Honda’s new Civic 1.6 Diesel – Road Test

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British-built Honda Civic now available with diesel power... David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) gives his verdict.

Honda's first car to arrive in the UK in 1973 was a Japanese built Civic 1.2 litre petrol two door saloon (pictured below). Last year the tenth generation Civic, a lower medium sector five door hatchback, went on sale and it's built in Britain at Swindon Plant and exported globally to over 70 different countries.



Honda’s first generation Civic.

UK Civic sales are close to 20,000 units annually and the new diesel model is still expected to be the choice of 30% of UK customers although the demand for diesel powered cars has fallen by 32% so far this year, due to the VW Group ‘dieselgate’ emissions issues and higher taxes.

Initially the mainstream new Civic Hatchbacks were introduced with the choice of two turbo petrol engines, 1.0 litre 129 hp and 1.5 litre 182 hp units, then came the 2.0 litre turbocharged 320 hp Type-R model, and now the 1.6 litre 120 hp turbodiesel engine option is available. Prices for petrol versions range from £18,890 to £32,995 for the Type-R GT. The

new diesels start at £20,220 and rise to £24,925 through S, SE, SR and EX spec levels. Currently the diesel models have manual gearboxes but an automatic option will be available early summer.

Joining the Civic line-up in August is a four door saloon body style. These are built in Turkey and will be available with 1.0 petrol and the new 1.6 diesel engine with prices and specs to be announced. Why a saloon version, which have proved unpopular in the lower medium segment as most UK customers choose a hatchback? It appears there is the potential for it to increase the appeal of the range as a Tourer estate version is not available this time, and there are some long-term Honda owners who miss being able to buy the now discontinued Accord saloon.

My Honda Civic hatchback test drive diesel version had the top spec EX specification costing £24,925, but with the £600 optional Tech Pack consisting of wireless phone charging, LED foglights, LED headlights with washers and heated rear seats. This option plus the £525 metallic paint cost pushed the on-the-road price up to £26,025.

The added spec for the EX consists of 17-inch alloy wheels, heated front seats, leather upholstery, blindspot warning, cross traffic monitoring, adaptive dampers and an 11-speaker sound system. Other items of spec brought upwards from other variants include dual zone air-con, rear parking camera, rain sensing wipers, power and heated folding door mirrors, leather steering wheel and gear lever knob, alloy pedals, privacy glass, Honda Connect navigation with a 7-inch touchscreen, DAB radio, front and rear parking sensors, electronic parking brake, Econ mode, rear wiper, Bluetooth connectivity, dusk sensing headlights and front/rear side electric windows. All Civics have Honda SENSING that uses camera and radar technology for collision mitigation braking, lane departure warning, traffic sign recognition and intelligent adaptive cruise control.



All the spec and the new diesel engine are nicely wrapped up in the latest tenth generation Civic five door sporty styled bodyshell we now know well. It’s noticeably more athletic looking than its main competitors, the Ford Focus, Vauxhall Astra, VW Golf, Skoda Octavia and SEAT Leon, with its coupé styled side profile, long wheelbase and steeply raked forward rear tailgate with its twin glass windows. Its sporty look is highlighted by sharp styling lines, sculptured panels and a variety of aerodynamic aero fins and air vents in the front lower bumper, below the Honda family face grille flanked by sleek headlights. The body is torsionally stiffer than the last generation Civic and the adoption of a multi-link rear suspension and lower centre of gravity provide improved handling and ride compliancy.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

Inside the sports theme, even for the diesel model, continues. It's well laid out and looks well constructed although the mix of smooth, textured and shiny vinyl trim look durable rather than up-market quality. Like other Civics the diesel beats most of the competition, except the Skoda Octavia, for rear seat space and legroom thanks to its longer wheelbase. At the rear is a 550 litre (19.42 cu.ft) boot, but fold down the rear seat backs and this goes up to a very useful 1,267 litres (44.74 cu.ft). But definitely not better than the competition is the relatively small 7-inch centrally positioned touchscreen. It's fiddly and slow to use and not up to the standard of the latest infotainment systems. Thankfully the temperature controls are separate from the touchscreen. In addition to an Econ button to maximise fuel economy, the EX version has an Active Damper System which adjusts the ride quality, but with the vehicle's modest performance it's best left in its softest setting and in reality there isn't much to choose between the settings.

