

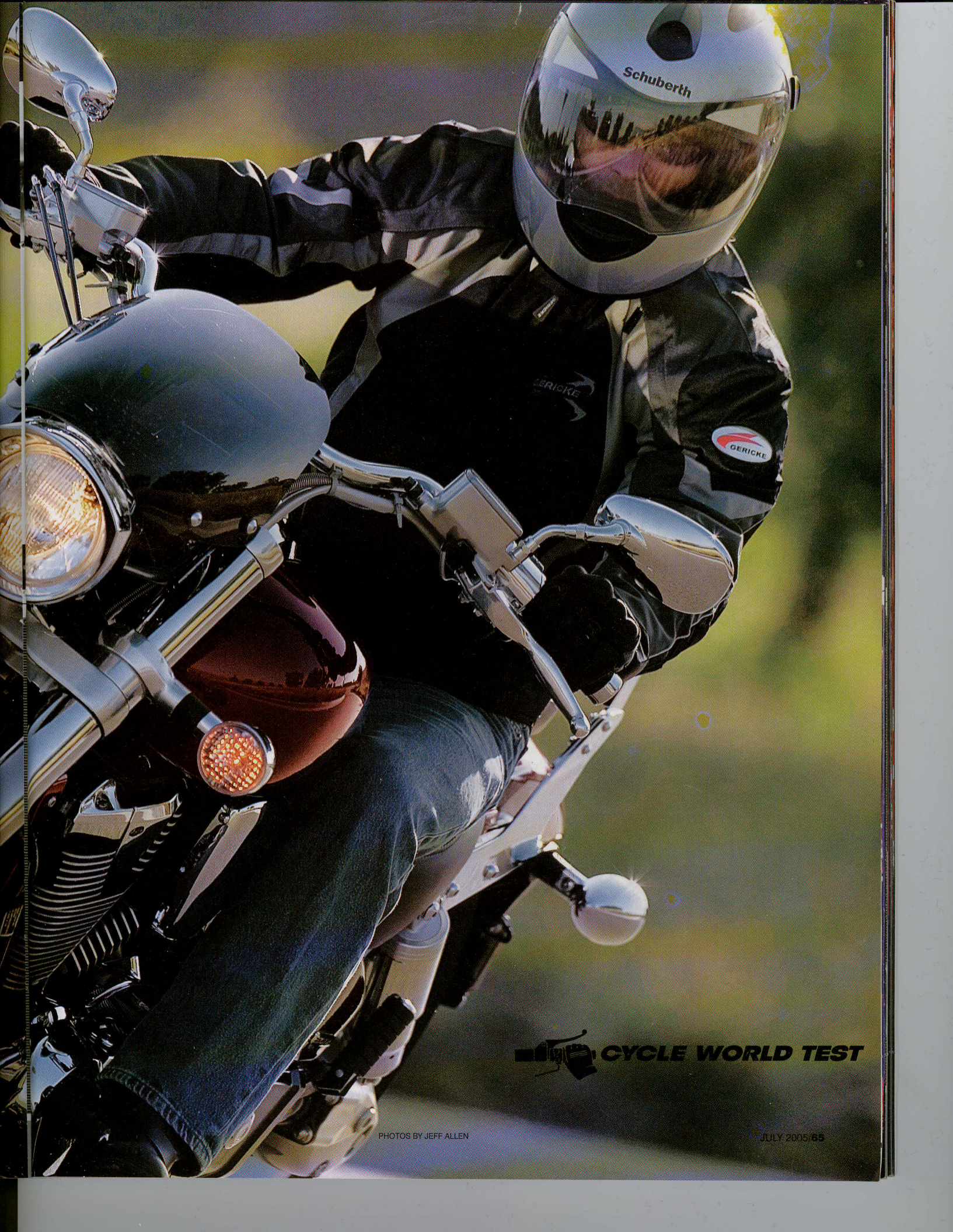
HONDA VTX1800F

**Have Triumph and
Kawasaki made the
big Honda a middle-
weight cruiser?**

BY STEVE ANDERSON

WHEN HONDA INTRODUCED THE VTX1800 in 2002, it was the biggest, baddest cruiser motorcycling had yet seen. Three short years later, in a world of 2300cc Triumph Rockets, 2-liter Kawasakis, and 120-plus-inch Harley clone engines, the VTX might almost seem to have become a little thang. Honda's immediate response hasn't been to reach for the boring bar; instead, with the addition of the VTX1800F—in three stages of trim at that—it's competing by offering a broader range of 1800s varied in appearance and accessories.





