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# Honda Civic Type R GT – Road Test

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Just how good is Honda's current Type R?  
Kim Henson test drives the top line GT version, to find out.

*(All words and photographs by Kim).*

In the late summer of 2001 Honda introduced their original, first generation performance-orientated Civic Type R, and I was fortunate enough to be invited to the launch event for UK motoring writers, held on the Isle of Man. Unfortunately the weather didn't play ball, and for most of our distance on the famous TT Circuit our assessment of the car was necessarily tamed by roads that were shrouded in mist and drizzle.

Even so, when the mists cleared a little, the performance potential of the vehicle was clearly evident, and the model was highly praised by those writers present (including me) for its





excellent performance, coupled with reassuringly safe handling and practicality levels more usually associated with much less powerful machinery.

Essentially though, the first Type R models were all about sheer power and performance, instantly delivered. However, over the years since then, the cars bearing that name have been refined, re-engineered and improved in every way, but building on the inherent strengths of the original, and using the experience gained by Honda over many years in motor sport. Fast-forward 18 years...



Race-inspired features of the current models include the brake cooling vents (to cool the large and effective Brembo discs and calipers), aerodynamic rear spoiler/wing, vented aluminium bonnet and centrally-positioned triple exhaust outlets.





As with their NSX supercar, Honda justifiably showcases the current Civic Type R - the highest-performing version of the 10<sup>th</sup> generation Civic line-up - as an example of the engineering excellence that the company applies to all of its vehicles. In short, the design team and engineers work relentlessly in pursuit of motoring perfection.





As a result, today's Type R is very different from earlier versions, even including the comparatively recent 2015 model. The current car has been changed in many ways, among these featuring a revised body platform (with torsional stiffness said to have been improved by 38 per cent), new running gear systems (revised MacPherson strut type front suspension with geometry set to optimise handling and minimise torque steer, plus a new multi-link rear suspension set-up), an updated gearbox and a fresh interior.

The more rigid body structure and suspension set-ups work together to provide even sharper handling responses than applicable to previous generations of the car. The new multi-link rear suspension is said to aid stability under braking and to minimise body roll. The Adaptive Damper System plays its part as well, and overall, chassis-wise, this is a race-bred sports car for the road (or track).





Power and torque delivery is important too of course... At the heart of the car is a 2.0 litre turbocharged four cylinder engine, incorporating Honda's efficient and reliable VTEC system (electronically operated variable valve control ), and driving the front wheels via a six speed manual gearbox. This features a 'rev match' system for smooth, seamless and rapid ratio changes, but the system can be switched off if the driver prefers.



A helical limited slip differential is also employed, to help feed all available power down to the tarmac.

The motor delivers 320 PS at 6,500 rpm, and a very healthy maximum torque figure of 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) all the way between 2,500 and 4,500 rpm.

Three drive modes are available, 'Comfort', 'Sport' and '+R', with the car's dynamic characteristics varying between the three in terms of throttle response, gearchange feel,





steering force and adaptive suspension damper settings; the appearance/illumination of the instrument panel also changes according to the mode selected.

For everyday driving, 'Comfort' mode provides a reasonably compliant ride for a car with so much performance potential, and even with this setting selected, handles impressively.



Switch to 'Sport' (at the touch of a button on the centre console) and the responses sharpen up and the suspension feels firmer; driving on twisting routes is even more fun, yet still feels very safe.



The '+R' setting provides the ultimate in performance, handling and roadholding, ideal for those who fancy giving their Type R an occasional airing on race circuits... When this mode is engaged, for a much more 'direct' driving feel, it changes the traction control settings and firms up the steering and adaptive dampers.





As a result of all this development work and the attention to detail applied at every level, this car is one of the quickest and most respected sporting five door hatchbacks of our time, delivering enviable acceleration figures (standstill to 62 mph in 5.8 seconds, plus ultra-rapid 'on the move' figures) and with a potential top speed where limits allow of a whopping 169 mph!

It looks the part too, with extrovert styling that is not backward in telling the world that this is a driver's car built for performance, and with the latest versions running on new 20 inch diameter sports aluminium alloy wheels (unique to the Type R and shod with very low profile tyres), that complement the bold angles and lines that this Civic's bodywork encompasses. One only has to glance at the car to be aware of its vibrancy, and for most



observers its appearance is exhilarating, even before you climb aboard and drive it.

