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Latest Honda Civic – Kim's First Impressions

Published: April 25, 2017

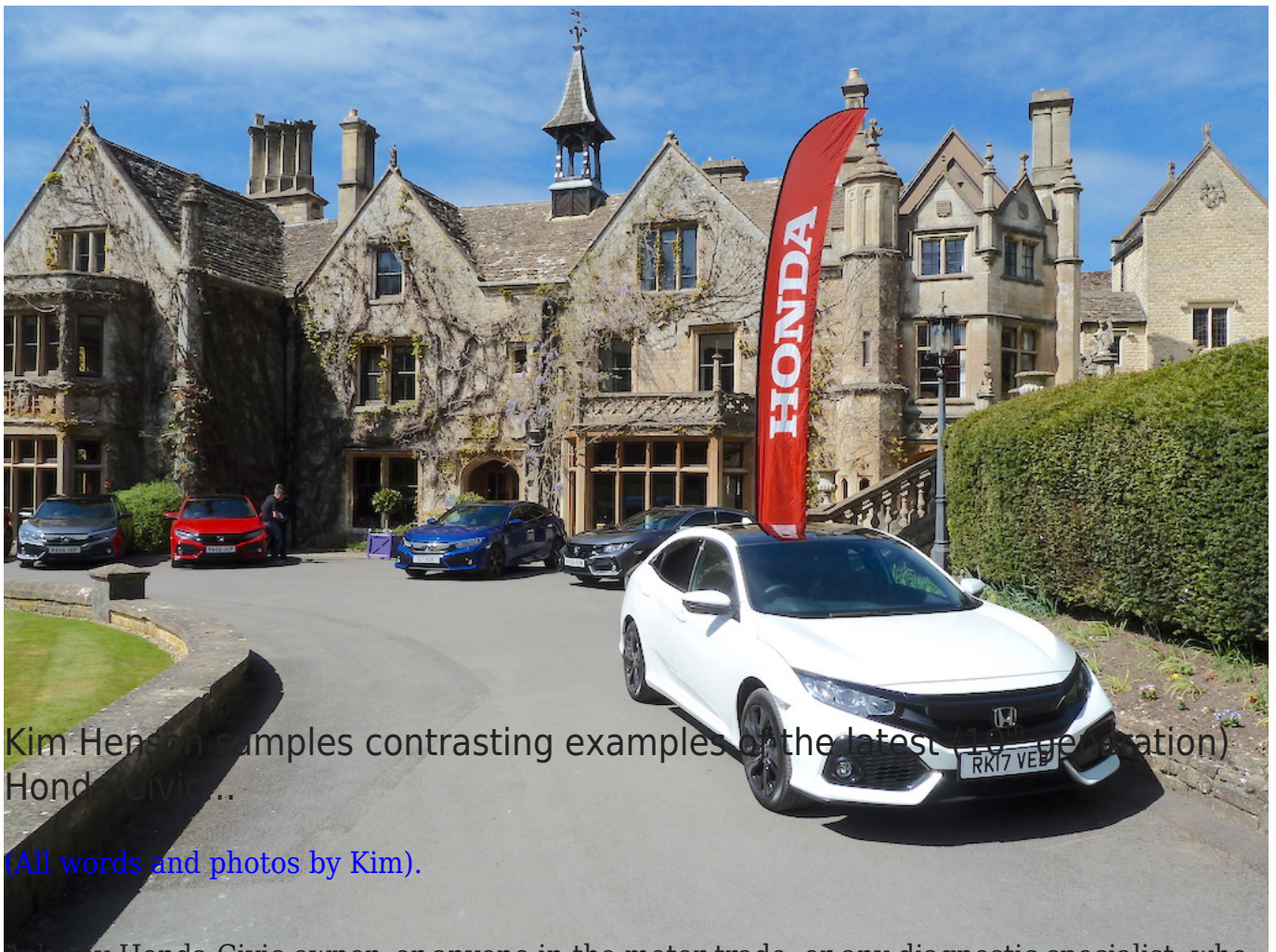
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Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/latest-honda-civic-kims-first-impressions/>



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Kim Henson samples contrasting examples of the latest (10th generation) Honda Civic...

(All words and photos by Kim).

Ask any Honda Civic owner, or anyone in the motor trade, or any diagnostic specialist, who has had anything to do with the model, or Hondas in general, and I am convinced that nearly all (if not 100 per cent) of these people will tell you that the Civic is an excellent motor car – and always has been. That is to say, for over four decades the Civic, in its various incarnations, has without exception proved to be a reliable and cost-effective car to run, as well as being enjoyable to drive.



Against this solid and heartening backdrop of automotive goodwill, enter the latest 10th generation Civic...



