Honda Civic e:HEV self-charging hybrid – First Impresssions

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FIRST UK DRIVE OF THE NEW HONDA CIVIC e:HEV…

…By Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

News

If you've ever spent a night sleeping in your car it can be a very disconcerting place to wake up, but that was one of the tests engineers set themselves creating the new Honda Civic e:HEV petrol electric self-charging hybrid.

Sleeping on the job took on a whole new purpose for them to evaluate the interior and the view out of it after a night's kip in the car.

What is seen when opening the eyes, how relaxing it is and what does it feel like to stretch and touch the controls to start up, adjust heating and ventilation and then drive off, were all very important in the appreciation of the design, layout and simply the “feel” of it.

The story was relayed to me last week by Andrew Winfield, Product and business planning manager at Honda Motor Europe at the UK Media launch of their latest model.

The new Civic e:HEV marks a turning point for the model and the company. The Honda Civic was introduced 50 years ago and the new e:HEV is the 11th generation after 27.5 million have been sold in 170 countries.

There are three trim levels, Elegance, Sport and Advance, but they share the same petrol electric self-charging powertrain and are identical in performance terms so differentiate with fitted equipment.



The entry level Elegance from £29,595 includes keyless entry, heated mirrors and front seats, nine-inch touchscreen infotainment, parking sensors and rear-view camera while the mid-spec Sport from £30,595 adds air-conditioning, synthetic leather and fabric upholstery, wireless phone charging, LED front lights and the £32,995 Advance tops the range with adaptive headlights, powered synthetic-leather seats and heated wheel, glass sunroof, 10.2 inch digital display, BOSE 12-speaker sound system and upgraded wheels.

Andrew Winfield outlined the importance of the new Civic e:HEV. made in the company's Yorri Plant, Japan.

“It is the latest model on Honda’s declared road to fully electric or fuel cell cars by 2040 and has committed to introducing 30 new battery electric vehicles over the next eight years.

These will include two exciting SUVs and for Honda a first time Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle for selected markets and five will arrive within 18 months.”

He went on to explain a lot of the design inspiration for the new car was taken from the third generation 1983 Civic with its very airy cabin and sleek light body but translated into modern requirements and flowing lines with clear sightlines.



The 11th generation Civic has a longer wheelbase plus wider rear track and is lower than the outgoing series.

The size of the new Civic and the electric motor would normally add weight to the car but the increase has been mitigated utilising a resin tailgate and aluminium bonnet as well as a compact electric transmission that has no traditional gears, saving parts and servicing.

The external clean lines have been mirrored inside with few breaks in panels and a neat mesh panel to the face of the wide dashboard, while all switches and handles have been engineered to give the best feeling to fingers for pulling or turning and pressure behind buttons.

Honda has introduced a power meter into the instruments' display instead of a rev counter alongside the more familiar speedometer.



The central display is larger than in the current model and is said to be simpler to use with separate heating and ventilation buttons beneath.

The current three-engine range of Civic models and choice of 6 speed manual, cvt or 9

speed automatics have been replaced by a single 2.0 litre four cylinder petrol engine and pure electric variable transmission. Only the front wheels are driven at any time and deceleration or braking generates regenerative charging back to the power battery.



The way the power is created, delivered and put down on the road has been engineered to give the new Civic e:HEV a strong driver and performance feel and they have added an acoustic engine sound to enhance that. The suspension has a sportier feel without losing comfort and the whole bodyframe is stiffer.

As a C-segment car its closest rival is the Toyota Corolla but it’s broadly a challenger to the Volkswagen Golf and Ford Focus as well.

So what’s it like? In short, very good.

First Drive Views



Honda has raised its game and the challenge to rivals with their 11th generation Civic e:HEV.

The C-sector five-door hatchback is roomier than the version it replaces and is mechanically simpler.

A new highly developed and sophisticated 2.0 litre petrol engine is coupled to an electric continuously variable transmission which does not have conventional gears and the two have been fine-tuned to work at their optimum for performance, economy and refinement.


HONDA

A new suspension system holds it all on the road and is comfortable but capable of being pushed by an enthusiastic driver.

Inside the Civic e:HEV looks a class above its category with clean lines, good textured controls and very clear instruments with minimum distractions for the driver.

Seats were extremely comfortable and had good adjustment range on the front pair, good room and were nicely shaped.

Headroom was good throughout but some taller people may find the legroom a bit short in the back. Seats have an offset split to progressively raise the luggage capacity to a maximum 1,220 litres (43.08 cu.ft).

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

Access was good throughout and the low waistline and deep windows give the cabin a bright appearance as well as reduce blindspots but you have sensors and a reversing camera as standard. There is no sunroof on the two lower grades, but a decent sized glass panel on the top Advance grade, which also gets heated steering wheel and intelligent headlights among its trim items.

Behind the wheel, the acceleration begins with electric assistance, silent and swift, and the system decides when it needs to bring in the petrol engine, so hums in the background if extra urge is needed before switching to the internal combustion engine for longer motorway journeys.

Honda has incorporated regenerative braking so energy is pushed back to the traction battery when slowing. It all works very well and without the concern of range anxiety of pure evs..

Everything comes together very well from a driver’s viewpoint with good minor controls, clear instruments, responsive powertrain and well weighted steering, compliant suspension

and strong brakes. There is little to dislike.

VERDICT

The latest Honda Civic e:HEV has been 50 years in the making, but that's time very well spent judging by the result on the road today.

For: Extremely smooth and responsive powertrain, good grip, economical, roomy infront, very comfortable seats, good instruments, few blindspots, self-charging hybrid so not subject to possible future power cuts or inflated electricity charging costs.

Against: Road rumbles over some surfaces, only adequate rear legroom, small oddments spaces.



FAST FACTS

Honda Civic e:HEV Sport 5-door hatchback

Price: £31,220, *inc. options*

Mechanical: 2.0 litre 143 PS petrol 4 cyl engine with 184 PS electric motor & electric transmission to front wheels

Max Speed: 112 mph

0 – 62 mph: 7.9 sec

Combined MPG: 57.7

Insurance Group: *28*

C02 emissions: 113 g/km

Tax costs: Bik rating 27%, VED £180FY, £155SR

Warranty: 3 years/ 90,000 miles

Size: L 4.56 m (14.96 ft), W 1.81 m (5.94 ft), H 1.41 m (4.63 ft)

Bootspace: 415 to 1,220 litres (14.66 to 43.08 cu.ft.)

Kerbweight: 1,533 kg (3,380 lb)


e:HEV