Honda Civic i-DTEC – Genuinely economical! Retrospective road test – and buying used.

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Kim Henson writes… While some drivers will only buy new cars, for others there are some excellent secondhand buys available at a

fraction of the price of a new model, and running costs can be light on your wallet, BUT you need to proceed with care.

Here Kim explains, using his own Honda Civic as an example…

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Writing often about new vehicles, as I do, it is easy to become blasé when test driving vehicles with price tags that look more like telephone numbers than amounts of UK pounds.

Of course if you fancy a 'fresh out of the box' vehicle, and are able to/wish to part with the cash required to buy one, that's fine. However, for many people a used example of a good car just a few years old can make a great deal of sense, especially in terms of saving money.

One of the biggest 'hidden' costs when buying a brand new car is depreciation, which can be very heavy in the first few years of ownership. By investing in a secondhand car a few years old, much of that cost is avoided, and depending on the age of the vehicle and the make/model, you may be able to benefit from the balance of the manufacturer's warranty still applying.

The 'used buying' approach was highlighted by my colleague Robin Roberts last year when he wrote about his own Toyota Auris, a superb, low mileage example that has already served Robin well. His article about acquiring his Toyota and also how to avoid pitfalls when considering a used car, can be found here…
https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/secondhand-buying-proceed-with-care-robin-roberts-advises-and-bought-a-toyota/

Whichever make and model in which you are interested, my advice is to do your homework beforehand and, importantly, check the model's reliability record, through word of mouth, online and if possible through trade sources. Avoid vehicles with well-known (or dubious) mechanical aspects that could cost you plenty. Sadly there are many such modern vehicles; the truth is that there are many known 'disaster' models in terms of design and build

quality. A quick look at online video sharing platforms, and talking to people who work on cars to fix them, can be helpful in determining the good, the bad and the ugly in these regards!

As with any car, genuine low mileage and a comprehensive service history are always helpful, and personally I would advise judging vehicle condition above the age of the car. Buying from a trusted source, if possible, is also a wise move. A clean, tidy vehicle can be a good sign but equally ‘All that glistens is not necessarily gold!’

My Honda Civic



I tend to keep my ‘everyday’ vehicles for a very long time (typically between 17 and 20 years per car), and recently I was thinking of buying a newer model, having used my Vauxhall Zafira (owned since almost new) for 20+ years.

At the outset, when considering purchasing a relatively modern vehicle, I was keen to avoid the many known ‘troublesome’ models available, and having worked with, and talked to, many trade sources over the years, my personal shortlist was narrowed down to a car built by (in alphabetical order) Honda, Suzuki or Toyota. It is no coincidence that these firms are always rated highly in independent customer satisfaction/reliability surveys. I want and need a car that stands a very good chance of starting first time, every time, and that runs for years without breakdowns (and of course it needs to be said that all cars need diligent

maintenance to keep them at their best).

My personal inclination was to buy a low mileage/nearly new hybrid Suzuki Swift Sport, Vitara or S-Cross, as I have road-tested many examples and been impressed by them, also I know from contacts in the trade that Suzukis are renowned for excellent dependability plus low running costs. (Incidentally for my own motoring I would be happy with a hybrid, but all-electric is not my choice).

However… Out of the blue I was offered a first class example of a 2014 Honda Civic 1.6 i-DTec, from a trusted trade source and I knew that the car had been cossetted from new by caring owners.





I knew too from test driving experience and reputation that, like their Civic predecessors, the ninth-generation Swindon-built Civics (2011 to 2016) are solid, reliable cars, and when introduced late in 2012 the 1.6 i-DTEC like mine received rave reviews.

The petrol powered versions are economical, with consumption figures typically in the mid to high 40s, miles per gallon, but the 1.6 diesels were, and remain, among the most economical cars built. Not only do they provide exceptional fuel consumption (official 'Combined' figure, 78.3 miles per gallon; in real world use, more like 64 to 73 mpg), but also when new they were rated as 'low emission' vehicles, with a CO2 figure of just 94g/km, and attracting a zero rate of road tax (although this is set to change from 1st April 2025).

Incidentally the ‘i-DTEC’ name stands for ‘intelligent – Diesel Technology Electronic Control’, and the 120 PS four cylinder motor is a turbocharged, light in weight aluminium unit. It features chain-driven twin overhead camshafts and incorporates a variable vane turbocharger.



In typical Honda fashion, the vehicle’s mechanical design (in particular) was very well thought out. Notably, the drivetrain incorporates a wealth of low friction aspects, and from the outset was engineered to be mechanically efficient. Honda also positioned the Diesel Particulate Filter (DPF) at the optimum angle and as close as possible to the engine, to encourage the most effective ‘burn-off’ of accumulated ‘soot’. Trade sources tell me that

they have never yet known these Hondas to suffer from DPF problems (unlike many other makes…).

Without exception, everyone I talked to in the motor trade, also owners, told me how dependable these Hondas are (along with the company's other models too; they all have an exceptionally positive reputation for longevity and reliability).

These Civics score highly in the practicality stakes too, with generous accommodation for driver and up to four more adult passengers to travel in comfort, and with a massive luggage boot, even with all five seats in the car occupied. With the rear seats folded flat there is an even more vast area for carrying things.

I was less happy about the fact that the car carries no spare wheel, but because of that there is a spacious additional storage compartment beneath the main boot floor. In addition, if needed, the rear seat bases can be folded upwards to enable tall items to be carried within the car. There are also storage compartments a-plenty around the interior, including two within the centre console, a commodious glovebox, also, in each door, a 'bin' incorporating a bottle holder.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

In view of all the foregoing, I needed no convincing about the design, engineering and build quality of the Civic. In this case too, the car, an 'SE' version, had been cared for throughout its 72,000 mile life, and its service history was fully documented. In that regard, I will add that as with any modern car, use of the manufacturer-specified lubricant types, and changing the engine oil and filter (plus other filters) at least as often as advised by (in this case) Honda, are vitally important for long-term problem-free running.