Having said that, the bodywork design has been developed not just to provide striking looks, but also to incorporate a variety of aerodynamic niceties to help optimise airflow and downforce, in turn aiding the car's handling and overall dynamic performance. These include the front 'air curtain' set-up, the rear spoiler/wing and the roof-mounted vortex generators, which guide air flow over the rear of the vehicle. Every little helps...



As mentioned, the Type R was developed with the benefit of Honda's extensive experience in motor racing. It's perhaps not surprising then that proof of the car's potential was provided by a development version of the model achieving a new world record for front wheel drive cars, lapping the famous Nürburgring circuit in Germany, in seven minutes,





43.8 seconds – some seven seconds faster than the previous Type R's time. The model has also set lap records for Magny Cours, Spa Francorchamps, Silverstone, Estoril and Hungaroring.

While it's deliberately a fast car, at the same time it is also a safe and practical vehicle. State of the art safety systems abound, and without listing them all, notably these include the Honda SENSING suite of aids that include Collision Mitigating Braking, Traffic Sign Recognition, Lane Keeping Assist and an Intelligent Speed Limiter, in addition to a multitude of protective airbags – and so on.

'Comfort and convenience' equipment levels are comprehensive, even on the lower-priced version of the two on offer, the 'basic' Type R, priced at £31,525.

A list of the standard kit would fill an article on its own, but as examples, standard features include Smart Entry and Start, rain-sensing screen wipers, an eight speaker Honda CONNECT infotainment system, a multitude of connectivity functions, LED headlamps, privacy glass, red sports seats (wrap-around 'bucket' type in the front), climate control, heated door mirrors, a leather-trimmed steering wheel, etc, etc.

The GT variant, and the subject of our road test, costs £2,000 more (so a total of £33,525). This extra cash buys an upgraded Honda's CONNECT infotainment system (including a premium 11 speaker audio set-up plus Garmin Navigation), Blind Spot Information, Cross Traffic Monitor, dual zone climate control, front and rear parking sensors, keyfob-operated mirrors and electric windows, LED front fog lamps, wireless charging an auto dimming rear view mirror and 'red trim on exterior garnishes'.

## INSIDE STORY

The bright interior, complete with beautifully-presented red and black seats and red seat belts, is businesslike in a sporty sort of way, and very welcoming. It's also comfortable over short and long distances, with the two front seats shaped to hold securely the driver and front seat passenger. Manual height adjustment is provided for the driver's seat.



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It may be important for buyers to appreciate that the rear seat (60/40 folding) is set up to accommodate just two people (rather than three, as might be expected, and as in other Civic models). The two rear seat occupants have good leg room (unless the front seats are set towards the rear of their available fore/aft travel) and just about adequate head room, although taller passengers may find their heads brushing against the headlining.





There are plenty of handy stowage spaces around the interior, including a large glovebox, deep bins in the doors (longer in the front doors than in the rear) and a very handy centre console compartment with a sliding lid.

The luggage compartment is as spacious as the less powerful Civics of today; with all four seats occupied the boot space is still good for holiday/weekend luggage. With just two people aboard, the rear seat backs (which are divided 60:40), fold forward – instantly, at the touch of a button – to provide a long and wide platform, although it is not quite flat towards the front. By my measurements, with the rear seats folded and the front seats set in about their midway positions, the available length for loads is approximately 173 cm (68 in), with a minimum width of 86 cm (nearly 34 cm) between the wheel arches, and a maximum width





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towards the rear of the boot, of 136 cm (51 in) - all these figures being approximate.







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During my time with the Honda, I was called upon to help my daughter move house, and the car proved to be astonishingly commodious with the rear seats folded, and the car was very easy to load via the rear side doors and the tailgate.





While talking about the boot, it is worth mentioning that a tyre repair kit is provided, but a temporary use spare wheel is available as an extra-cost option.

A look into the cockpit and at the dashboard again confirms that the Civic type R is a driver's car. The instruments, grouped together directly ahead of the driver, are crystal-clear and easy to read by day or night. The digital speedometer provides an unmistakable display of the vehicle's speed, which is a very good aspect... and the tachometer is cleverly integrated in the form of an arc around the mph reading and information readout.