Schuberth

GERICKE

GERICKE

 **CYCLE WORLD TEST**

PHOTOS BY JEFF ALLEN

JULY 2005/65

HONDA VTX1800F



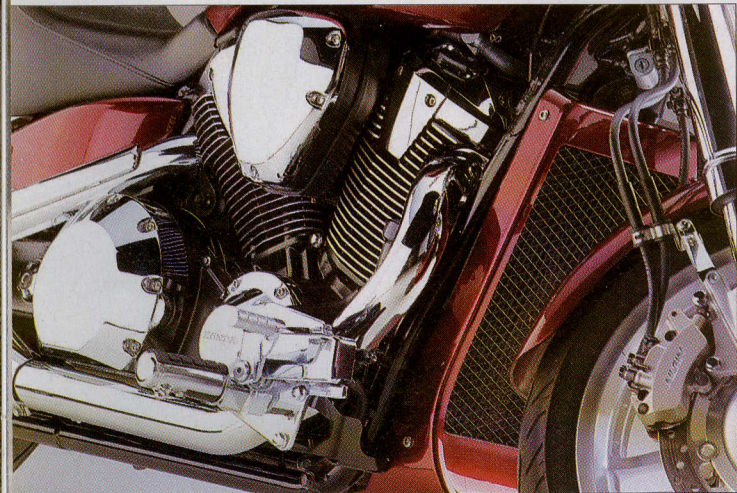
In Honda's nomenclature, the "F" suffix has generally been reserved for sportier models, and so it is with this VTX. The F-model gets a wide 18-inch rear wheel carrying a 180/55-18 low-profile radial tire, a superbike look rather than the cruiser-typical, tall-sidewalled 16-incher on other VTX models. (Still, it's interesting how quickly cruisers are evolving—the super-wide 240 and 250mm tires on custom-built Harleys and the stock Victory Hammer make a 180 look slightly puny.) The front fender's bobbed, while the rear fender gets a straight, upswept cut across the bottom, to enhance what Honda describes as "drag-racing" and "performance-cruiser" styling. Similarly, the headlight shell has a smaller hood, and a new gas tank with flangeless construction gives a flowing look. The speedometer is a high-tech LCD unit poised atop

the gas tank, with a digital speedo readout and a bar-graph tachometer. The huge bazooka 2-into-1 exhaust of the original VTX-C gives way to a 2-into-2 system with crossovers. And just to get the performance message completely across, Honda sent us a testbike fitted with its optional sport windshield, a little flyscreen that helps break the wind on your chest, but doesn't do much more.

Though the handlebars and footpegs are new, Honda didn't turn the VTX into a Harley Street Rod. The riding position remains standard cruiser, with a low, 27.7-inch seat height and forward pegs. A 6-footer sits with his feet out, knees slightly bent, hands wide and torso leaned back only the tiniest bit from vertical. A ride quickly confirms that the VTX-F didn't get a complete personality transplant.

At 789 pounds with a full tank and a 67.4-inch wheelbase, the VTX remains a cruiser by the gross, no matter how many cc its competition packs. Its long-stroke engine pumps out more than 80 foot-pounds of torque from just over 1600 to 5400 rpm, with the torque peak of almost 97 ft.-lb. at just 3200. The engine, with an unobtrusive fuel-injection system, leaps to a smooth and quiet idle at the first touch of the starter button. It motors away seamlessly, pulling from well under 2000 rpm at near full-throttle openings, though full throttle in top gear at too low an rpm—under about 35 mph in road speed—will have the VTX hammering the cushions in the driveline. Rev it out, and the big Twin pulls harder, falling off only slightly before it hits the soft rev limiter. In >

Our Spec 2 VTX came with a satin-black engine and milled cylinder-fin edges. Plainer Spec 1 has silver-painted motor, while Spec 3 uses more chromed and polished parts throughout, including an intense buff job on the five-spoke rims.



HONDA VTX1800F

Sportiest of Honda's big cruisers, the F is a mix-n-match of various VTX parts, including bobbed bodywork from the C and twin exhausts from the N. Eighteen-inch rear wheel really opens up the styling.

a lighter bike, this engine would give stunning performance, but in this behemoth, it does what it can. A respectable 12.7-second quarter-mile time puts it more than a second behind a Triumph Rocket.

What the VTX offers instead is relaxed performance. Near its redline, the pegs get buzzy, but at 2500 rpm (about 60 mph in top), it's a marvelously lazy and relaxed ride, smooth yet mechanical, with each power pulse distinct and lulling. Roll-on performance is strong even from this low rpm, with a 60-to-80-mph run in top gear taking just 3.6 seconds—and 80-to-100-mph feeling quicker yet. The VTX is happiest cruising in top-gear anywhere from 50 mph all the way to 90 or so, where the windblast gets a bit fierce. The 127-mph top speed continues as more theoretical than usable.

