Latest Honda Civic – History and First Impressions, plus Honda news

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Author: David Miles

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New 10th Generation Honda Civic British built for global markets

David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) reports...

News

The new 10th generation Honda Civic five door family hatchback is now in production for global markets and it is only being built in the UK at the company's Swindon factory. Production at the same location will also include the 'hot' Civic Type-R, but not a Civic Tourer estate, which is no longer going ahead due to the relatively low global sales of such

models in its sector.

But it's still good news for post Brexit Britain, with Honda spending a further £200 million turning their Swindon plant into a global manufacturing hub for the new Civic hatchback. Previously Swindon has been the production centre for European versions of the Jazz which has now had production moved to Japan and the CR-V large SUV which is being phased out by 2018. The next generation CR-V will be built in Japan, leaving Swindon as the sole global production hub for Civic five door hatchbacks. Civic saloons are built in Turkey and Civic coupés are also built in the USA.

With 600 extra employees taken on at Swindon there is now a total workforce of more than 3,700 and currently a new Civic comes off the production line every 69 seconds. About 800 vehicles are produced each day for sale in 89 countries.

Total production at the Swindon plant of CR-V and Civic models is expected to be 165,000 units this year but still only one of the two production lines is in operation. During the last recession Line Two was mothballed and remains closed. Line One currently runs 24 hours a day using a three shift system. With both Lines in operation the Swindon facility would have a production capacity of 250,000 units a year.

Forecasts are that Civic hatchback production from Swindon will see 20% going to UK customers, 40% to left hand drive European markets and 40% to the rest of the world including Japan and North America.

In the UK Honda dealers have 2,000 advance orders for the new Civic hatchbacks which arrived in showrooms in late March with early adopters already driving their new cars with the new '17' registration plate. In the USA customers cannot get enough of the new model which went on sale last autumn with over 70,000 sold orders. It is the first five door hatchback Honda has sold in the USA.

The 10th generation Honda Civic five door hatchback is both longer and wider than the generation it replaces, in line with global market requirements and effectively covering the

gap in their overall passenger car line-up, following the demise in some markets of the D-segment Accord saloon and estate models. It remains classified as a C-segment car, competing against the main sales contenders such as the Ford Focus, Vauxhall Astra and new VW Golf.



UK prices start from £18,375 and rise to £27,550 through two petrol engine options and the choice of six core spec levels. Strangely S, SE, SR and EX grades can only be ordered with the 1.0 litre petrol engine and Sport and Prestige levels come with the 1.5 litre petrol engine. The two Swindon-built engine options available now are new petrol turbocharged

units; a 1.0 litre 129 hp three cylinder unit and a 1.5 litre 182 hp four cylinder engine. Both are available with manual gearbox and CVT automatic transmissions. A 1.6 litre 120 hp turbodiesel unit is to be added to the range early next year and the revised 2.0 litre turbo petrol unit with 320 hp and 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque will power the new Type R, which will be launched in Europe this summer.

Simon Branney, Honda UK's PR Communications Manager, told motoring journalists this week that around 14,000 new Civic hatchbacks would be sold in this country during the first full year of sales. Around 83% of sales in the UK will go to retail customers, 70% of buyers are expected to choose a 1.0 litre powered version and 60% will select a manual gearbox version. Currently for new Civics with the 1.0 litre engine, SR specification is the most popular and Sport is the most popular choice so far for customers who have chosen the 1.5 litre powered models.

When it comes to the high performance 320 hp front wheel drive Type R model, around 600 units are expected to be available to UK customers this year and 3,000 units next year, he said.

2017 all-new Honda Civic Hatchback first test drive review

The 10th generation Honda Civic five door C-segment hatchback now built solely in the UK at Honda's Swindon plant for worldwide sales uses an all-new, 52% more rigid and 16 kg (35 lb) lighter weight global platform, also used for Civic saloons and coupés sold in other parts of the world but not the UK. It is longer and wider and the styling is less extreme than the ninth generation, but it still has that futuristic edge to it.

At 4,518 mm (14.82 ft) in length and close to 1,800 mm (5.9 ft) wide and with a longer 2,697 mm (8.85 ft) wheelbase it has all the right dimensions to meet worldwide customer needs and there is a roomy 478 litre (16.88 cu.ft) large boot for load carrying. This expands to 828 litres (29.24 cu.ft) with the rear seats folded and up to a maximum of 1,267 litres (44.74 cu.ft), depending on the specification level chosen. But this time around the Civic does not have those 'magic' folding rear seats which created a flat and long load area at the expense

of interior accommodation. To allow for the ‘magic’ seats it meant the fuel tank was located under the front seats, giving a higher centre of gravity for the vehicle. Moving the fuel tank now to the rear of the car, just ahead of the axle, means the seats are mounted lower so the centre of gravity is 10 mm (0.39 in) lower, which improves handling, and a new independent multi-link rear suspension is used which enhances ride quality.





