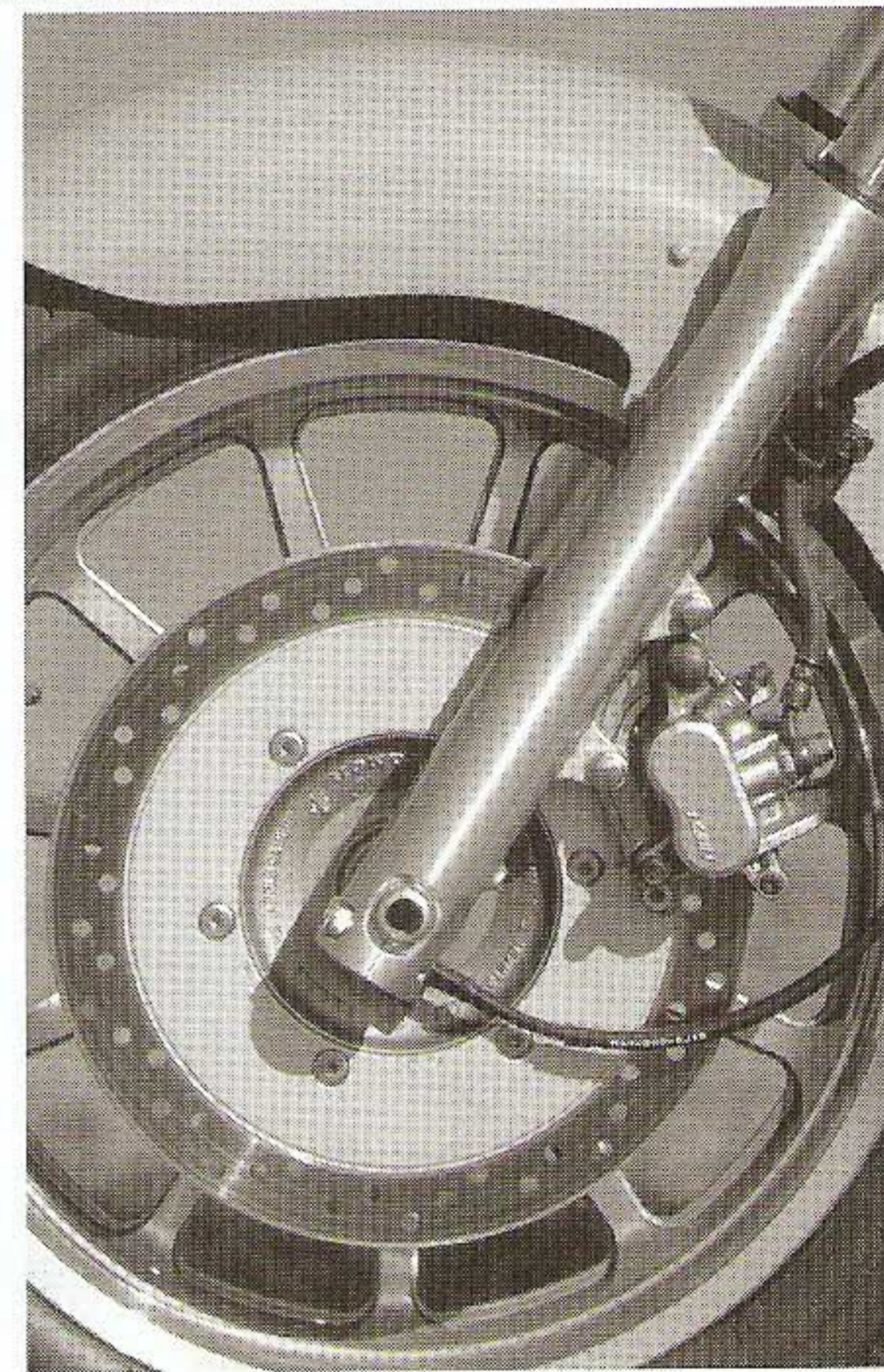
The Tourer's engine superiority isn't limited to peak output; our test bike had none of the lean-running staggers that plagued our previous ACE model. It responded cleanly and forcefully to a handful of gas right off the bottom end. Most impressive was the Tourer's top-gear roll-on performance. The gearing leaves the V-twin poised on the fat portion of its torque peak; there's no need to downshift for a pass, and even with a passenger aboard the Tourer has plenty of power for overtaking. That's definitely not something you could say about the original ACE. We were somewhat surprised to discover that the Tourer could