There's a seven inch touchscreen set-up in the centre of the fascia, and this is quite easy to operate although for my liking too many of the vehicle's functions can only be accessed via





the touch screen. Having said that, the temperature controls (on the GT version individual for each side of the car, or synchronisable between the two) are in the form of conventional rotary control knobs, and these are easy to use. The Climate Control screen is also easy to call up, by means of the button just beneath the screen, taking the user into a menu that allows operational changes to be made.

The display can be set to show current average miles per gallon figures (and, helpfully, those relating to previous use, between tripmeter re-sets).

During my autumnal week with the car, the weather was often wet/misty, and sometimes the overnight temperatures were below freezing, so moisture and/or ice on the screens were present each day. However, the effective demisting/de-icing capabilities of the car restored a clear view – front and rear – within seconds of start-up; a great safety feature I feel.

On a practical note, if the car is muddy, care is needed when getting in and out of the vehicle, to avoid touching the wide side skirts with your clothes (or they will get dirty!).

## ON THE ROAD



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Throughout my time with the Honda, a push on the dash-mounted 'Start' button brought the two litre motor burbling instantly and happily to life, and in all weather conditions it very soon warmed up to normal operating temperature.

I was very impressed by the way that this car is so wonderfully docile and easy to drive at low engine speeds, in high density traffic and in towns, for example. In such situations the engine works quietly and effortlessly, without showing any temperament, nor need for high revs. The prodigious levels of torque delivered at low rpm means that the car pulls strongly in such situations, with a minimum amount of gearchanging required. It's happy just to trickle along quietly until it can be given its head out of town.

I found that although maximum torque is not produced until the engine speed has reached





2,500 rpm, in fact the motor will pull strongly from much lower speeds – about 1,400 rpm and upwards.

When the open road is reached and the throttle is applied rather more vigorously, a different character is instantly revealed and the Type R surges rapidly ahead when required, with the tachometer needle climbing. However, this is a modern and very refined high performer, and unlike some other turbocharged hot hatches (especially those of the past), with this Honda everything happens in a very controlled manner.

At the same time the motor produces a satisfying yet muted growl from its triple outlet exhaust system. It's a pleasant sound and tells you that it is accelerating hard, but is not screaming the fact to others.

It doesn't take long to reach 60 mph, and at this speed the engine is unstressed and hardly working, with just 2,250 rpm required in sixth (top) gear.

It is also sobering to think that at Britain's legal speed limit for motorway driving, the car is travelling at 100 mph less than its top speed capability! In any event at 70 mph progress is quiet and effortless, as it is when hill-climbing.

When accelerating hard, there's a distinct lack of 'torque steer' (in some front wheel drive cars, especially high-powered ones, this phenomenon tends to drag the front wheels to one side when accelerating rapidly, with 'tugging' at the steering wheel occurring at the same time). This good-mannered nature of the Type R when accelerating rapidly is welcome.

In fact I found that this Honda is a very precise vehicle to place on the road and follows the line chosen by the driver at all speeds, and even in adverse weather/road conditions (when of course discretion and a regard for the laws of physics and of the land are required). During my time with the car it always felt reassuringly composed, safe and fun to drive, and grip levels were astonishingly good.

Let's hear it too for the perfectly-weighted power-assisted steering set-up. With plenty of



assistance provided at low road speeds, the car proved to be easy to park and to manoeuvre, but on the open road the steering felt precise, with plenty of positive feedback for the driver; no vagueness at all.

Cornering – whether on long, sweeping main road curves or tight hairpin bends – was easy, drama-free and body roll-free, and highly enjoyable.

The brakes proved to be powerful, progressive in action and reassuring; just excellent.

Parking was straightforward, aided by the good turning circle and the excellent reverse camera system – essential as rearward visibility was restricted by the ‘wing’/spoiler mounted partway up the rear window, and the car’s thick rear side pillars.

I should mention that although the car rides low (and has a low centre of gravity), it proved to be fine in coping with urban road ‘speed’ humps in my local area (which in any case I take slowly) and there was no danger of grounding.

However, the outer edges of those lovely-looking 20 inch special sports wheels are vulnerable to being accidentally grazed on kerbs when parking, even if you are careful, and are poorly protected by the tyres, which could do with extending a touch more outwards, to help preserve those rims.





With the car operating in 'Comfort' mode the ride quality was perfectly acceptable for all my passengers, and yet we all felt that the car cornered superbly.