But for this Civic road test I am specifically reporting on the suitability and performance of the new (revised) turbodiesel engine. This unit, like the petrol ones and the Civic Hatchback, is built at Honda's UK Swindon Plant, and is an upgraded version of the previous engine. It remains an aluminium unit but it is now fitted with forged steel pistons rather than the previous aluminium alloy ones, said to improve thermal efficiency to retain heat for better fuel economy and lower emissions. The injection moulded aluminium block has further strengthening struts to reduce vibrations and Honda says the frictions within the engine have been reduced.



The power output is an adequate 120 hp at 4,000 rpm and torque is an ample 300 Nm (221 lb.ft) but only at 2,000 rpm and the engine revs are red-lined at 4,500 rpm so it is a relatively low revving unit with quite a narrow powerband. Full use has to be made of the nice and slick six speed manual gearbox to keep the unit in its optimum torque delivery band with the fourth to six gears tending towards long-legged ratios for optimum fuel economy and reduced noise levels. On start-up the engine was slightly noisy but once cruising along it was significantly more hushed and smooth. Top speed is 125 mph and zero to 62 mph takes 10.2-seconds for the EX version.

But it's the official fuel economy and CO2 figures which are far more impressive. The Combined Cycle figure is a potentially outstanding 80.7 mpg with CO2 emissions of only 93 g/km and that official figure is this engine's strong point. It means under the new VED road

tax diesel rate First Year tax costs £145 before reverting to the Standard rate of £140. Company car drivers, the likely most prominent users of the diesel Civic, will pay 24% Benefit-in-Kind tax under the new rates which add 4% for diesel powered cars over petrol ones. As for my real-life test driving fuel economy, the best figure was 62.2mpg during a long run using motorways and some leisurely 50 mph speed restricted country roads. Add in some local commuter trips and the average for the week was 58.2 mpg, way short of the official Combined Cycle figure.

VERDICT

Probably the strongest competitor the Civic diesel has in its mid-sized hatchback family car sector, is from its own petrol powered 1.0 litre, 129 hp engine. This petrol model is cheaper to buy by around £1,300, the performance is better, the real-life fuel economy will only be slightly worse and the taxes are similar. At least customers have the choice of a diesel engine now.

For: Sporty styling of other more popular petrol powered new Civics, high specification, roomy front and rear with a large boot, good fuel economy potential of the new diesel engine, low taxes for a diesel engine, compliant ride, sharp handling.

Against: Real-life fuel economy even during modest driving was nowhere near the ‘headline’ official figure, only adequate performance, narrow powerband and geared for fuel economy, outdated and fiddly touchscreen operations, some rear quarter visibility restrictions, significant road noise intrusion on poorer tarmac surfaces, cheaper petrol powered versions still make more financial sense for retail customers.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Honda Civic 1.6 i-DTEC EX manual five door hatchback.

Price: £24,925 (£26,025 as tested).

Engine/transmission: 1.6 litre, four cylinder, turbodiesel, 120 hp, 300 Nm (221 lb.ft) of torque at 2,000 rpm, six speed manual.

Performance: 125 mph, 0–62mph 10.2 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 80.7 mpg (on test, 58.2 mpg).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 93 g/km, VED road tax First Year diesel rate £145 then £140 Standard rate, BiK company car tax 24%.

Insurance Group: 15E.

Warranty: Three years/90,000-miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,518 mm (14.82 ft), W 1,799 mm (5.90 ft), H 1,434 mm (4.70 ft), boot/load space 550 to 1,267 litres (19.42 to 44.74 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.