

# More room for Insight

New version of Honda's hybrid car seats five and is set to be more popular than the two-seat original

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**T**he 2011 Honda Insight is the latest of a breed of highly efficient, low emissions passenger cars to hit Singapore roads, softly.

The model name did appear once before, on a strangely funky three-door coupe that could have been mistaken for a Citroen with its wheel spats covering most of the rear wheels.

The original Insight was a hybrid with an electric motor combined with a petrol engine and the same theme continues in the latest namesake.

Just two of those models were sold here, but the new version has sparked a lot more interest, with a dozen units pre-sold by authorised Honda importer Kah Motor.

So, does this suggest there is a greater awareness among drivers about CO2 emissions?

Not likely, in my opinion. As far as the Insight is concerned, the new model's drastically different concept in terms of styling and practicality makes it a proper, neat-looking, family car.

Whereas the original Insight was a small two-seat city runabout, the latest version is a five-door, five-seater that will appeal to a wider spectrum of motorists.

Based on an extended Jazz platform, the Insight's long 2550mm wheelbase and aerodynamically shaped fast-back design offer ample interior room for all five occupants.

There is also generous space in the boot, despite the existence of a nickel metal-hydride battery pack, which nestles neatly under the spare wheel.

Honda's IMA (Integrated Motor Assist) drivetrain that powers the new

Insight consists of a 65kW (88bhp) 1,339cc petrol engine and a 10kW electric motor sandwiched between the rear of the engine and the clutch.

As the name implies, the motor "assists" the engine in providing power to the wheels via the continuously variable transmission (CVT).

While this hybrid configuration plays a big part in reducing fuel consumption, there are interesting driver aids to further encourage economical driving.

Turn the ignition key and the motor, which has 78Nm of torque, fires up the engine instantly and noiselessly.

At idle, the 1.3-litre i-VTEC engine barely murmurs its existence. On the road, the car drives like any other conventional motorcar, although the typical CVT characteristic (that "slipping clutch" sensation when accelerating) is still present and somewhat annoying.

The Insight is neither a hot hatch nor a quick hybrid, but it nonetheless has adequate performance. It takes off smartly from rest because the engine's 121Nm, which peaks only at 4,500rpm, is boosted by the electric motor's 78Nm from 1,000rpm.

At every traffic light stop, the engine cuts off and stays dormant for up to 90 seconds. Otherwise, it starts up again when the brake pedal is released, so there are more fuel savings there.

The driver can also select what is called an Econ mode, which basically re-programs the engine, gearbox and motor assistance to enhance fuel economy even further.

Throttle response then becomes a little subdued, the transmission ratios move up quickly and regenerative braking during deceleration is enhanced. Even more fuel savings there.

What the eco-conscious driver would be most thrilled about is the Insight's "Scoring Function", which keeps tab on fuel savings and displays the driver's economy achievements.

Little symbols of plants start to appear on the multi-function display and as the fuel efficiency improves, the plants start to grow leaves.



Eco-conscious drivers will be thrilled with the Insight's "Scoring Function", which keeps tab on fuel savings. PHOTOS: ALECIA NEO



## HONDA INSIGHT

**Price with COE:** \$111,900  
**Engine:** 1,339cc 8-valve four-cylinder, hybrid  
**Transmission:** CVT  
**Power:** 88bhp at 5,800rpm  
**Torque:** 121Nm at 4,500rpm  
**0-100kmh:** 12.6 seconds  
**Top speed:** 180kmh  
**Fuel consumption:** 4.6 litres/100km (city-highway)  
**Agent:** Kah Motor

of refinement.

Though the CVT's behaviour is still something to get used to, particularly on hard acceleration, it more than makes up for this minor flaw with exceptional fuel economy.

For a modern hybrid, it is priced keenly, too.

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A consistently large number of leafy plants over an extended period eventually rewards the driver with a symbol of a laurel and trophy.

This is a bit of a gimmick, but it might actually work with drivers who are keen to prove (and maybe brag of) their skills

at economy driving.

In any case, the Insight's main appeal lies not in its unusual graphic display but the excellence of its overall package. It looks smart, seats five in comfort, has decent performance with ride and handling to match, and possesses a high level