Handling is perhaps the biggest gap between the VTX-F and Harley's new Street Rod. By cruiser standards, the F, with its taller-than-other-VTXs ride height, leans impressively far before its footpeg feelers begin dragging, and several degrees of additional lean remain available before it drags anything that doesn't fold. But that's still far less than the Street Rod offers. Additionally, the F never lets you forget it's one big and very heavy motorcycle. The wide bars give you the leverage to bend it into a corner relatively quickly, but you feel its mass resisting. Try to hustle it through an S-turn, and you feel every one of those 789 pounds. No, Honda hasn't magically transformed the VTX into some cruiser-slash-replica-racer. Instead, it's taken the heavy and stable handling of the original VTX and enhanced it with more cornering clearance.

Increased ride height or no, big bumps still catch the suspension out, but smaller bumps are fairly crushed by the VTX's weight and compliant radial tires. On the freeway, the seat—relatively thin to keep ride height down—offers a pleasant site for your rear through a tank of gas. With average mileage in the 30s, the bottom of that tank comes up relatively quickly, at 149 miles.

A little out of character for a sport-cruiser, though our back-seaters loved it, the Hondaline premium backrest and its attendant mounting bracket will run you a total of \$396. Plug in the accessory luggage rack for an additional \$180.



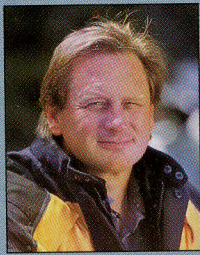
We liked the VTX's tinted sport windshield, a \$150 option that we'd negotiate for before we left the dealer's showroom.



Perhaps the VTX's most outstanding performance comes not in acceleration or handling, but in braking. Using Honda's integrated braking system with sophisticated hydraulics, the VTX's brake pedal activates both front and rear brakes. Stomp on it alone, and the big Twin slows quickly. Keep pushing, bringing two of the front brakes' six pistons into play, and eventually the rear tire locks up—but by that time the VTX is slowing more than twice as quickly as it would with rear braking only, and with far less tendency to swap ends with a locked rear. Use both pedal and front brake lever, and the VTX stops yet more quickly and controllably, even when its gross weight with rider and passenger scales well north of half a ton.

In the end, though, the most important question to ask yourself about the VTX-F (or any of the other mega-cruisers) is this: Do I fit? An almost 800-pound motorcycle is a lot of machine, and while Honda has done an excellent job of keeping the weight low and the seat height down, and has built a smooth-running, controllable engine, you notice the pounds every time you're doing something other than cruising down the road. You feel them moving the VTX in your garage, and you feel them if you attempt to hustle the VTX down a twisty road. In its defense, the VTX also carries a big rider and passenger effortlessly, and its weight and stability-oriented steering geometry will keep it tracking true on the Interstate no matter how blustery the wind gets.

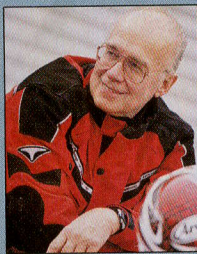
So, the VTX1800F remains a heavyweight, for better or worse. But Honda has enhanced its footwork, and fitted it with styling that better matches its performance. Perhaps that's not a knockout, but it keeps the Honda in the ring, still a contender, still a smooth big cruiser with an impressive punch. □



PERFORMANCE STANDARDS CHANGE quickly. The VTX1800 was a stunningly fast cruiser when it first came out; now, its performance is merely strong, not extraordinary. But what struck me was not how well the VTX went fast, but rather how well it went slow. It had a mellow beat at a 50-to-60-mph top-gear cruise that reminded me of the best Harley Big Twins. Its engine was alive,

with a pulse and texture that relaxed rather than inflamed, that said, "This speed is just fine; let's do it all day." That's perhaps a more useful achievement for a cruiser than an 11-second quarter-mile time. The VTX is a relaxed fast bike. Even at 80 mph, it turns only 3300 rpm—there are cars that turn more revs than that. If I were Honda, I wouldn't spend a minute thinking about enlarging the 1800's engine or increasing the power; instead, I'd put it on a diet. It would be better in every way if it weighed 100 pounds less—and even then it would still outweigh a Softail.

