

CIVICS LESSON

THE HIGHLY ADAPTABLE TOP SELLER COMES IN NEW FLAVORS BY JOE SAGE

The fading of sedans in the face of the crossover craze has been widely reported, statistically confirmed by sales numbers and/or reinforced by a number of manufacturers reducing or even dropping their sedan lineups, in a combined chicken-and-egg market response or supply dictate. Those manufacturers who keep sedans in their lineup are poised to benefit from the reduced competition, while identifying real strength in certain market segments.

Honda is one of these—bringing us a brand new Civic and identifying their prime market as Millennials, Gen Z, first-time buyers and multicultural buyers. We work in an area with a great many young tech workers and such, and anecdotally this is backed up by a notable popularity of small sedans. And Honda's numbers are not just for any ol' sedans. Civic already rates number one in sales with each of these demographics. It's also, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the third-most Instagrammed vehicle in the world.

Civic is even king of Honda's own realm, with

25 percent of their own website visits and a third of all online Honda searches specific to the model. This is all significant, as three out of every four Civic buyers come back to purchase another Honda. And it may be another Civic—they've sold over 12 million in the US since 1973, making it one of the top three passenger cars in America over these 49 years running.

Honda has an all-new generation—eleven Civic for 2022, replacing gen ten, which was launched in 2015. Styling is new inside and out, body and structure are strengthened, its new 1.5-liter turbo is both more powerful and more fuel efficient, suspension and steering are updated, and of course there are a new range of tech and safety features galore.

To say it has been well received is an understatement—the new Civic has just taken home the prestigious North American Car of the Year Award.

It all starts with the Civic Sedan, but with perhaps equal parts thirst for new ideas and the opportunity to expand and strengthen a segment they are committed to, Honda has introduced two variations—a new take on the Hatchback and the return of the Si. We just spent a week each with them, back to back.

The Hatchback is available with two different engines—a 158-hp 2.0L normally aspirated four and a 180-hp 1.5L turbo as on our top trim Sport Touring (and the upper-mid EX-L), with a choice of 6-speed manual or CVT (at no price

difference) on all but the base model (the LX is CVT only). The mildly performance-oriented Si is available with a 1.5L turbo only, though for this model it's juiced up to 200 hp. And the Si comes with a 6-speed manual only.

The Hatchback is an interesting take on hatches, which our market is used to being a two-box squareback format. This one is more of a Kammback or Grand Touring style, more sedanlike, with an elongated roof and continuity of interior space from the cargo area into the cabin. Even with the rear seats up, this almost doubles cargo space; with the rear seats down, it multiplies this sizably, though that specification is not yet available.

The first Honda we ever drove was also the first front-wheel-drive car we ever drove, and thus our first experience with torque steer, a tendency for the force of wheel rotation to translate to unwanted redirection of the front wheels, which are also the drive wheels. That was years ago, but we still watch for it, and in the new Hatchback, we found it completely conquered—accelerating through tight S-maneuvers in town with no repercussions.

All in all, the Civic Hatchback experience is the same as the Sedan, cargo considerations aside. The Hatch does weigh about 25 pounds more (top trim to top trim) and shifts one percent of its weight distribution to the front (ditto on trim), thanks to the open compartment structure in the rear, though its added cargo volume will shift things rearward according to load.

CVTs have detractors and they have people who are unaware of them, but we've yet to meet an actual fan. Accelerating up a freeway ramp, the car has

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SPECIFICATIONS Hatchback Sport Touring Si 6MT (summer tires)

ASSEMBLY	Greensburg, Indiana	Alliston, Ontario, Canada
ENGINE/TRANSMISSION/US-CDN%	USA/USA/60%	USA/India/60%
ENGINE	1.5L turbo four 16v DOHC i-VTEC dir inj	(same / enhanced)
HP/TORQUE	180 hp / 177 lb-ft	200 hp / 192 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	10.3:1	(same)
TRANSMISSION	LL-CVT, dual-mode paddles	6-spd manual, rev-match
DRIVETRAIN	FWD	FWD
SUSPENSION	F: MacPherson strut; R: multi-link indep;	(same)
	stblz bars: F: 26.5mm tubular, R: 17.5mm solid	F: 27mm tub, R: 18mm solid
STEERING	variable ratio rack & pinion EPS	similar but dual-pinion
BRAKES	F: 11.1 vented; R: 10.2 solid	F: 12.3 vented; R: 11.1 solid
WHEELS	18-in alloys	18-in matte black alloy
TIRES	235/40R18 91W	235/40R18 95Y hi-perf
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	179.0 / 107.7 in	184.0 / 107.7 in
TURNING CIRCLE	38.1 ft	(same)
HEADROOM (F/R)	37.6 / 37.1 in	(same)
LEGROOM (F/R)	42.3 / 37.4 in	(same)
CARGO CAPACITY	24.5 / (seat down tbd) cu.ft	14.1 cu.ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	na	na
WEIGHT / DISTRIBUTION F/R	3102 lb / 60.2/39.8%	2961 lb / 60.6/39.4%
FUEL / CAPACITY	reg unl / 12.39 gal	reg (prem rec) unl / 12.39 gal
MPG	(CVT) 30/37/33 (city/hwy/comb)	27/37/31 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$29,400	\$27,500
PAINT: Blazing Orange paint (on Si)		395
DESTINATION CHARGE	1015	1015
TOTAL	\$30,415	\$28,910

