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Honda's amazing, fascinating history plus Civics old and new...

Published: November 6, 2017

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Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/hondas-amazing-fascinating-history-plus-civics-old-and-new/>



Honda's first generation Civic, built in 1975.



Honda's Civic Type-R GT outside its Swindon production home.



David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) reports on Honda's progress since the 1940s... and drives Civics built 42 years apart...

(Photographs of the Civic Type-R GT and the first generation Civic 1.2 by David; others courtesy of Honda).

News

Honda (UK) is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Honda (Japan) and today it is rated as one of the top 20 brands in the world.

Honda manufactures a broad product range encompassing cars, motorcycles, power products including marine, energy, lawn and garden, ATVs and aviation and was the first Japanese automobile manufacturer to release a dedicated luxury brand, Acura, in 1986.

Honda has been the world's largest motorcycle manufacturer since 1959, as well as the world's largest manufacturer of internal combustion engines measured by volume, producing more than 14 million internal combustion engines each year.

Honda produced their first automotive vehicle in November 1947; the 1/2 horsepower A-Type Honda was manufactured and sold as a complete motorbike. Because it gave off a lot of smoke, it was known as the "Chimney". Soichiro Honda started Honda Motor Company in 1948, at the age of 41. 1948 saw Honda introduce a 90cc version of the A-Type known as the "B-Type".

Honda exhibited its first automobiles, the S360, S500, and T360 at the 9th Tokyo Motor Show in October 1962. The first Honda car to be sold in the UK was the Civic two door, four seater 1.2-litre Civic saloon. It was launched in Japan in 1972 and arrived in the UK market in 1973 with a three door version following the same year. This Civic model was Car of the Year in Japan for 1972, 1973 and 1974 and was placed third in the European Car of the Year awards in 1973.

Since 1986, Honda has been involved with artificial intelligence/robotics research and



released their ASIMO robot in 2000. Honda has also ventured into aerospace with the establishment of GE Honda Aero Engines in 2004 and the Honda HA-420 HondaJet, which began production in 2012.

Honda has over 55 years of World Championship Racing. Today, Honda is an active participant in Formula One, motorcycle, touring car and ATV racing.

In 2016 Honda's global automobile sales were 4,974,000 units and their motorcycle global sales were 17,491,464 units

The first Honda engine to be built at their Car Plant 1 Swindon, Wiltshire, was produced in 1985 and the first car, the Honda Accord, in 1992 - with Civic production starting in 1994, the same year as Honda's venture with Rover ended.

Today this facility has 3,700 associates on site and the Plant consists of engine and car assembly lines, panel pressing, engine assembly and aluminium smelting and casting operations. Different departments work off a variety of shift rotations including two-shift, three-shift and continental shift patterns. Last year this Plant produced 134,146 vehicles and their target for this year is around 160,000 units, with around 50% being exported to over 70 global markets. This facility also produces around 220,000 engines a year for their current UK produced models and other Honda cars produced elsewhere. Over £2.5 billion has been invested in 30 years by Honda at the Swindon facility.

Now the Swindon facility is the global production centre for the all-new 10th generation Honda Civic five door family sized hatchback, and the sole facility for producing the 4th generation high performance Civic Type-R models. To meet global requirements there are 700 different specifications of Civic models coming off the Swindon production lines at any one time. Production of the CR-V large SUV is due to cease at the Swindon facility next Spring to make way for increased production of Civics for global markets.

As for Honda's UK 2016 predicted sales, the company has a target of 15,000 Civic registrations, 13,000 CR-V large SUVs, 19,000 for the Jazz supermini hatchback and 6,000



for the compact HR-V Crossover. This gives a total of around 53,000 UK sales for the year, slightly less than the 59,000 sold last year, reflecting the fall overall in sales for the UK's new car market. Around 70% of UK Honda new car sales go to retail customers.

Honda's Civic Pride



Honda's first generation Civic, built in 1975.

First generation Honda Civic

Having first arrived in the UK in 1973 the 1st generation Civic two door small family four