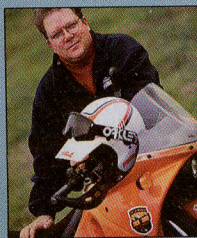
—Steve Anderson, Contributing Editor



HONDA SEEMS TO HAVE GLOMMED ONTO Harley's mix-and-match method of creating "new" models. The VTX1800F's designers borrowed the handlebar and front fender from the VTX1800C, lifted the shotgun exhaust from the 1800N, gave the bike an 18-inch rear wheel and a few different styling licks, then designated it both a "sport-custom" and a "performance-custom." Of all five of

the VTX1800 models, I like the F best, but I want to know what makes it sportier or more performance-oriented than the other four. It has the very same engine and chassis, so there are no performance differences, and it takes more than a few added degrees of cornering clearance to turn a long, heavy, feet-forward cruiser with underdamped suspension and exaggerated, shaft-drive-induced chassis-jacking into a "sport" model. Look, Honda people, this is a very nice bike, but let's call a spade a spade, shall we?

—Paul Dean, Editorial Director



FUNNY THING ABOUT POWER-CRUISERS. They seemed like such a good idea when they came out in force for the 2003 selling season, but not one—neither Honda VTX1800C nor Kawasaki Mean Streak nor Harley V-Rod nor Yamaha Warrior—has been what you'd call a runaway showroom success. Seems cruiser buyers want nostalgic stuff like fat fenders and spoked rims and bucko

bars, while those riders of a more sporting persuasion bypass the lot completely and go to performance standards or general-purpose sportbikes. Power-cruisers, a niche too far, perhaps?

Of course, I'm absolutely the wrong guy to ask: I'll take a street rod over a retro wagon any day. In fact, I purchased the Jeff Palhegyi'd "Rainbow Warrior" that wowed all riders in last year's "Sturgis Shootout," and this F-model VTX, especially with the Cobra Speedsters bolted up (see sidebar), feels pretty good, too. Gotta lose that goofy sissybar, though.

—David Edwards, Editor-in-Chief

HONDA VTX1800F

SPECIFICATIONS

GENERAL

List price \$12,899
 Importer American Honda Motor Company, Inc.
 1919 Torrance Blvd.
 Torrance, CA 90501
www.amerhonda.com

Customer service phone 310/783-2000

Warranty 12 mo./unlimited mi.

ENGINE

Engine liquid-cooled V-Twin

Bore x Stroke 101.0 x 112.0mm

Displacement 1795cc

Compression ratio 9.0:1

Valve train sohc, three valves per cylinder, threaded adjusters

Valve adjustment intervals 8000 mi.

Carburetion fuel-injection

Oil capacity 3.9 qt.

Electrical power 300w

Battery 12v, 20ah

CHASSIS

Weight: Tank empty 761 lb.

Tank full 789 lb.

Fuel capacity 4.8 gal.

Wheelbase 67.4 in.

Rake/trail 32.5°/5.7 in.

Seat height 27.7 in.

Ground clearance 5.0 in.

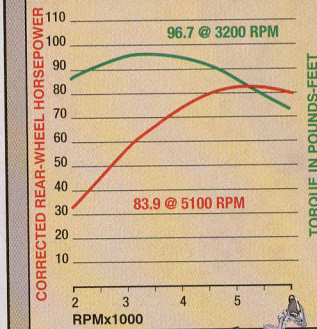
GVWR 1179 lb.

Load capacity (tank full) 390 lb.

HORSEPOWER/TORQUE

Corrected rear-wheel horsepower 96.7 @ 3200 RPM

Torque in pounds-feet 83.9 @ 5100 RPM



SUSPENSION/TIRES

Front suspension: Manufacturer Showa
 Tube diameter 45mm
 Claimed wheel travel 5.1 in.
 Adjustments none

Rear suspension: Manufacturer Showa
 Type dual shock
 Claimed wheel travel 3.9 in.
 Adjustments spring preload

Tires: Front Dunlop D251F 130/70R18
 Rear Dunlop D251 180/55R18

PERFORMANCE

1/4 mi. 12.70 sec.
 @ 106.25 mph
 0-30 mph 1.5 sec.
 0-60 mph 4.2 sec.
 0-90 mph 8.3 sec.
 0-100 mph 10.3 sec.

Top gear time to speed:
 40-60 mph 3.5 sec.
 60-80 mph 3.6 sec.

Measured top speed 127 mph

Engine speed at 60 mph 2175 rpm

FUEL MILEAGE

High/low/avg. 35/29/31 mpg

Avg. range inc. reserve 149 mi.

BRAKING DISTANCE

from 30 mph 30 ft.

from 60 mph 122 ft.

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph indicated 29 mph

60 mph indicated 58 mph

