



Special Report

New kids on the block

The face of motorcycling is changing, but until recently, all the action has been at the lower end of the field, with a flood of new lightweights from China and Korea fighting it out in a very price-sensitive battle.

Report

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Photography

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TOP RIGHT **Skinny front and fat rear make for unique handling on the Vegas Jackpot.**

BELOW **The Vegas Jackpot – snappy styling and stacks of performance.**

At the top end, however, the scene has been relatively static, with traditional cruiser boss Harley-Davidson fighting off similar designs from the major Japanese brands. Then, just a year or so ago, along came Victory, proudly calling itself The New American Motorcycle, and pitching its impressive range fair into Harley's court. Since then, Victory has appointed dealers in Queensland and Newcastle, opened its own showroom in Melbourne

(the first Victory company-owned dealership anywhere in the world), and will soon do the same in Sydney. It's a brave move, not just for the investment involved, but because of the battering all US-based companies have taken since Lehman brothers ran up the white flag. Fortunately, Victory has at least one good thing going for it – the motorcycles themselves are very fine pieces of engineering.



Victory, part of the giant Polaris group, produced its first motorcycle in 1999 at its Spirit Lake, Iowa factory, so it has achieved much in the ensuing decade, with strong resale value, low servicing costs and a claimed 95% customer-satisfaction rating in the US. As a sign of its commitment to the Australian market, Victory recently staged a major launch of its new and current models on the Queensland Sunshine Coast, and brought





out the company's Vice President of Motorcycles – Polaris Industries Inc., former US motocross star Mark Blackwell. A well educated (he has an MBE from Pepperdine University) and personable bloke, Mark is a font of information and constantly fielded questions on Victory's range from the 20-odd local journo assembled for the occasion.

Broadly, the Victory range is split into two divisions; the big tourers and the leaner cruiser models. The former feature what Victory calls Core Technology, which is a carefully thought out cast-aluminium spar alloy chassis, and a feature of the launch was an air-freighted example of a concept machine built around this technology – probably the trickiest 'Bobber' ever produced. In any rate, Core Technology provides several advantages from an engineering point of view, such as an extremely rigid and dimensionally stable structure with increased airbox volume and a lower seat height. To augment the latter, the battery and

associated bits and pieces have been relocated to the lower front of the engine, below the oil cooler, which also lowers the centre of gravity. The rest of the models in the range share a conventional tubular cradle frame, which has just been revamped to lower the seat height without compromising rear suspension travel.

Motor-wise, the basic Victory OHC 4-valve V-twin mill is air/oil cooled, and comes in two sizes: the 85 horsepower 100 cubic inch (1634 cc) with either 5-speed or 6-speed transmission, and the 97 horsepower 106 cubic inch (1731 cc) six-speeder, both with a counter-balancer to reduce vibration. In terms of suspension, there's a mixture between models of an upside-down style fork and conventional bottom-slider forks, with a mono-shock rear end on all models.

And while the mechanical specification is impressive, it's the visual impact that makes any one of the bikes such a stunning proposition. The finish is simply

impeccable, the paintwork worthy of an art gallery, chrome deep and lustrous, and the styling innovative without being offensive.

The Victory team had mapped out a 205 kilometre run beginning from Coolumb and heading north to Noosa >

ABOVE **The Cross Country. Just load 'er up and hit the road.**
BELOW **Victory Vice President Mark Blackwell hammers home a point.**



SUITABLE PARTNERS



ABOVE **Floating along on the Arlen Ness Vision is a remarkable experience.**
 ABOVE RIGHT **For such a big bike, the Vision takes to the corners with alacrity.**

heads before heading up into the hills via Cooroy to a lunch stop at Kenilworth. This run of about 120 km included some glorious back country roads, with several stops so we could swap bikes. After lunch at Kenilworth it was more mountain roads until Maleny, and thence some freeway stuff back to the Coolumb base.

My first mount was the Hammer 8Ball, a conventional cruiser in basic black, basic instrumentation (just a speedo) and the 5-speed 100 ci engine. This is Victory's entry-level model at \$22,495 + ORC and is their biggest-selling model in Europe, accounting for half the total sales. It was smooth, powerful and fairly neutral in the handling, with its 130/70 and 250/40 18 inch tyres, the single disc front brake providing adequate stopping power – a pleasant, vice-free machine.

After a coffee stop I switched the complete opposite end of the range,

the Arlen Ness Vision, which is about as radical as you can get in a touring motorcycle and with more creature comforts than the average limousine. Mr Ness Snr personally designed the décor on the substantial fairing, which incorporates a stereo system that would not be out of place in a Double Bay penthouse. He also did the billet wheels, the chrome grips (I am yet to be convinced of the practicality of these on any motorcycle, but I guess looks count), plus numerous graphic touches.