**This ACE model is powered by the offset-crankpin version of the V-twin, which allows higher revs without uncomfortable vibration. The engine is also rubber mounted, and mirror images remain unclouded at highway speeds. Single front disc is on the verge of being overwhelmed by the heavier weight of the Tourer, though it's adequate.**

stick with the FireStorm and TL1000S twins in a roll-on comparison, at least initially; some of that is a matter of gearing, but the fact remains, this Shadow performs better than any VT1100 since the original 1985 model. (Unfortunately, our southern test schedule for the Tourer left us without our usual Dynotronics power measurement, but we'll make amends in our next issue.)

Of course, without the single-pin crank engine, the Tourer lacks the loping potato, potato idle and exhaust note of the original ACE, but the Tourer's chesty exhaust and intake boom is pleasant enough, though smoother in tone. The revised two-into-two exhaust system has a larger volume, and the tailpipe extensions running under the saddlebags emit a surprisingly audible burble; not so much to the rider, but to observers and those in its wake.

Maintenance requirements for the engine should be modest; the liquid-cooled V-twin's twin-plug, three-valve heads have no-fuss hydraulic lash adjustment, and a dozen



years of production have allowed Honda to work the bugs out of this motor.

Like all of the current Shadow models, this one uses a five-speed gearbox with wide ratios; clutch action is light and controllable, and the final drive is by shaft, whose length mitigates against disturbances to the handling during throttle transitions.

Fuel consumption of 6.9 L/100 km (41 mpg) for the Tourer isn't particularly good, especially since the tank capacity is a meagre 15.8 L, which means you need to switch



the petcock to reserve around the 175 km mark. That's well short of the Tourer's comfort range.

Long-range touring comfort is something not normally associated with a Honda Shadow, but the new ACE has greatly improved ergonomics. The seat remains comfortably low, but has thicker and more supportive padding, while the pegs are in a moderately forward location and the wide, flat handlebar provides a natural reach for the arms. The passenger seat is detachable, like that of the other ACE models, but it's larger on the Tourer and reasonably cushy. Without a backrest or useful grab handle, though, the passenger needs to hang on to the rider.

Part of the touring package is the wind-screen, which is sized to allow an average rider to view the road over its top edge. It provides good wind protection to the torso, but produces some mild buffeting if the highway speeds creep much beyond 120 km/h. Plenty of fresh air circulates around its lower edges, which is a compromise best appreciated in summer temperatures.

Another surprising element in the ACE Tourer character is its handling. Although a bit more truckish at low speeds because of its greater weight—286 kg (630 lb) dry for the Tourer, or 26 kg (57 lb) more than the standard ACE—the Tourer is much more stable in a straight line and through sweeping turns. During our southern road test, the

Tourer accompanied a group of sport bikes in a swing through some sweeping pine-forest roads. Despite carrying a passenger, the Tourer could maintain a brisk pace without feeling the least perturbed: no weaving, pogoing or unreasonable limits on cornering clearance. The wider handlebar provides plenty of leverage for tipping into turns, and the steering has a stately sort of neutrality that feels just right for the bike. Unlike the

original ACE, the Tourer is fitted with tubeless radial tires, a wider 130/80 front and a 170/70H16 rear compared with the original 170/80H15. They mount on sturdier 10-spoke cast wheels instead of laced rims.

Recent memories of the harshly unforgiving twin shocks of the standard ACE model receded considerably after we spend some time aboard the Tourer. Despite having the same modest 100 mm travel, the recalibrat-

## The Spirit is willing...

Honda has mixed, matched and moulded its 1100 Shadow models so promiscuously that it's easy to lose track of them. But the base-model 1100, which has existed in various forms since 1985, is now called the Shadow Spirit. It uses similar underpinnings to the Tourer, having the same smoother offset-crankpin engine and five-speed gearbox. Honda has groomed it for '97 with engine covers modelled on the ACE style, a cable-actuated clutch that does away with the bar master-cylinder, and a tank, seat and exhaust system inspired by the ACE.

Honda offers a long list of minor cosmetic changes for the 1100, but the overall effect still strongly resembles the previous four-speed Shadow—which is unfortunate. The buckhorn-style handlebar looks stale and feels awkward, and we continue to be amazed by the crudeness of the crossover link on the exhaust system, which doesn't exist anywhere else in the Shadow line.

