

## ROAD TEST

2006 HONDA VFR800 \* 2005 HONDA VFR800  
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THE ARMS

SPOT the difference:  
New VFR is on left



BY BERTIE SIMMONDS  
PICTURES BY MARK MANNING

### 2006 HONDA VFR800

★★★★★  
**COST** £6499  
**POWER** 107bhp  
**WEIGHT** 218kg

**Availability:** New  
**Colours:** Red, black or silver  
**New for 2006:** Minor updates only

**Insurance group:** 16 of 17  
**Info:** Honda, 0845 200 8000



**TECHNICAL SPEC**  
 Engine: Liquid-cooled, 782cc  
 CV: 4, 60mm bore stroke 50° V4  
 Fuel injection: Six ports  
 Chassis: Aluminium frame  
 Forks: 43mm fork, adjustable  
 Preload, single rear shock, adjustable by preload and rebound damping  
 Brakes: 1 x 120mm disc with three-piston caliper, 250mm rear disc with three-piston caliper (ABS) and CBS as standard, Tyres: 120/70 x 17 front, 160/70 x 17 rear

# So, is it fixed yet?

The 2006 VFR looks familiar but Honda has given it subtle changes and, vitally, reckons it has finally sorted the lurchy VTEC set-up

**T**HE VFR, best all-rounder in the world or wonderbike blighted by gimmicky VTEC pulaver? Both, actually - which is why for 2006 Honda has once again set out to improve it.

#### BUT IT LOOKS JUST THE SAME

Mainly it is, but there are subtle nods. The 2006 bike can be identified by a brushed rather than chrome finish to the end cans, clear indicator lenses (the bulbs are amber), a graduated tinted screen and a colour co-ordinated section between the headlight - the previous model's was plain black. Oh, and you're also now got a half-white tach.

#### JUST WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM WITH THE VTEC?

The main criticism came during motorway use. Some owners felt the system would flutter between two and four-valve operation at a fast cruising speed, making the whole VTEC system more obtrusive than helpful. Also, it could kick in when you weren't expecting it - over a damp patch or in mid-corner.

#### WHAT HAVE THEY CHANGED?

The VTEC's operation has been changed to make it feel less harsh. On the '05 bike, two valves only would operate until 6800rpm, when the other two would kick in. That threshold has been lowered to 6600rpm.

Going down the rev range on the older bike, the revs at which the VTEC reverts back to two-valve operation was very close to when it chimed in, at around 6600rpm, but

this has also now been changed, to revert at 6100rpm, so the bike should never hover between two and four-valve operation.

Other changes include modifications to the ECU and injectors (both now from the latest FuelInject) to enhance drivability. The intention is to make the transitions between valve modes more subtle, plus provide a little more throat and better fuel economy.

#### SO HAS IT WORKED?

We rode the '05 and '06 bikes back-to-back and yes, you can feel the difference. But only just. The transitions on small throttle openings can hardly be sensed. But if you're in a go-for-it mood, big handfuls of throttle are rewarded with a very distinct punt up the backside when four-valve operation kicks in. This is very noticeable and big fun. What's more, the transition back to two-valve operation is smoother and less discernible, especially at high cruising speeds.

#### DOES ANYONE ELSE AGREE?

The whole VTEC debate is such a hot potato (in VFR circles, anyway) we wanted some more opinions. Ea-MCN road tester Chris Moss rates the VFR very highly and while he says the 2006 bike is an improvement, he has always been a critic of the VTEC system. He said: "There is an appreciable improvement on the 2006 bike. You notice the transition less and it feels smoother and more sophisticated, but this does depend on the load on the engine, and throttle position. The problem isn't just the VTEC, it's the tune of the engine. The VFR

is not a top-gear bike, so it depends on gear changes far more often than a machine which is billed as a sports racer should do."

Keith Phillips from the VFR Owners Forum rode an '06 bike and declared the changes were spot-on. He said: "The transition to four valves was so smooth I had serious trouble identifying when it was engaged and when it wasn't. Holding the revs on the cut-in point caused no hunting. The new system seemed to work perfectly."

#### ANYTHING ELSE?

Yes, power rivals like the 4150cc Triumph Sprint ST (at least more cubic capacity and have left the VFR behind. The 800cc motor doesn't have the torque or power of the top

sports-racers. Overtakes need more than the odd tap of the foot to be made crply.

#### BUT IT'S NOT ALL BAD, SURELY?

No, the latest version is still everything a VFR should be. Despite its 218kg dry weight, the chassis is so well balanced it's a hoot to ride on back roads. It's also precise, exquisitely engineered, probably the best-finished motorcycle ever made and so solid that even with 50,000 miles on the clock it's barely run-in. The V4 motor may be a bit pricey to service but it's indestructible. The Dual CBS is better than ever, ABS is now standard and similarly unobtrusive and the bike also has a popular owners' group and web forum. In it, in essence, Honda's BMW!



NEW bike features much smoother VTEC transition

## VERDICT

LET'S say this from the off: The Honda VFR VTEC is still one of the best and most versatile machines on the planet - a real 'Swiss Army bike.' Modifications for 2006 have made real, noticeable improvements to the VTEC.

So if you're an earlier-model VTEC owner looking to upgrade, there may be good cause to.

Also, if you're looking for owning reliability, Fabergé build quality and an ability to age better than Cheq, look no further than the VFR.

But before you invest, just make sure you're happy to lose out to even the budget CBF1000 in terms of stamp and flexibility. The VFR is still an excellent motorcycle - it's just 200cc away from perfection.

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