

REVIEW: Victory Cross Country



When you take a gamble on unusual styling, you also risk obscuring a machine's goodness with its presentation. Entered into evidence is the Victory Vision Tour, a fine motorcycle with a polarizing appearance. Are there touring riders who never gave it a chance because of its over-the-top bodywork? Almost certainly.

Having learned from that exercise, Victory put the Cross Country into the line-up. It's a more conventional big American touring ride, which Victory officials expect will become the brand's top-selling touring bike in, oh, about the next five minutes. This I learned very quickly when I took this beaut on a trip to Richards Bay and back, the boxes loaded with magazines.

To make long days on the seat enjoyable, Victory's engineers fitted the Tour with a combination of off-the-shelf accessories optional on the base Cross Country along with some new features. That pointy tail box combines with the removable, outward-opening panniers to provide some awesome capacity. You know how you sometimes have to think hard about what to take on tour? Forget it. If you think you'll need it, pack it; the Cross Country Tour will probably have the room.

New for the Cross Country Tour are plastic lowers hugging a tubular crash bar in place of the Cross Country's stylish open castings. Not only do you get generously sized storage compartments—the left with an iPod/iPhone connection to the integrated audio system plus a 12-volt outlet—but added a very clever air-management system.

Superior protection doesn't mean much if you're squirming on the seat before the first fuel stop. Here, Victory absolutely nailed it. The chrome tiller-style bar places the grips further forward than you'd find on an Electra Glide, and the smooth seat offers more than one locked-down position for your cheeks. The smooth seat seems a little soft at first, but proved to be all-day comfortable. What's more, the floorboards are crazy long, giving you the option of the full-cruiser slouch or almost dead upright, plus

everything in between. The Cross Country Tour's riding position is more cruiser-like than the Gold Wing's or BMW K1600GTL's but much more open than the Harley's.

Victory drops another trump on the table with engine sophistication. The 106-cubic-inch, air-cooled, 50-degree V-Twin is quieter than the 103-inch Harley motor, and just as smooth to the rider despite being solidly bolted to the Cross Country Tour's frame. Softer off the bottom than the Harley, the Cross Country Tour's power plant has a pleasant midrange surge, a smooth six-speed gearbox, and just enough mechanical presence to be interesting, not intrusive. Victory claims 92 HP and 148 Nm of torque. Despite tall gearing—you'll really want fifth gear for passing—but in its defence, that new fairing set was pushing a lot of frontal area through the atmosphere.

Maintaining a 660mm seat height came from the seat's shape and location on the chassis, not from eliminating suspension travel—the right choice for a touring machine. The Cross Country Tour's inverted fork and single, air-adjustable rear shock choked small bumps yet kept the hefty chassis solid during travel. Cornering clearance was ample, and the Cross Country Tour seemed perfectly contented leaned over. For 2012, ABS is standard on the touring models, and is of the unlinked variety; the Vision Tour has linked brakes. The Cross Country Tour's brakes are powerful enough for any situation, even if the front doesn't provide a lot of feedback. Victory says that it has chosen a new sensor mechanism with more teeth than usual, which provides better ABS resolution and quicker response.

As superb as the new Cross Country Tour proves on the open road, there are items on the wish list. Just like with any bike, you'd like to add things because we're never satisfied with what the factory has done, we want to personalise our own ride. So, that said, Victory offers a vast range of optional accessories which won't necessarily rip your arm off or make you take a second bond on your house. These include optional wind protection, seats and backrests, chrome, handlebars and mirrors, grips and pegs, electronics, exhausts and performance parts.

The competition is utterly overshadowed by the Cross Country Tour's on-the-road abilities, handsome styling and good value. Consider: Victory mentioned that the company's sales in the touring and cruiser categories are running 24 % ahead of the industry.

Products as good as the Cross Country Touring bear much of the responsibility.

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