

Road test: Honda Civic

by Tim Saunders



'Where's the gearstick?' I panic as I sit in the driver's seat of the Honda Civic 1.6 diesel. 'You don't need a gearstick,' says my son Henry (3). He knows about these things. This automatic version has an exceedingly minimalist 9 speed automatic unit that takes a short while to get used to. Honda always seems to

develop new and inspired futuristic design features that others follow years later. Of course that design is also extremely aerodynamic, aiding efficiency. Look in the boot and there's a sliding parcel shelf and there's lots of digital jiggery pokery on the dashboard, some of which shows it reaching 80mpg during the test, encouraging economical driving.

I've just had a week with the considerably wider Jaguar E-Pace that felt quite clumsy in comparison to the smaller Honda. I also found the Jag's interior to be very dark. Not so in the Civic, where there's a generous electric tilt/slide glass roof.

Another surprise for me is that the Civic is lower to the ground than my wife's Vauxhall Corsa, and feels very sporty as a consequence. It certainly doesn't feel like a five door family hatchback and is completely different to the last Civic model it replaces.

It is finished in eye-catching Rallye Red and while the front certainly demands your attention I cannot help but feel that the angular front bumper could age quite quickly in this fashion conscience world we live in.

Just before I embark on a journey to Kent I must drop my wife off at the library to return a few books. After doing this there's a persistent



FACTS AT A GLANCE

Honda Civic 1.6 i-DTEC EX 9AT

Price: £26,620

Top speed: 124mph

0-60mph: 11secs

Economy: 50mpg

bleeping from the sensors alerting me to something that it does not like – it tells me it's underneath the car but this clearly is not the case – as we make our way out of the car park. I don't need this aggravation at the best of times and certainly not in a vehicle with which I am unfamiliar. It finally stops as I leave the car park. Perhaps the cars were all too near the sensors

and it didn't like it. I don't know. Thankfully this experience does not repeat itself during my week with my sporty red friend and things quickly improve. I am determined to stick to the speed limits as we head down the M27 towards the A3 and the intelligent cruise control really helps me as it rigidly adheres to the 50mph limits often in place these days. Just as well too because we count some 17 police vehicles, many unmarked whipping down the outside lane after speeding motorists, providing my back seat passengers with plenty of entertainment.

It is only when I have been driving for a couple of hours that I realise the seat is a little high compared to my wife's. Lowering the driver's seat provides a much better driving position. Now it really does feel like a sports car. I begin to like it very much.

Usually when travelling a distance my wife insists on packing the map 'because I can't trust the sat nav'. On this occasion she forgets. And I can report that we get to Ashford, Maidstone and Herne Bay without too much trouble. But there are issues. The main one is that the sat nav does not recognise the address of the new Travelodge in Ashford. It takes us to the old one where the staff explain where the new one is located, telling us that we're the second perplexed customer to ask that day. It's not that difficult when we find out. Sometimes there's a one minute delay with the instructions, which I overcome by slowly going round the roundabout that I typically find myself on – twice. On another occasion the device insists on taking me down a closed road due to gas works. I overcome this by ignoring it and using my brain. I suspect any sat nav would have come up with these problems. It seems that this part of Kent is a bit of a nightmare to drive round. Roadworks, traffic jams and a great many signs to navigate.

It's a comfortable car, my wife enjoys using her heated front seat but complains that she might have to call 999 for the fire brigade to put out her hot bottom. My bird does enjoy a good roasting...

The position of the seatbelt points in the rear is good allowing us to make light work of installing our little urchins. There's a good amount of space in the back and the boot is a good size. Added, as per usual, I forget to engage the childlocks on the rear doors but fortunately the rascals are well behaved and don't try to open the doors while we're driving.

The Honda delivers an enjoyable drive. It can be driven as an automatic or the paddle shifts can be used for a more engaging experience.

As we return home an elderly gentleman in a soft top Jaguar F-Type is showing off his car's performance to his young wife (I presume) and as we pull up beside him, he doesn't seem at all pleased with the Honda's low down acceleration as we leave the traffic lights. Yes, the Honda Civic is full of surprises and you cannot help but smile when behind the wheel or indeed outside looking at it.

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