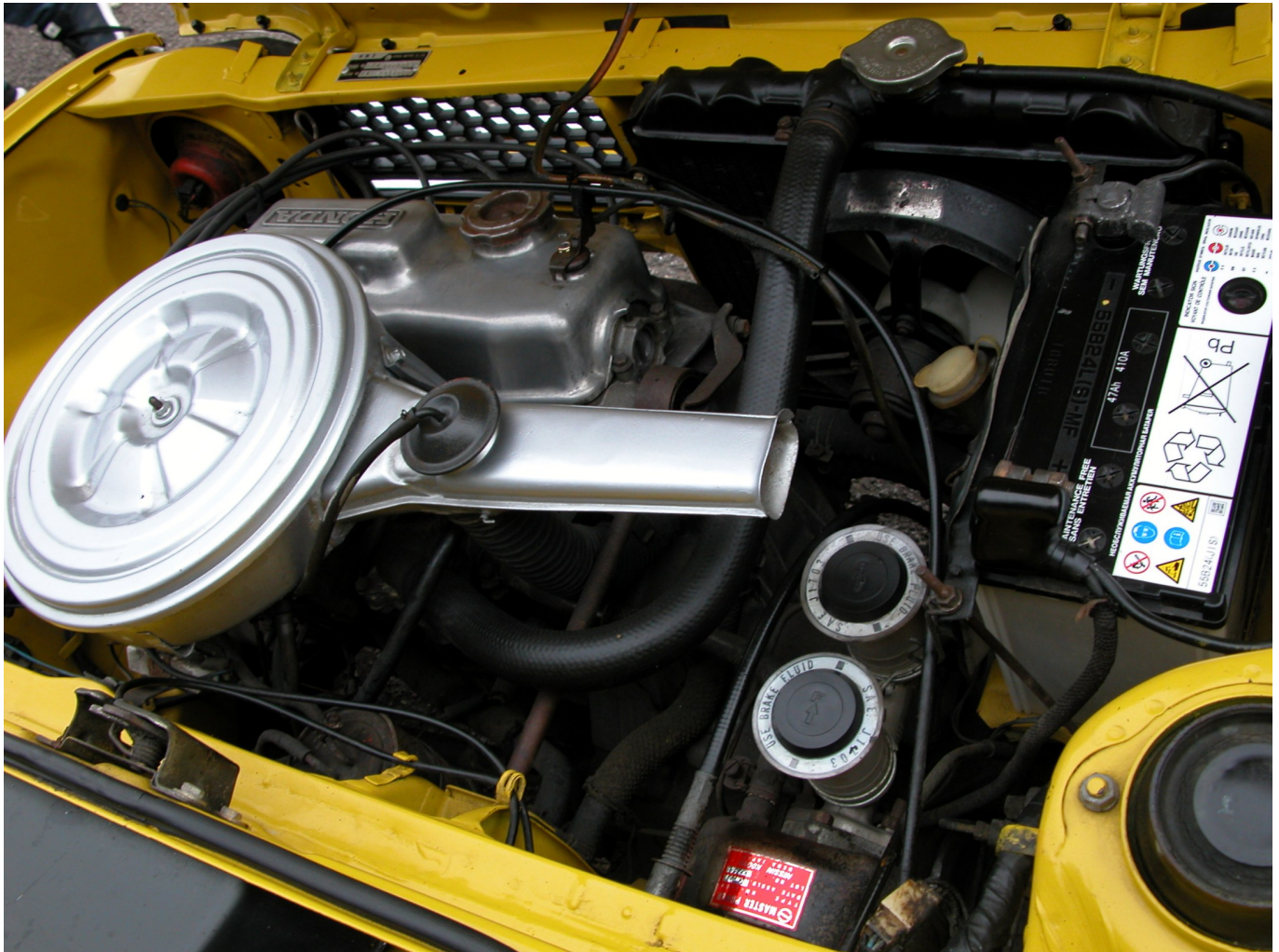


seater saloon was a vitally important car to launch Honda on its way and now the British built 10th generation Civic five door family hatchback and Type-R high performance models are even more important for UK jobs in a shrinking new car market. A 12.2% fall in UK new car sales in October and a fall of 4.5% for the year to date, say the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, is caused by declining business and customer confidence due to the fallout over Brexit and concerns re future emissions and the Government's policy on diesel powered vehicles.

Those are today's issues but step back to 1973 when Honda launched their first generation Civic model in the UK. I've just had a very brief drive in one of the first Civics, actually a two door, four seater Civic 1.2 Deluxe manual in Carnaby Yellow. This actual car cost £1,059 new and was used for brochure photography, and it is believed to be the oldest surviving Civic in the UK. Honda UK bought the car back from its then owner and added it to their heritage fleet of vehicles.

Luckily Honda UK let a few of us motoring writers have a turn in this car last week before sampling other heritage and current models. My story is all about Civics First and Latest.

This was Honda's first global car. At 3,655 mm (11.99 ft) in length it was tiny compared to today's small family hatchbacks, but it had two doors, four seats and a lift up boot lid. It was only 1,505 mm (4.94 ft) wide so by today's standards it is cramped, but we are told as generations go by we are all getting bigger. Open the driver's door and the very first thing I noticed was an ashtray positioned in the right hand corner of the dashboard, just where the driver would want it, not where others might want to use it. Of course it had wind down front side windows, two-speed wipers, indicators and it had reclining front seats, even two sun visors, not just one for the driver – and it came with a radio and heater system.



Under the forward opening bonnet is a 1.2 litre OHC 50 hp petrol engine with 79 Nm (58 lb.ft) of torque at 3,500 rpm. Drive to the front wheels is through a four speed manual gearbox, although a two speed Hondamatic auto transmission was available as an option. The steering is not power-assisted and there is no servo (power) assistance for the brakes, discs at the front and drums at the rear. By the way the engine was started from cold using a manual choke - remember those?



