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Words: Fraser Plets: Paul



The new Vegas Low from Victory might have a shorter seat height, but it's not low on style, power or rider appeal.

We've tested a few of the Victory range over the past 12 months or so and the new variants just keep coming. The latest in the other American motorcycle stable is the Vegas Low. As the name suggests, the Low is basically a Vegas that is, well, lower than standard – a whole 33mm lower. Victory, like most other manufacturers are aware that cruisers are becoming popular not only with aging bikers and born-again, but also those that are vertically challenged as well as female riders who are also seeing the benefits of a low seat height and centre of gravity to facilitate their biking needs.

But it's not just the seat height that has been dropped. To cater for the shorter cruiser fan, Victory has also made the hand and foot controls a bit more accessible. The foot pegs are set 57mm rearward and the handlebars have a two-inch (50mm) pull-back, while the side covers are scalloped, making the bike around 35mm narrower. Shorter legs invariably mean shorter phalanges and the front brake lever is now span-adjustable making it easier for smaller hands to securely grasp the lever. Combined, these features mean the Vegas Low is an attractive proposition for riders seeking a lower, relaxed, laid-back cruiser position. However, taller than average riders (like me at 190cm) can also appreciate the low-rider ethos of cruiser-dom and I'm happy to report the Vegas Low can accommodate us taller chaps just as comfortably. While I didn't ride for any more than an hour and a half at a time (due to sub-zero temperatures and having to stop and circulate the blood to my extremities), the Low's riding position didn't grate anywhere near as much as our own M109RN, which after the same time in the saddle is rendering



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my arse well and truly numb. Those with a keen eye will also note that the Vegas Low is a single-seater and isn't furnished with passenger foot pegs. Simply stated, the Vegas Low is a clean looking, solo rider's bike.

Features that the Vegas Low does share with the rest of the Desert City Whanau are the signature fuel tank with the raised spine, scalloped sides and split tail that integrates with the seat along with its unique headlight design and instrument cluster. The Low also retains Victory's 100 cubic inch (1634cc) Freedom V-twin engine that generates a claimed 85 ponies (63.4kW) and 106 ft-lbs (143.7Nm) of torque, mated with a six-speed transmission with overdrive.

Selecting first gear on the six-speed box still produces an audible clunk like the Vegas Jackpot, and 8-Ball tested this year, but thankfully the clutch action is reasonably light and the transition through the gears is smooth and the throws between each cog pretty short and sweet. With 143Nm of torque available (up 8Nm from last year) at a relatively low 2000rpm, short shifting to keep it in the meaty part of the torque curve is the way to go. As I've said in the past, I prefer the ratios in the 8 Ball's five-speed box to the six-speed found in the rest of the Victory range, I reckon they're more suited to our 100kph speed limit, but the Low will still pull smoothly from 100kph in sixth, just not as crisply.

The 100 cu inch Freedom V-twin

is an engine we've grown to love (no surprise it forms the backbone of the bulk of Victory's range) with torquey character and low-down punch, and thankfully the air box drone at certain revs is not as apparent as previous incarnations. Throttle response from the 50° air/oil-cooled twin is sharp and precise and Victory has once again done a fine job on the fuel injection. Acceleration is smooth and glitch free, and the exhaust note emanating from the standard dual cans isn't half bad. Purists of course will ditch the muted standard items in lieu of something with better breathing and a louder bark.

The very shiny front end sports 43mm conventional telescopic forks with chrome fork legs and triple trees, which match the fins on the cylinders and heads, the speedo and also the all-new chromed Stinger wheels. On the rear a chromed swingarm mates up nicely with the rear 5.5" rear wheel, the chrome staggered slash-cut dual exhaust, and of course the chromed rear pulley and belt covers. The rear suspension features a preload adjustable spring, which allows for easy adjustability for various riders' requirements.

The Low provides a comfortable ride with the stock suspension soaking up the bulk of the undulations and road surfaces found on NZ roads, although on square edged bumps it still felt a little harsh and was susceptible to kidney punching the rider on the bigger hits. Mid-cor-

ner stability and turn-in were pretty good considering the 21-inch front hoop and the Low can be hustled along at a fair old clip, but the rear 250-section tyre does limit rider feel and feedback. That said it doesn't seem to have the same 'roll on or off' the edge of the tyre effect of our 240mm shod M109RN.

With 135mm of ground clearance, touching anything down on terra firma takes a spirited rider, and the forward controls touched the tar seal less than many metric cruisers on our test. Low speed manoeuvres were far more likely to scrape bits off than higher-speed work.