DRIVING

In just over a year of mixed motoring, my Civic has proved to be an easy and enjoyable car to drive and to own. It steers, rides and handles competently (braking is reassuring and progressive too), the car has plenty of space inside for up to five adults to travel in comfort, and its generous luggage space endears it to me, making weekend or holiday trips a breeze.

I am also impressed by the willingness of its 1.6 litre turbo diesel engine. It's not a sports car, but does provide spirited performance, even with five adults on board, plus a boot full of luggage. The car cruises quietly and smoothly at motorway speeds and pulls strongly up inclines.

I like the slick-changing six speed manual gearbox, and when in top (sixth) ratio the engine needs only 2,000 rpm to provide 70 mph, or around 1,700 rpm to give 60 mph. I find too that there is plenty of low speed pulling power, from 1,400 rpm.

The facia design was innovative when the car was introduced and to me still looks fresh today, with amply illuminated, crystal-clear instrumentation and a prominent digital speed readout. The car's on-board computer provides a wide range of useful functions, and a colour-coded information display advises when the car is sipping fuel in light throttle mode (green), or when power over prudence predominates (blue).



There’s a stop-start system to cut the engine when idling in traffic (this system can be turned on or off according to preference) designed to help cut fuel consumption and emissions.

The low friction drivetrain and aerodynamic aids contribute to the car’s excellent real-world fuel consumption, which ranges from around 55 to 65 miles per gallon in town use, to between 70 and 74 miles per gallon when cruising (close to the car’s official Combined figure of 78.3 mpg). I find these figures astonishly good, and in fact I have never yet found a car to beat them, with the possible exception of the ‘bubble’ cars of the 1950s/60s.

For me personally the diesel engine makes sense, as my car is often used for light throttle long-distance motoring, in which fuel consumption and emissions levels are low. I also like the fact that on a full fuel tank the Civic has a potential range of more than 720 miles. That said, as with any diesel car it's best not to drive with the tank level below about a quarter full (due to possible 'air cavitation' within the fuel pump and injectors, caused by too little fuel in the tank versus too much air!).

The Honda has a good turning circle and low speed manoeuvering is straightforward, although rearward visibility is limited by the high rear quarters and the large spoiler mounted across the rear window. However my car has helpful reverse sensors which warn of the close proximity of people and objects behind the vehicle.



More good news for me

A further aspect of my car that appeals to me personally is the fact that it was built in the sadly now gone Honda factory at Swindon – and during a working visit there at around the time when my Civic model was in production, I saw at first hand the care and attention to detail put into each car by the dedicated workforce.

I am also delighted that my car has a CD player in addition to a radio, and I rate the sound system performance as ‘excellent’.

I am pleased too that my Civic is equipped with a ‘traditional’ manually-operated handbrake, which works very effectively.

High levels of build quality and reliability

Further detail aspects of the car continue to impress me, from the sensible location of the DPF unit close to the engine, to the aerodynamic efficiency of the car to its high build quality – evident everywhere and, in typical Honda fashion, so much better than many of its contemporary rivals. As mentioned, talking to other Honda owners and those in the trade, the Civic seems to be a very well-liked motor car in almost every respect, and especially in terms of long-term dependability.

Not so good points

When considering aspects of my Civic that are not so good (from my viewpoint), just two come to mind.

The first is that the car was deliberately built with low ground clearance, to aid aerodynamic performance, thus optimising fuel consumption and emissions levels. However this in turn means that the front bodywork is also very low to the ground and therefore vulnerable when driving over steep road humps and when parking ‘forwards in’ to sparking spaces with a kerb in front of the vehicle. Care and forethought are required to avoid unwanted contact!

The other aspect that surprised me is that I find the headlamp performance, on both main and dipped beam, to be below par in terms of light intensity and beam spread. There is nothing wrong with the car (that is to say it is working as designed), but the lights do not provide illumination levels as good as those applying to my old Zafira (they are excellent) or indeed my 1980s Morris Ital (also first class). I am currently considering upgrading the bulbs to rectify this, while at the same time avoiding dazzling oncoming motorists.

VERDICT

Having owned it for just over a year so far, I am delighted my Civic and feel that it is a

beautifully-engineered, practical, comfortable and super-economical car. My version is the five door hatchback but estate car variants were also produced, providing even more carrying capacity with equally impressive fuel consumption figures.

If you are looking for a similar model to buy, expect to pay between approximately £4,000 (more usually, from £6,000) and £10,000, depending on condition, specification and mileage.



Wheels-Alive Tech Spec in Brief (of our car as tested)

Honda Civic 1.6 i-DTEC SE

(Part of the ninth generation Civic range, 2011 to 2016; five door hatchback and estate models offered).

Cost when new, in 2013: SE, £19,400; ES, £20,595; EX, £23,175.

Expected price to pay today: £4,000 to £10,000 (approximately).

Engine: 1.6 litres

Max. power: 120 PS or 118 bhp @ 4,000 rpm

Max. torque: 300 Nm (221 lb.ft) @ 2,000 rpm.

Transmission: Front wheel drive; six speed manual gearbox.

Performance:

0 – 62 mph: 10.5 seconds

Top speed: 125 mph

Fuel consumption:

Official ‘Combined’ figure, 78.3 mpg

On test (over 5,500 miles so far), overall average (per on-board computer) 66.7 mpg

CO2 emissions: 94g/km

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