2022 HONDA CIVIC LINEUP HATCHBACK Si 6MT

LX	2.0L / 158 hp	CVT	\$22,900
Sport		6MT	24,100
"		CVT	24,100
EX-L	1.5L Turbo / 180 hp	CVT	26,600
Sport Touring		6MT	29,400
"		CVT	29,400
Si	1.5L Turbo / 200 hp	6MT	27,300
" w summer tires			27,500



2022 CAR OF THE YEAR™



(Left) 2022 Honda Civic 1.5T Hatchback Sport Touring (Right) 2022 Honda Civic Si 6MT 4-Door Hardtop (Summer Tires)

plenty of power, although if you are in tune with the idiosyncrasies of CVT behavior, it's very apparent in this one—just roaring up that ramp waiting for something to shift that never does. It doesn't affect your speed; it just deviates from what people are used to, unless of course they are getting used to ever-more-common fuel-saving CVTs.

As the week went on, we found ourselves thinking the Civic Hatch was a blast, a fun little car. Perceptions may have been augmented by its Rallye Red paint. Now imagine the same thing with a little more horsepower, a manual transmission, and just a bit beefier suspension, steering and brakes. We wouldn't have to imagine for long, as our Hatchback's departure was hand-in-glove with the arrival of an even sportier Blazing Orange Pearl 200-hp manual trans Si.

Does that sound like a step up? It's actually \$2100 less expensive—or \$1900 less if you opt for Summer Tires (they actually treat "Si (Summer Tires)" as another model, with different specs, not just a set of tires). If you like performance and you like some cash still in your pocket, the Si is a win-win.

Not overly showy, the Si is recognizable by its rear wing, exhaust tips, discreet badging and black alloy wheels. The interior is laid out pretty flawlessly, taking advantage of every surface and opportunity with purpose, but without clutter. It's full of style points that don't run the cost up but add a lot of character, such as a honeycomb pattern across the instrument panel, concealing the vents and contributing a look and feel on a par with, say, high-dollar carbon fiber. It's a whole separate feeling, cleverly achieved. There are also sport seats, and of course three pedals.

The steering wheel and shifter are leather-wrapped, while the seats are non-leather, a combination of fabric and an unidentified material for bolsters and surrounds. Of note: in our dry climate, these generate considerable static electricity. We learned the hard way that you should check for bed-head between parking and your next meeting.

The engine is strong, and the shifts are strong. The enhanced VTEC turbo delivers torque 300 rpm earlier, for performance from the line and in cornering, and it holds almost all peak power from 6000 rpm to redline at 6500. The trans-

mission includes a rev-matching system from the Type R, applied for the first time in the Civic Si. If you like enhanced exhaust system sound effects, the new Si has 'em. The system also generates downshift blips on its own. The most aggressive version, in Sport mode, is not for everybody—amped up considerably, but also dropping out at every shift, which will delight some drivers and disturb others, as just a bit too boy-racerish. Normal mode is about the same at aggressive lower RPMs, while Touring mode tames the whole curve. Then again, during an open highway run on AZ 87, we punched it back into Sport, gave it some gas, and it sounded great. Possibly Touring mode should simply be renamed Neighbors mode or police-in-the-next-lane mode, for town.

The transmission itself—manufactured in India—is brilliant, a gem, delivering very tight, smooth, precise short-throw shifts exactly as intended, with the possible exception of a slight drop in power through second gear.

Surprising to us, after a week of noting the absence of front-drive torque steer in the Hatchback, was the presence of it in the Si—basically just between shifts, that brief instant during which power is not applied to the wheels. Once realized, this is pretty easily conquered and controlled.

We had a big box to transport and were pleasantly surprised to find that, even following the Hatchback, the trunk is sizable for a compact, basically as wide as the Hatch, just not as deep, i.e. just as useful most of the time.

Honda makes vehicle shopping and purchase simple, via a straightforward system of models, each with their particular inclusions, one price and done, rather than the more common option process that almost always changes your price considerably once you're final. Even as such, it's impressive how much versatility they can get out of one model. With just the Hatchback, you have four trim levels, two engines and two transmissions. With the Si, there is only one flavor—well, plus the Summer Tires version (great for here, by the way).

For the price, both the Civic Hatchback and Civic Si are knockouts.

But wait—while we were driving these, Honda was semi-revealing a new gen-eleven Civic Type R, still in camouflage, in Tokyo. The prior Type R was just over 300 hp and close to \$40 grand. We look forward to this full reveal. ■