Lean the Victory into the turns and the bike will respond accordingly and with the minimum of fuss, with the suspension package and double cradle steel frame doing a good job of providing a predictable, comfortable ride, without scaring the rider with understeer as many cruisers can. It's no sports bike, but it certainly didn't languish in the twisties as some bikes of this ilk can. Slow manoeuvres or u-turns are easy too thanks to big wide bars, and low centre of gravity. However there isn't a generous amount of steering lock and factor in the long-ish wheelbase and you'll struggle to complete a u-turn on B roads without backing it up and having another go.

Bringing 288kg of American muscle to a halt are a pair of 300mm discs – one front, one rear, with six pistons between them (four-pot

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front, two-pot rear) with both doing an adequate job. They offer plenty of feel, power and consistency, and match the minimalist low-rider styling cues nicely.

There are a few other updates for the 2009 Vegas models, one of which is a newly styled taillight that incorporates multiple LEDs that apparently produce twice the brightness while running or braking. At the other end of the bike, the Vegas Low receives a new headlight that features easy bulb replacement by simply removing two 4mm socket head bolts (using a 4mm Allen wrench that is included on the Unitool which stows away under the side cover). The headlight’s reflector is new as well and Victory claims it provides a brighter, more uniform light pattern on the road. When on the high beam setting, both 55watt bulbs are illuminated, and I can tell you they are among the best headlight units we’ve experienced on a cruiser thus far. Like other models in the Victory range, the Vegas Low is now pre-wired for Cruise Control, which can be easily added at anytime by the dealer – very handy if you’re buying second hand. The Low also incorporates a new fuel pump and tank. The

pump assembly is designed to be easy to install and service.

Another new feature for 2009 is a tilt sensor that shuts off the fuel pump if the bike tips over and keeps it off until the ignition key resets the system. This is in addition to a new two-piece die cast foot peg that provides improved durability should the Low wish to get lower still to the ground. The brake and shift lever pivot and are now made of steel and according to the factory are less prone to breakage if the bike happens to fall on its side. While it’s not the same as the Vision’s Tip Over Protection (which uses the foot boards to protect the bodywork), it appears to be a step in the right direction.

On the cosmetic front, the Vegas Low wears new Stingray cast wheels with feature-highlighted spokes, which really complement the chromed out forks, swingarm and engine detailing. They are available with black or silver sprockets and if you opt for the black wheels, the rotors and sprockets are blackened as well. It’s this attention to detail that’s starting to garner fans to the American brand. Speaking of which, one thing that few liked on the Victory range

that has changed and for the better in my opinion is the Tank Badge. While the previous models included a full colour version, complete with that all American symbol, the eagle; it’s been replaced with a monochrome tank badge (in honour of Victory’s second decade). Personally I like it more, but it could still be a little subtler.

All in all the Vegas Low is a package that impresses out of the box. It looks fantastic, particularly with the faux carbon-fibre, blue and white paint scheme (carbon fibre on a cruiser?), acres of chrome and a style that’s becoming recognisable and much appreciated. Not only that, it performs as good as it looks and offers a genuine alternative for buyers looking for something non Harley Davidson. Where it loses out to the metric or Japanese cruisers is on price, as at \$29,995 (single colour) it may be competitive to its HD equivalent, but will be more expensive than any Japper of similar performance/size. But for the extra Sir Eds you get a real bona-fide Yank, a bike that stands out from the crowd off the showroom floor, and a cruiser that really does fit the term cruiser in every sense of the word.

**BRM**

### Victory Vegas Low

Price: \$29,995 single colour

#### ENGINE & TRANSMISSION

Type: 1634cc Air/Oil-cooled 4-stroke 50° V-Twin

Bore x Stroke: 101x102mm

Compression Ratio: 8.7:1

Valve Train: Single overhead camshafts with 4 valves per cylinder, self-adjusting cam chains, hydraulic lifters

Fuel System: Electronic Fuel Injection with 45mm throttle bodies

Transmission: 6-speed overdrive constant mesh

Clutch: Wet, multi-plate

Final Drive: Carbon Fibre Reinforced Belt

#### CHASSIS & RUNNING GEAR

Front Suspension: 43mm forks, 130mm travel

Rear Suspension: Single, mono-tube gas, 75mm travel, preload adjustable spring

Front Brake: 300mm floating rotor with 4-piston caliper

Rear Brake: 300mm floating rotor with 2-piston caliper

Front Wheel: 21x2.15in

Rear Wheel: 18x5.5in

Front Tyre: 90/90 21 Dunlop Elite 3

Rear Tyre: 180 55-B18 Dunlop D417

#### DIMENSIONS

Fuel Capacity: 17 litres

Rake/Trail: 32.9°/126mm

Length: 2439mm

Wheelbase: 1684mm

Seat Height: 640mm

Ground Clearance: 135mm

Dry Weight: 288kg