The new body style still has edgy similarity to the last generation Civic, with a wide but slim front grille flanked by sleek headlights which lead into the sweeping styling lines of the muscular front wings. Under the grille in the lower bumper is a central air vent flanked by two other vents cum housings for driving/fog lights. The doors carry sculptured panels under a rising waistline and above that is the curved coupé roof line leading to the steeply raked rear tailgate. The annoying rear spoiler which was mounted previously across the centre of the tailgate window, restricting rear visibility, has been slimmed down and lowered so that visibility is uninterrupted. Despite its growth in size, being a six-footer I still found the new Civic not to be that roomy. It felt crammed for space in the front in the driver's position and I couldn't get far enough away from the pedals or steering wheel. With the front seats pushed back to their furthest point rear seat legroom is also limited, as is headroom for tall rear seat passengers.

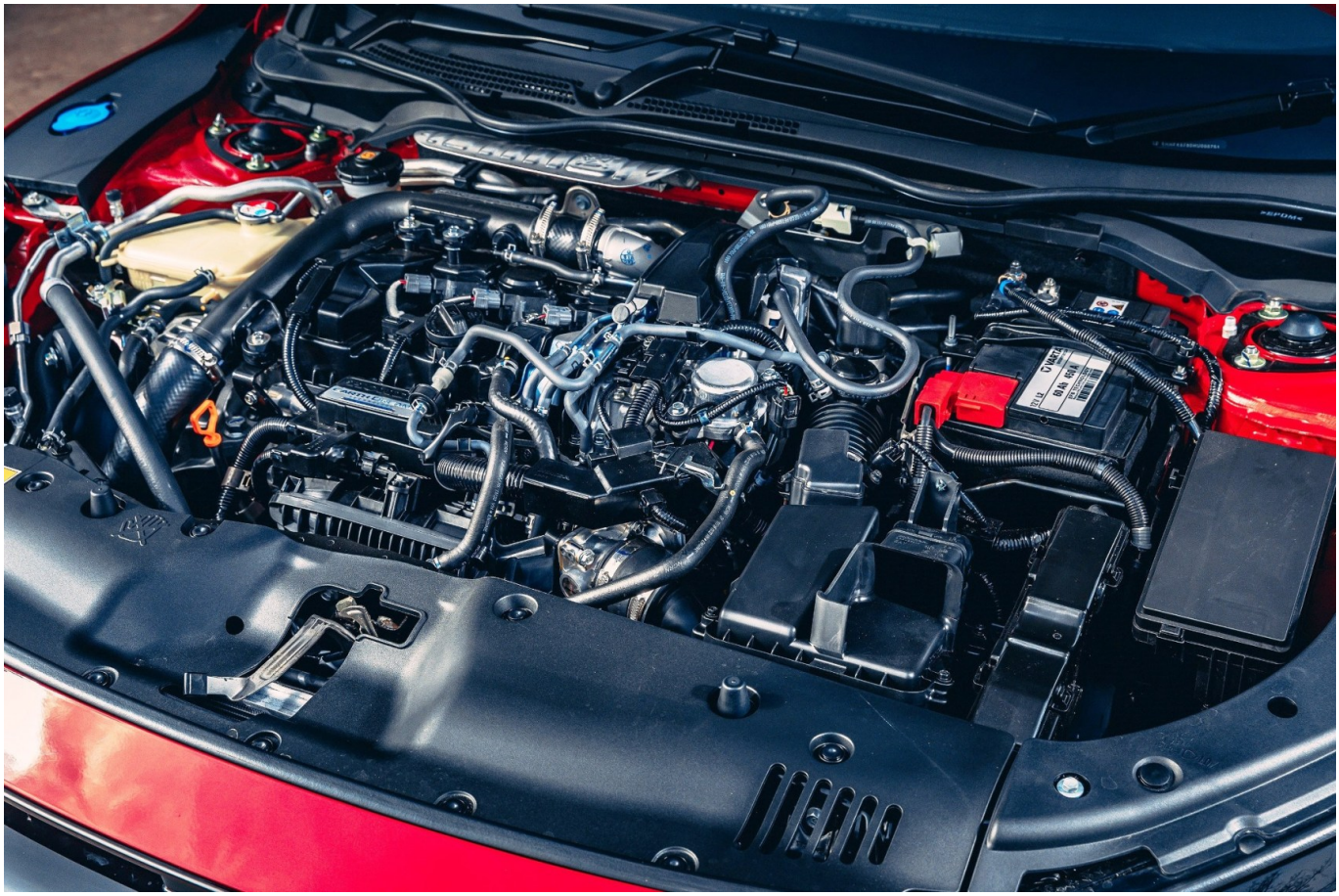
Inside the new Civic the facia panel is more conventional than the last generation. The jet fighter styled extreme cockpit with split-level instruments has gone, to be replaced by a more conventional and less contrived design. The previous design divided opinions and it put some customers off by its gimmicky styling. The fit and finish of the interior looks good enough, with soft touch trim in some places including the top of the facia panel, but elsewhere there are some areas trimmed with hard plastic – well below the standard set with an VW Golf or the marginally more expensive Audi A3.