Now my esteemed colleague David Miles has already written on Wheels-Alive about the history and development of the new Civic, so I feel that it is pointless duplicating all his words of wisdom on these subjects (please follow the link at the end of this article, to read what David has written, and for his personal impressions of the new model).

However, there are a few points that I feel are worth emphasising, before launching into my own impressions of driving the latest versions.



First, the new, five door Civic is unmistakably a Honda in terms of its striking appearance, with distinctive and individualistic DNA inherited from its predecessors. Yet under its sporty-looking skin the newcomer has in fact been re-engineered from the ground up. Honda's engineers have sought to provide an entertaining, sophisticated and dynamic driving experience, with eager performance (in all versions), while at the same time endowing the new models with fuel consumption and emissions performance befitting a state-of-the-art Civic.

To this end, under the bonnet of the latest sleek, suave 2017 Civics will be found either a three cylinder 1.0 litre VTEC or a four cylinder 1.5 litre VTEC petrol engine, turbocharged in each case.

Interior space is claimed to be class-leading, with improved practicality, and the next generation Honda Connect set-up has been designed to provide occupants with enhanced, more intuitive connected infotainment.

In addition, across the line-up the cars come with Honda SENSING, providing a variety of built-in safety and driver-assistance systems to help avoid accidents, or at least minimise risk to the driver and passengers.



Make no mistake, as a model the new Civic is vitally important to Honda, and represents the largest single global product development in the company's history.

Very good news for Britain is that Honda's Swindon manufacturing plant has been chosen as the production hub for the new Civic five door models, which will be exported to more than 90 countries worldwide.

Dynamic Approach

The new Civic is wider and longer than any of its predecessors, and has more interior space plus a lower centre of gravity for better handling, as well as improved aerodynamics.



Due to the employment of new techniques and new technologies, including the use of ultra-high strength steel, the body shell is 16 kg (35 lb) lighter than its predecessor model, but with 52 per cent greater torsional stiffness.

A new suspension set-up (lower arm type MacPherson struts at the front, and a new multi-link system at the rear) aids ride comfort and handling, and developments in NVH ('Noise, Vibration and Harshness') management are said by Honda to bring benefits in terms of class-leading interior refinement.

A dual pinion, electrically-operated power-assisted rack and pinion steering system is also employed.

Driving the front wheels via a new six speed manual or redesigned bespoke CVT ('Constantly Variable Transmission' automatic gearbox, is a choice of 1.0 litre three cylinder, or 1.5 litre four cylinder turbocharged engines.

In developing these engines, Honda drew heavily on the experience gained in producing the company's first VTEC TURBO power unit, the mighty 310 PS 2.0 litre motor fitted in the Type R from 2015.

Fascinating features of both the new engines include a compact, low inertia mono-scroll turbocharger with an electronic wastegate, plus Honda's iTEC ('Intelligent-Variable Timing and lift Electronic Control') and Dual-VTC ('Dual-Variable Timing Control) systems.

Together these help to deliver eager performance and frugal fuel consumption.

In addition, much engineering effort has gone into reducing internal friction within the engines, both of which incorporate chain-driven twin overhead camshafts.

Interestingly, the three cylinder 1.0 litre engine is said to provide improved driveability (through greater torque at low and mid-range engine speeds) than the 1.8 litre VTEC engine used in the previous Civic. The four cylinder 1.5 litre unit is more powerful and torquey still.



A sophisticated instrument/infotainment system, incorporating a seven-inch colour TFT-LCD ('Thin Film Transistor'-'Liquid Crystal Display') Driver Information Interface (DII), provides the driver and passengers with a wealth of information and entertainment functions.

TEST DRIVES

1.5 litre four cylinder



I first sampled the 1.5 litre in range-topping 'Prestige' trim level (with 'Sport' and 'Sport Plus' being the two lower steps in the line-up), with the 'seven speed' CVT transmission – and my test car was finished in Honda's appropriately named 'Brilliant Sporty Blue' metallic



paint colour.

I liked the comfortable, high-backed front seats and the spacious feel within the vehicle, although when I tried the rear seats I did find that the sloping roof line did restrict headroom for occupants here (I am not very tall but my head was touching the headlining). Having said that, available leg room in the rear was adequate unless the front seats were pushed back towards the rearmost extent of their travel.

I was also impressed by the very clear instrumentation, with unmistakable digital readout of current speed, right ahead of the driver.

There are plenty of stowage compartments around the car's interior, including a spacious cubby hole/bottle holder at the rear of the centre console.

The boot is generous in size; it's wide, long and deep, although with a high-ish sill over which to lift luggage. I feel that praise is due for the separate, spacious and hidden compartment beneath the main boot floor.