But there are functional improvements here. The five-speed gearbox provides better acceleration and reduces revs at highway speeds to a more comfortable level. Fuel capacity is increased, and the larger headlight makes night-riding more obviously survivable. Switchgear has been cleaned up, and the formerly extreme footpeg position has been moved back to a more sensible location. The Spirit makes a decent mount for casual around-town use.

We suspect, though, that the base-model Shadow Spirit has out-lived its appeal, offering neither the styling nor efficiency of the other ACE models. The final blow for the Spirit will arrive soon; next month we'll report on the new ACE 750, which is arguably not only the best Honda custom yet, but will be priced under the 1100.

That sounds like a one-way ticket to the afterworld for this Spirit.





ed springing and damping of the new shocks offer a vast improvement. The suspension action has a slightly bouncy feel, but it can tolerate heavier loads and is quite free of the painful harshness that plagues the standard ACE. The swingarm on the Tourer has been braced for greater strength, and the shocks are angled differently.

Given the extra weight and speed potential of the Tourer, we would have liked more brakes than the single 316 mm front disc with a twin-piston caliper and the rear 276 mm disc. The front disc has a nicely firm lever feel, but it demands a Harleysque squeeze and the assistance of the rear brake for a quick stop.

Leather saddlebags have an undeniable appeal, but you can't beat the practicality and weather protection of hard luggage. The Tourer's hard bags are nicely color-matched to the two-tone paint scheme, which on our test bike was a striking green and ivory combination. The lids hinge at the front and lock at the rear, and are well sealed against rain. Their capacity can't

match a Gold Wing's, but the bags offer enough room for a solo tour. Bring a passenger and you'll need a luggage rack. Chromed guardrails in front of the bags give some tipover insurance.

Appraisals of styling are subjective, of course, but we think Honda has managed to integrate the Tourer's utilitarian elements into a custom model in a nicely understated fashion. The two-tone paint, fender extensions, saddlebag shape and windscreen provide a mix of retro and neo-custom elements that is distinctive and attractive. Perhaps the Royal Star does the same trick better, but the Honda ACE Tourer has a more reasonable \$15,399 list price, or \$500 more for with the two-tone paint. That may not seem inexpensive either, but considering the Tourer's adaptability to cruising or touring roles, there's real value. In practical terms, the \$1,920 premium it carries over the original ACE seems like money well spent.

Honda persists in calling this much-evolved bike a Shadow, but it's a V-twin clearly ready to step out of the twilight. **CC**

Neatly finished hard saddlebags hinge at the front and lock at the rear; weatherproofing is good. Rider and passenger seats have extra foam for touring comfort.

## Snap judgment

### On the one hand...

- 👍 Finally, the Shadow V-twin regains some decent engine power
- 👍 Comfortable seating, adequate wind protection, useful luggage
- 👍 Handles surprisingly well, much-improved suspension

### ...but on the other

- 👎 Fuel capacity and range insufficient for a bike called a Tourer
- 👎 Needs another disc brake up front
- 👎 Can't we have the potato, potato exhaust note *and* some power?

## SPECIFICATIONS

<b>Model</b>	Honda Shadow ACE Tourer
<b>Price</b>	\$15,899 (as tested)
<b>Engine</b>	Liquid-cooled four-stroke V-twin with three valves per cylinder
<b>Horsepower</b>	68 at 5,500 (claimed)
<b>Torque</b>	71 lb-ft at 3,000
<b>Displacement</b>	1,099 cc
<b>Bore × stroke</b>	87.5 × 91.4 mm
<b>Compression ratio</b>	8:1
<b>Carburetion</b>	Two 36 mm CV
<b>Transmission</b>	Five-speed
<b>Final drive</b>	Shaft
<b>Suspension</b>	41 mm front fork with 149 mm travel; twin rear shocks adjustable for preload with 100 mm travel
<b>Wheelbase</b>	1,650 mm (65 in.)
<b>Rake/trail</b>	32.3 degrees/155 mm
<b>Brakes</b>	Single 316 mm front disc with twin-piston caliper; single 276 mm rear disc
<b>Tires</b>	130/80HR18 front; 170/70HR16 rear
<b>Dry weight</b>	286 kg (630 lb)
<b>Seat height</b>	730 mm (28.7 in.)
<b>Fuel capacity</b>	15.8 L
<b>Fuel consumption</b>	6.9 L/100 km (41 mpg)
<b>Fuel range</b>	229 km