With the console-mounted switch changed to 'Sport' mode the car felt sharper in all respects. Although the ride quality became firmer, it wasn't harsh, and when on my own in the car I enjoyed trying the car with this setting selected.

The '+R' mode is the ultimate for handling/roadholding prowess, but felt a little too firm for any distance of road use, for me at least.

I have to admit that I enjoyed the way that the car performed when set to the Comfort mode, and the switch stayed in this position for most of my week with the vehicle.



The six speed manual gearbox was a delight, with a short-throw, silky-slick gearchange quality that enabled ratio changes to be accomplished ultra-rapidly and easily.

Traction was excellent too, with power reaching the tarmac via the limited slip differential that worked superbly.

During long drives at night, and in pouring rain, I was thankful for the excellent headlamps (giving a good spread of light on both dipped and main beams) and the effective screen wipers.

## FUEL CONSUMPTION?

The official 'Combined' fuel consumption figure for the Type R is a creditable 36.7 mpg. Over a total test distance of 358 miles, including some town driving conditions, my test car showed an average consumption figure of 35.0 mpg. I feel that this is very impressive, considering the performance potential of the car.





As with other models in the company's range, and as mentioned earlier, Honda's on-board computer system screen display can be set to show previous average fuel consumption figures, obtained between re-sets of the twin 'trip meter' mileage recorders. (The figures recorded previously by other drivers of my test car had apparently varied between 32.0 and 33.8 mpg).

While talking about fuel... I liked the 'capless' fuel filler arrangement, which incorporates an automatically-activated spring-loaded cover over the petrol filler pipe neck. With the body side's external flap opened, the fuel pump nozzle can be inserted quickly and easily into the tank's filler neck, to enable refuelling to take place. What a good idea.

Incidentally, a label on the bodywork flap covering the petrol filler tube indicates that 98 RON fuel grade is recommended, with 95 RON (i.e. 'normal' unleaded in the UK) as the minimum grade acceptable. The comprehensive handbook (containing more than 800 pages of useful information about the car) confirms this. When I re-fuelled the car at a local filling station, I chose their higher-grade 'Super' unleaded petrol, in fact stated as being 99 RON (rather than their 'regular' offering of 95 RON 'standard' unleaded).



## VERDICT

Totally terrific.

Over many years I've driven, judged and written about countless new and classic cars, and after a joyful week living with this extraordinary machine, the current Type R has moved up yet another notch in my list of all-time favourite vehicles. It is now equal at 'Number One' in my personal countdown. (If you are wondering which model it shares this top position with, the answer is another Honda, the NSX, actually... classic and latest versions).

By the way, each of today's Type R models comes with a plaque bearing the car's individual





serial number, making it even more special for the buyer...

Of course, £33,525 is a great deal of money, but would buy a GT version as tested. However, to put this in context, by comparison with so many other performance vehicles in which a buyer might 'invest' his or her cash, in fact the Type R represents a huge amount of good value for money as a truly excellent sporting motor car.

In my book this Honda is already a top class modern classic in its own time.



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## Honda Civic Type R GT.

Engine: Euro 6 four cylinder, 16 valve 2.0 litre (1996cc), direct fuel injection turbocharged, with fuel-saving 'stop/start' system.

Transmission: Six speed manual gearbox; front wheel drive.

Power: 320 PS @ 6,500 rpm.

Max. Torque: 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) from 2,500 to 4,500 rpm.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 5.8 seconds.

Top speed: 169 mph.

Fuel consumption:

Official WLTP figure: Combined, 36.7 mpg.

Achieved during our Wheels-Alive test, over 358 miles, average 35.0 mpg.

Estimated mileage range on a full tank (46.9 litres or 10.3 Imperial gallons), at our actual achieved mpg: Approximately 360+ miles.

CO2 Emissions: 178 g/km.

Warranty: Three years/90,000 miles.

Insurance Group: 40E.





Euro NCAP rating: 5\*.

Dimensions:

Length 4,557 mm (14.95 ft), Width 1,877 mm (6.16 ft); but including door mirrors, 2076 mm (6.81 ft), Height 1,434 mm (4.70 ft).

Luggage capacity: 420 to 1,245 litres (16.88 to 43.97 cu.ft).

Five doors, four seats.

Wheels and tyres: 20 inch diameter Piano Black wheels, shod with 245/30 ZR20 tyres.

Basic Price ('On the Road'): GT, as tested, £33,525. ('Basic version, £31, 525).