The result is a truly gob-smacking visual extravaganza – the sheer mass of which makes it somewhat of a challenge to confront. But, surprise, surprise, once on board, the Vision is a pussy cat, velvety smooth and with impeccable road manners. The 106 ci engine with its 6-speed overdrive gearbox was a major cut above the Hammer that I had just

ridden, in fact there was virtually nothing in common between the two bikes. Whereas the Hammer's front brake did its job without anything above the call of duty, the Vision's stoppers really reined in the big bike quite impressively. When Victory say overdrive, they really mean it, because you won't be using top gear on anything other than a multi lane highway, and for the majority of the time I galloped along in fourth or fifth.

The AN Vision performed superbly on the mountain roads, and unlike the Hammer, emitted a glorious deep growl from the mufflers when the throttle was cranked open. It really is an amazing dichotomy – a motorcycle the size of an apartment that behaves itself perfectly, and in luxurious comfort, and all yours for around \$39,995 + ORC.

The top-of-the-line Vision Tour now comes with Victory's own ABS system,



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with 300 mm floating discs – two at the front and one rear.

Pretty soon I got the tap on the shoulder to vacate the seat – everyone wanted to ride this one – and I climbed down to the Vegas Jackpot – a snappy looking cruiser with the big engine and 6-speed gearbox. Now this really was something completely different. The combination of a skinny 21-inch front wheel and a rear tyre bigger than that on my Commodore SV6 makes for a curious experience when the road goes anything other than straight. You have to be rather forceful in turning into bends and the bike wants to maintain its straight track, then, having achieved the necessary lean angle, it wants to sit back upright when the throttle is opened. This, to me, was an unusual sensation, but I quickly got used to it and after a while I quite liked the touch of aggression that was required to keep the ship on an even keel. Of all the Victory motorcycles I rode on the day, the Jackpot was definitely the most fun-per-mile.

At our final coffee stop someone else snaffled the Jackpot, so my final run for the day was on a Cross Roads – a dedicated tourer with stacks of luggage space (Victory says 79.5 litres of cargo capacity) in the deep panniers, a Lexan windshield, extra-long floorboards and the pokey 106 ci engine. Like all the bikes I rode, the Cross Roads was extremely comfortable – the plush saddle-style seat and the raked-back handlebars perfectly positioned for me. This being the freeway section of the ride, I found myself on the ideal machine for it – this is a bike you could literally ride all day and not be knackered at the end of it. And speaking if ends, all too soon the gates of the Hyatt Cooloom, our



headquarters, hove into view and it was time to park the scooters and reflect on the day's experiences.

Victory is extremely focussed on their aim to carve themselves a sizeable chunk of the top end of the market, and they have a range of quality products from which to do it. From all accounts in the short space of time that the brand has been active in Australia, reliability is a strong point, and in a style-conscious segment of the market, they have every base covered. ■

Victory Motorcycles Off-the-shelf

Model	Colour	Retail*
Vegas 8Ball	Black	\$22,495
Vegas	White	\$24,495
Vegas	Cherry	\$24,495
Vegas	Ocean Blue	\$24,495
Vegas	Red/White	\$24,995
Hammer 8Ball	Black	\$24,995
Hammer	Blue Flame	\$26,995
Hammer	Green Flame	\$26,995
Hammer S	White/Black	\$28,995
Hammer S	Blue/White	\$28,995
Kingpin	Cherry	\$24,495
Kingpin	Blue/Sandstone	\$24,995
Jackpot	White	\$28,495
Jackpot	Red Graphics	\$30,995
Jackpot	Gold Graphics	\$30,995
Jackpot	Black	\$28,495
Cory Ness Jackpot	Red Graphics	\$38,995
Vision Tour ABS	Black	\$35,496
Vision Tour ABS	Ocean Blue/Sand	\$36,595
Vision Tour ABS	Cherry	\$35,995
Cross Country	Black	\$29,996
Cross Country	Black/Skulls	\$30,495
Cross Country	Cherry	\$29,995
Cross Roads	Black	\$27,995
Cross Roads	Cherry	\$27,995

*Including GST (excluding on road costs)

TOP LEFT Distinctive rear end styling on the Cross Country.
 TOP RIGHT Concept Core hard-tail was air-freighted in especially for the launch.
 CENTRE LEFT Big speakers would not be out of place in your apartment.
 CENTRE RIGHT Lexan screen on Cross Roads is easily detachable.
 ABOVE Handsome dashboard on the Vision.