All models have Honda Sensing as standard. This system uses camera and radar technologies to support such functions as Collision Mitigation Braking, Lane Departure Warning, Traffic Sign Recognition and Adaptive Cruise Control. There is a full set of front, side and rear airbags, hill start assist and traction control. The spec level is generally high through all levels with models with the more popular 1.0 litre engine having 16-inch alloy

wheels available on the SE level, together with front and rear parking sensors, heated door mirrors, climate control, a 5.0-inch screen with DAB radio, Bluetooth and Econ mode. Larger 17-inch wheels are standard on SR versions and above, there is dual zone climate control, rear parking camera, auto wipers and Honda Connect 7.0-inch touchscreen navigation plus Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity. The EX level includes heated front seats, sun roof and Adaptive Damper adjustable suspension. The Sport and Prestige levels available with the 1.5 litre engine have similar levels of spec although 17-inch wheels are standard for both versions and the Prestige spec has leather upholstery and heated rear seats.

When it came to test driving both petrol engines currently available, the opinions of my media colleagues seemed split on which version they preferred. The sales forecast figures suggest the 1.0 litre three cylinder turbocharged petrol engine with 129 hp and 200 Nm of torque (148 lb.ft) will be far the most popular as it has a starter price in the range £4,165 lower than the 1.5 litre models. When it comes to a mid-range spec comparison the price gap narrows to £2,200 between the two engines.



The 1.0 litre turbo petrol engine I thought was a real gem, it's lively, responsive and the three-cylinder soundtrack sounded sporty. Top speed is 126 mph, and with its slick-changing new six-speed manual gearbox zero to 62mph takes 11.2 seconds – but for the base S version with less specification and weight that figure was 10.4 seconds. It's not only outright acceleration performance that differs between trim grades. The S and SE versions return 58.9 mpg in the Combined Cycle, and SR and EX with larger wheels 55.4 mpg. On test our XE manual model returned a real-life 50.1 mpg for a one hour test driving route, using country roads in The Cotswolds. The CO2 figure for all variants is 11 7g/km with a manual gearbox so the new VED road tax costs £160 First Year rate and then £140 for the second year onwards Standard rate.

When it came to trying the 1.5 litre, four cylinder turbo petrol unit with 182 hp and

marginally more torque of 240 Nm (177 lb.ft), the engine soundtrack was less appealing although it revved freely enough, but just lacked a bit of 'character' and of course it's more expensive to buy and run. Top speed for all spec levels is 137 mph, the zero top 62 mph acceleration time is 8.2 to 8.4 seconds depending on the variant, the Combined Cycle fuel economy is 48.7 mpg and we returned 46.5 mpg using more or less the same test route as the Civic with the smaller engine. With CO2 emissions of 133 g/km VED is £200 for the First Year and then £140 thereafter.

For me the clear choice between the two engines was the lively 1.0 litre unit, the best seller, it's cheaper to buy and run and not that much different in performance given today's traffic congested roads.

In terms of handling and agility, all versions felt agile and nimble with good corning grip, sharp steering responses, generally well balanced and competitive but not class leading. The ride comfort, even with the Adaptive Damper System fitted as standard to the higher spec versions, was better with the smaller engine model, the 1.5 litre version seemed to provide a more fidgety ride at mid-range speeds over country roads. Although the wheel size was the same between the two versions we tried, I can only assume to damper/springs rates are firmer for the 1.5 litre powered versions because of the extra engine weight.

VERDICT

Overall the new British-built Honda Civic hatchback is a vitally important car for global sales for Honda and it's really important for British jobs that it is a huge sales success. Early indications are positive.

For: Built in Brain for global markets, sporty but not too extravagant styling, good specification, high level of safety equipment, agile handling, characterful new engine, affordable running costs.

Against: Larger but not that roomy especially in the rear seats, variable ride quality, small infotainment touchscreen by today's standards, considerable price difference between

engine sizes, spec levels and VED tax costs.



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

Honda Civic 1.0 VTEC Turbo petrol EX manual, five door hatchback (best selling engine).

Price: £23,200.

Engine/transmission: New 1.0 litre, three cylinder turbo petrol 129 hp, 200 Nm (148 lb.ft) of torque from 2,250 rpm, new six speed manual gearbox.

Performance: 126 mph, 0–62 mph 11.2 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 55.4 mpg (50.1 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 117 g/km, VED £160/140, BiK company car tax 22%. Insurance Group: 15E.

Warranty: Three years/90,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,518 mm (14.82 ft), W 1,799 mm (5.9 ft), H 1,434 mm (4.70 ft), boot/load space 478 to 1,267 litres (16.88 to 44.74 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.

To read Kim’s assessment and personal view of the latest Civics, please click HERE.