

FRONTRUNNER

The Civic combines build quality with engineering to produce front-wheel-drive cars that are also fun-to-drive

*brand focus* |

Honda's Civic leader

What makes an automotive brand popular? Our focus on Singapore's Top 10 makes continues with the republic's third most popular brand – Honda. **Samuel Ee** lists the range available here and picks the model that best exemplifies the Japanese carmaker's appeal.

HONDA may be the most expensive mainstream Japanese make here, but it still manages to stay in the Top 3 consistently. Its current Honda Civic was even Singapore's most popular model in 2008 (among authorised distributors), despite being the priciest mid-sized Japanese sedan.

Why? Because like other Honda models before it, the Civic combines build quality with engineering to produce front-wheel-drive cars that are also fun-to-drive. Not only Honda sedans and hatchbacks show off their sporty DNA, but even the MPV and SUV models.

But while the Odyssey multi-purpose vehicle and CR-V sport-utility vehicle boasted good design and driveability, the most revolutionary Honda product in recent times has to be the Honda Civic.

This compact four-door sedan has always been a favourite among Singapore motorists, but in 2006, the new Civic stood out with a new chassis and a new design concept that featured sporty "one-box" styling containing a spacious cabin with unique multiplex meters.

The new car's exterior design had a steeply raked windscreen which was unusual for a sedan, and the "layered" look of the glowing instruments inside was almost futuristic.

The Civic was also the first in its segment then to offer a five-speed automatic gearbox mated to the familiar and frugal VTEC engine.

With its good blend of ride comfort and handling for a family sedan that was good-looking and well-made, the Civic quickly became the

popular choice. It helped too that there was a choice of three engines – 1.6, 1.8 and 2.0 litres. By straddling both COE categories, the Civic catered to both the entry buyer and up-grader.

But as the Japanese yen began to rise in late 2008 amid the global economic crisis, the Civic was priced out of a market that focused on cheaper models such as those from South Korea.

Currently, the Civic 1.6 VTi starts from \$83,800 (with COE), before progressing higher up the price range to a Civic 1.8 VTi-S and all the way to the most expensive Civic 2.0 Si at \$96,400. The range also includes the fuel-sipping petrol-electric Civic Hybrid at \$84,800.

The competition is not only cheaper, but has also caught up with the Civic's design and even surpassed it in some technological areas (such as one less expensive competitor's 1.6-litre sedan model with a six-speed auto).

Still, the Civic is the "premium" choice among mass market sedans and when the forex and economic situation stabilises, don't be surprised to find the Honda brand riding high on the sales charts again.

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SPECS

Honda Civic 1.6 VTi

Engine 1,595cc

Transmission 5-speed manual or 5-speed auto

Max power 125 hp @ 6,500 rpm

Max torque 151 Nm @ 4,200 rpm

0-100 kmh 9.2 secs (M), 10.5 secs (A)

Top speed 197 kmh (M), 192 kmh (A)

Price from \$83,800 (with COE)

Distributor Kah Motor

☎ 6841-3333

lineup roundup |

The sportier alternative



WITH their accurate steering and confident handling, Honda cars have always been the sportier alternative among Japanese models. It also had engineering advances such as a double-wishbone suspension and VTEC engine with variable valve lift and timing technology.

Apart from the Civic, other saloon models include the City, Accord and Legend. The Thai-made City is Honda's global entry-level sedan, but it is not cheap because of the aesthetics and engineering required for a global market. The Accord used to be the reference mid-sized sedan in Singapore, but has since been overtaken by the Toyota Camry. This big Honda has good saloon qualities, but one disadvantage is that the smallest engine available is a 2.4-litre four-cylinder.

The flagship Honda here is a rare sight – the all-wheel-drive Legend luxury saloon. More ubiquitous is the Jazz hatchback. If parallel imports are included, this small runabout is Singapore's most popular hatch, thanks to a roomy and versatile interior, and efficient engine. It may be more expensive than other Japanese or Korean hatchbacks, but is the epitome of utility and quality.

But what is unusual about the local Honda lineup is the fact that it includes three seven-seater MPVs. The Freed is a 1.5-litre mini-MPV with three rows of seats and rear electric sliding doors for improved access. The Freed is relatively new and has not achieved the popularity of the two bigger MPVs – the Stream and Odyssey.



The 1.8-litre Stream is a family favourite with its seven seats and good fuel economy. Like the Toyota Wish, the Stream also figures prominently on the sales charts, but feels more car-like from behind the wheel. Equally car-like is the larger 2.4-litre Odyssey. This popular MPV has a revolutionary low platform floor and handles like a sedan instead of a van. Its last row of seats is also big enough to fit two average-sized adults. Another Honda with a low CG is the CR-V. This soft-roader has part-time four-wheel-drive for better fuel efficiency.

Finally, there is the Civic Type R hot hatch. With its two-litre, 201 hp engine, this three-door model is currently the only sports model available here after the elegant S2000 roadster was discontinued last year.

By Samuel Ee
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PACE SETTER

(Top to bottom)

The roomy Jazz hatchback, the fuel efficient CR-V and the Odyssey MPV which handles like a sedan instead of a van