The roll-out load cover pulls out from the right-hand side of the luggage compartment, where it's easier to reach and out of the way – a clever idea.

During an hour-long test drive in north Wiltshire/south Gloucestershire, I enjoyed the car's excellent, fluid performance. The 1.5 litre engine is a real gem, delivering power and torque a-plenty (with maximum torque available through a very wide rev range), and providing a commendably sporty drive. This is helped by Honda's latest CVT transmission, providing drive ratios which constantly enable the engine to be in the right rev range for instant acceleration, yet also providing reasonable fuel consumption. (There's also a 'Sport' ratio setting on the transmission controller, which sharpens response still further).



The mechanical smoothness and quietness of the car were evident, even when accelerating hard. On the M4 motorway progress at 70 mph (2,000 in the 'seventh' ratio) was hushed and refined - terrific... although I was aware of some tyre roar at higher speeds. This was not excessive, and in truth probably emphasised by the lack of mechanical noise!

Piloting the Civic through a series of bends on a 'switchback' type country road was sheer pleasure. The suspension soaked up all that a British 'B' road could conjure up, the car went where it was pointed and steering response was excellent, with great feedback. The brakes were powerful and effective in action without feeling too sharp. The new Civics are equipped with an electrically-operated handbrake; personally I always prefer a traditional manual handbrake lever, but the electric system worked well enough on the test car.



The official 'Combined' fuel consumption figure for the 1.5 litre model with CVT transmission is 46.3 miles per gallon. During my test drive the dash display registered almost exactly 42 mpg.

The car is not cheap, at £28,075 (including the metallic paint finish cost, £525).

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1.0 litre three cylinder



I next took to the road in a 1.0 litre, top line 'EX' specification model, in this case with the



new six speed manual gearbox. (Note: Lower specification models start with S, then run upwards through SE and SR grades).

The performance provided by this amazing three cylinder motor is nothing short of remarkable for the engine capacity; the test car accelerated rapidly and was happy running and pulling at low rpm when required.

At lower engine speeds it was not quite as smooth and quiet as the four cylinder 1.5 litre unit, and ultimately this car was not as rapid – but it was good nevertheless, if a little more audible when accelerating. That is not to say that the engine note was intrusive or unpleasant, but at lower speeds when working hard it emitted a unique and distinctive three-cylinder sound.

It was fun to drive on twisting by-ways, main roads and the M4 motorway, where at 70 mph in top (sixth) gear the car was smooth and quiet, and the tachometer needle was steady at 2,500 rpm. (By contrast, in a brief run at the end of the day in a CVT version of the 1.0 litre model, the engine speed was a little lower, at 2,200 rpm).

The manual gearchange is worthy of merit, being slick, smooth and sporty in operation; again Honda engineers have excelled.

As with the 1.5 litre model, I felt that the dynamics were spot-on, with positive handling and roadholding, pin-sharp steering and commendably effective brakes.

At £23,735 for the test car, as driven, the price of the manual transmission 1.0 litre version is considerably lower than that of the 1.5 litre model. Far better too is the fuel consumption, with an official 'Combined' figure of 55.4 mpg for the manual car in EX form (56.5 mpg for the CVT model in EX trim). During my test drive, I saw an average figure of 51 mpg.

VERDICT

The new Civic is impressive in so many ways, and based on past models I am sure that it will



prove to be a dependable vehicle in the long run too.

If you are thinking of buying one, it all depends on your own circumstances as to which version is best for you.

If cash is not an issue, and you are not concerned about the heavier fuel consumption, I have to say that personally I preferred the four cylinder 1.5 litre model (and in saying that I fully realise that my colleague David Miles was more in favour of the three cylinder 1.0 litre car!). On the other hand, I feel that the three cylinder 1.0 litre Civic is a spirited performer too, with better fuel economy and a much lower asking price... so with this version you will save money when you buy and money as you drive. Decisions, decisions... Please see below for the technical specifications of the first two versions I drove...

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Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Honda Civic 1.0 VTEC Turbo petrol EX manual, five door hatchback.

Price: £23,725 (including £525 for pearlescent paint, as tested)..

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.

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.

Honda Civic 1.5 VTEC Turbo petrol Prestige CVT, five door hatchback.

Price: £28,075 (including £525 for metallic paint, as tested).

Engine/transmission: New 1.5 litre, four cylinder turbo petrol 182 hp, 220 Nm (162 lb.ft) of torque from 1,700 to 5,500 rpm, 'seven speed' CVT transmission.

Performance: 136.7 mph, 0-62 mph 8.4 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 46.3 mpg (42 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 139 g/km.

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.

For David Miles' impressions of the new Civics, plus some additional background history and information, please click [HERE](#) to read his article.