

Dream machine BY JOE SAGE

One very long yet very quick quarter-century ago, there were three Japanese rice rockets: Type R, Evo and STI—factory tuner rally cars from Honda, Mitsubishi and Subaru, the latter two all-wheel-drivers and the Honda a front-driver. Each has its own detailed history, with international variables, gaps here and there and the other two departing production over the past decade. But, based on the gen-eleven Civic new for 2021, the latest Type R survives, entering in 2022 as new for 2023. We last had a 2020 Type R in early 2021, with more aggressive body styling—bigger vents and wing, bolder all around, a Storm Trooper look. The new 2023 Type R closes the gap between a halo vehicle with a dramatic cutting edge boy racer persona and a tamer one with wider appeal, dependent more on its specs than its spectacle. This may

matter more to the smaller edgier customer block, so it remains to be seen what the impacts of this evolution may be, if any. Being radical enough to please the extreme set, while mainstream enough to sell well enough to support the whole effort, may seem like conflicting goals, but making things work both ways is where the magic happens. Be glad the car is still being refined and produced.

The Honda Civic Type R has not only survived, but is doing very well indeed. It's the most powerful Honda production vehicle ever sold in the US, recently setting a new track record at Nürburgring that eclipses even the prior Type R's record at Suzuka Circuit (see sidebar).

Civic Type R is a huge part pure Japanese Domestic (though lefthand drive)—built at the Yorii Plant in Japan—and a key part all-American, with

its engine from Honda's Anna Engine Plant in Ohio.

At home beneath a vented aluminum hood is a 315-hp 2.0-liter four-cylinder turbo, an even more powerful version of Honda's award-winning K20C1 engine, fed exclusively through a 6-speed manual. Upgrades include a redesigned turbocharger, increased air intake flow rate and a new straight-through exhaust system with active exhaust valve for enhanced engine acoustics. The grille, radiator and fan have all been upsized, ensuring sustained, optimal cooling during extreme driving.

Body rigidity is increased, its wheelbase has grown 1.4 inches, and track has grown front and rear by up to an inch. Retuned suspension improves straight-line stability and steering feel, while two-piece front brake rotors reduce unsprung weight; brake boosting and cooling are also upgraded.

All this is wrapped in sheet metal arguably less extreme than before, in the name of aerodynamics

and downforce. The Type R's defining element, the new rear wing is fully effective—count on that—while a little more low-key, not even visible in the rear view mirror. And take heart in the unmistakable presence of those Type R tailpipes.

The interior is also extensively reworked, from ergonomics to features and finishes.

Driving performance is superior, shedding that bouncy skateboard feeling of earlier entries in this class, including itself—smooth as can be over seams and imperfections in pavement. You don't really notice that it's a front-driver, though we could still get a little chirp from the front tires in a routinely aggressive turn or shift—but that's all pleasure and no pain. The shifter and clutch are accurate, easy and well-spaced. The car remains extreme, but driving it is a dream.

There's new rev-matching in this powertrain, generally not our favorite thing—aimed mostly at drivers who aren't particularly experienced with shifting a manual. Better to master that, a skill you can bring to vehicles without it. We turned this off.

Cruising in town, you can stay in one gear much of the time, anyway—power curves are broad, with acceleration and deceleration right on tap and immediate torque up and down the range.

Drive modes include comfort, sport and R+, plus an Individual Mode allowing you to set the best of all of the above for engine, steering, suspension, even powertrain sound. Switching among them is via a simple toggle on the console.

Though appearance is dialed back, take heart in the fact that the cognoscenti still recognize the Type R—this car will draw out the boy racer set on the freeway. (Other Type Rs or STIs don't react, but a run of the mill Civic with pink wheels and decals may try to show you how much skill those added.)

Type R is fabulous as a daily driver, with very smooth shifts and great maneuverability. On the freeway, it's a hoot—dead accurate in every way.

We never found its fuel mileage readout, but its ratings are great for this powerhouse—and that's not what you buy it for, anyway. That's just yet another bonus. ■

The new Type R was voted Motor Authority BEST CAR TO BUY 2023.

Named one of Car and Driver's 10BEST CARS FOR 2023, the car also went on to win their Editor's Choice award for 2023 SPORT COMPACT CAR.



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY.....	Yorii-Machi, Saitama, Japan
ENGINE / TRANSMISSION.....	USA / Japan
ROWS / SEATS.....	two / four
ENGINE.....	2.0L turbocharged 4-cylinder, 16v DOHC VTEC, 23.3 boost
HP/TORQUE.....	315 hp / 310 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO.....	9.8:1
TRANSMISSION.....	6-spd manual: high-capacity w rev matching
DRIVETRAIN.....	FWD
DIFFERENTIAL.....	helical limited slip
SUSPENSION.....	adaptive damper system:
	F: dual-axis MacPherson strut, 29.0x5.0 tubular stblzr bar;
	R: multilink, 20.5 solid stblzr bar
STEERING.....	dual-pinion, var ratio elec power
BRAKES.....	F: 13.8x1.05 two-piece vented, Brembo four-piston alum calipers; R: 12.0x0.361 solid
WHEELS.....	19x9.5J matte black alloy
TIRES.....	265/30 / ZZR19 93Y Michelin Pilot Sport 4S high-performance summer
LENGTH / WHEELBASE.....	180.9 / 107.7 in
GROUND CLEARANCE.....	4.8 in
APPROACH / DEPART.....	10.9 / 15.1°
TURNING CIRCLE.....	39.9 ft
HEADROOM (F/R).....	39.3 / 37.1 in
LEGROOM (F/R).....	42.3 / 37.4 in
CARGO CAPACITY.....	24.5 cu.ft
WEIGHT / DISTRIB.....	3188 lb / 62/38%
FUEL / CAPACITY.....	reg (prem rec) / 12.4 gal
MPG.....	22/28/24 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE.....	\$42,895
PAINT: Championship White.....	395
DESTINATION CHARGE.....	1095
TOTAL.....	\$44,385

(Note: prices have increased; see chart.)

2023 CIVIC TYPE R LINEUP

Type R / 6MT.....	\$43,295
-------------------	----------

NEW NÜRBURGRING RECORD: The all-new 2023 Honda Civic Type R has followed up its lap record at Suzuka Circuit in Japan with a new front-wheel-drive record on the 20.8-km Nürburgring Nordschleife in Germany—considered the most challenging road circuit ever devised—during testing and performance evaluation, with an official lap time of 7 minutes 44.881 seconds. Six years ago, the record was set by the previous-generation Civic Type R (FK8).