

Honda Civic 1.6 i-DTEC EX Manual

Published: July 22, 2013

Author: Tom Scanlan

Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/honda-civic-1-6-i-dtec-ex-manual/>



Honda has put on sale its latest 1.6-litre 120PS Diesel engine in the popular Civic range.

As seems to be customary, the technology in this engine has been given a name: 'Earth Dreams'. Broadly speaking, it hints at eco-friendliness, through efficiency in frugal fuel consumption and low emission pollution, but without reducing accelerative performance (0-62 mph in 10.5 seconds).

The range starts with the SE version, costing £19,400. There's also the ES at £20,595 and the EX for £23,175. In each case, the engine is unchanged, so the extra costs are for upgrades in equipment refinement or add-on features. The good thing in Honda's case is



that, whichever model you go for, you will not lose out on any safety technology. This includes the main standard industry features of ABS (anti-skid braking), EBD (electronic brake force distribution ensuring appropriate braking power to front or rear ends), EBA (emergency brake assist (ensuring full pressure from the brake pedal if the driver hasn't already done this) and VSA (vehicle stability assist so that, for example on a bend where the car detects loss of adhesion, engine power is reduced to the wheel that's starting to skid).

Driving the 1.6 i-DTEC is easy and pleasant. I happened to be in the top-of-the-range XE, so had the benefit of HDD navigation, premium audio, leather interior, heated front seats, also front and rear parking sensors. On my drive, I didn't in fact require any of these (seats, of course, are useful, but don't have to be in leather!). My navigator happened to be none other than Honda's BTCC champion driver, Matt Neal. I was even more on my best behaviour, therefore, than I would usually be.

FRUGAL FUEL CONSUMPTION

Our route for the first impressions covered around thirty miles of sunny - as it happened - Sussex, and was generally unhurried, but with some very slow traffic through villages. Having said that, and even though Honda's official combined fuel consumption for this car is 78.3 mpg, it was pleasing to find that the car's trip computer showed my fuel was used at 73.1 mpg. By the way, although Diesel technology is reckoned to be less effective in heavy traffic, this Honda's official fuel consumption figure for urban motoring is an impressive 70.6 mpg, so it sounds promising. (We'd love to hear from you if owners who regularly drive in heavy traffic can actually achieve anything like this figure.) The clue is in the improvements to the turbo-charging, the high pressure injection of fuel and internal redesign. Lighter construction of the engine (Honda says this is the lightest engine in its class) and reduction in weight in the newly-designed six-speed gearbox are further aids, as are subtle changes to the aerodynamics. If fuel economy is all-important to you, you can opt to drive in the car's economy mode; I used it for perhaps ten per cent of my trial run.

It's not easy to find fault with new cars these days, certainly not in a brief first drive. The Civic 1.6 i-DTEC showed no faults or immediately noticeable design peculiarities; everything



was in place and worked nicely. The car was comfortable; they call their rear seats 'Magic seats', but not in the sense of producing the unexpected! No, it's just their name for an admittedly very easy system of folding re-setting the back seats to extend boot space.

The engine felt responsive and the gearbox made for a very easy drive: It was a car I felt instantly at home in. A clever touch is their ANC (anti noise cancellation) that helps reduce low-frequency sound.

This Civic should prove to be particularly popular, with its miserly fuel consumption and, with an emissions rating of only 94g/km, it's in tax band A, so there's no annual contribution to the road fund to pay, as well as, for Londoners and visitors, no congestion charge.



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