Top speed was an impressive 90 mph and zero to 60 mph took 15.1 seconds according to official test figures published on its introduction. With a recorded 71,794 on the clock the engine still felt lively, willing to rev but how a modern day five speed gearbox would have improved the driving experience. You soon figure out there is no power-assisted steering, due to its heavier weight than we expect now, but at least it provided feedback to the driver which is more than we get now from similar models. And yes some added anticipation was needed when braking.

VERDICT

Definitely this first Civic was a joy to drive down memory lane.



Latest generation Honda Civic Type-R – and it's built in Britain

Just as important as the original Civic was in 1973 to establish the Honda brand, so is the 10th generation Honda Civic five door hatchback range built in Britain for global markets. It's vital this model is successful for the future of UK jobs.

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Top model in the new Civic range is the 4th generation Type-R GT 2.0 litre turbocharged 320 hp version I tried, that costs £32,995. The slightly lower spec, but not in terms of



performance, is the Type- R which costs £30,995.

Thankfully for most users there are less costly models priced from £18,890 up to the price quoted for the Type-R GT. There is the choice of engines - 1.0, 1.5 and 2.0 litre petrol and a 1.6 litre turbodiesel, and depending on the engine chosen, SE, SR, EX, Sport, Sport Plus, Prestige and of course Type-R and Type-R GT specification levels. Of the 15,000 new generation Civics expected to be sold in the UK this year 10% of them will be Type-R variants.

The 10th generation Civic is the largest Civic to date and it is the best looking, best handling, most comfortable, best specced and even in its smallest engine form the best to drive.

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The Type-R versions bristle with aerodynamic add-ons in the form of an aggressive looking front deep spoiler, rear diffuser, rear tailgate spoiler and side skirts with fins, strakes, blades and air inlets all around the low riding five door body. Honda engineers assured me at last week's media event that nothing about the Type-R's styling is to do with visually enhancing the car, they all have a purpose in creating down-force, providing high speed stability, speeding up airflow around the body and reducing drag in the search of maximum performance. Even the three port centrally positioned exhaust system has been designed for optimum unrestricted airflow.

So performance is what the Type-R is all about. The 2.0 litre, four-cylinder VTEC turbocharged petrol engine pushes out a significant 320 hp at a high 6,500 rpm but more important is the 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque delivered at 2,500 rpm. It is this that makes this car so responsive when accelerating from mid-range speeds to top speed. That figure for the record is 169 mph, with zero to 62 mph taking 5.8 seconds.

There are three selectable driving modes, Comfort, Sport and +R which can alter the steering feel, ride comfort, vehicle stability, traction control, throttle responses and the Rev Match system which does what it says, matches revs via an engine 'blip' to gearchange



speeds.

With its six-speed close ratio sports manual gearbox and limited slip differential the car lapped the world-famous Nurburgring Nordschleife circuit in 7 minutes 43.8 seconds, the fastest time ever for a front wheel drive car.

All I can say is that on my test drive around some winding Cotswold rural roads it was 'fast' but more impressive was the mid-range response and also the ability to provide fuss-free driving in stop/start busy Friday afternoon traffic around Swindon.

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It wasn't even that thirsty for fuel either. The official Combined Cycle figure is 36.7mpg and my fast and then slow test drive returned a real-life figure of 32.3 mpg. With CO2 emissions of 176 g/km, VED road tax is £800 First Year rate and then £140 Standard Rate. Company car speedy users will pay 34% Benefit-in-Kind tax. Insurance is Group 40A.

The specification is high and there is lots of driving safety equipment and driver support functions. It's roomy, and has a large 420 litre (14.83 cu.ft) boot which goes up to 786 litres (27.76 cu.ft) with the rear seats folded, so it can double as a relatively roomy family car without hassle. So there's no good reason not to have one if you have to explain yourself to other members of the family or business on why you want one. You know it makes sense!

VERDICT

Impressive.

For: Best Honda Civic yet, best Civic Type-R so far, aggressive exterior styling, high specification, well-balanced agile handling, compliant ride, healthy mid-range engine response, attractive prices in its hot family hatch market sector, built in Britain.

Against: Old-school design infotainment system, like or loathe exterior styling, rear seats



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only really designed for two people, exhaust tone could be more distinctive under acceleration.



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

Honda Civic Type-R GT 2.0 VTEC Turbo Manual.

Price: £32,995.

Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre, four cylinder, VTEC turbocharged petrol, 320 hp, 400



Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque from 2,500 rpm, six speed manual, three driving modes, front wheel drive.

Performance: 169 mph, 0-62mph 5.8 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 36.7 mpg (on test, 32.3 mpg).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 176 g/km, VED road tax £800/£140, BiK company car tax 34%.

Insurance Group: 40A.

Warranty: Three years/90,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,557 mm (14.95 ft), W 1,877 mm (6.16 ft), H 1,434 mm (4.70 ft), boot/load area 420/786 litres (14.83/27.76 cu.ft), five doors; four/five seats.

Note: If you would like to read Kim's impressions of the classic original NSX and the latest 2017 3.5 litre version, also the 1975 Civic and the 2017 Civic Type R, please click [HERE](#).