



AS WITH MOST HONDAS, IT IS THE WAY THE FRONT-WHEEL-DRIVEN INSIGHT HANDLES THAT SHOULD BE ITS MOST SATISFYING QUALITY.

# SCORING STREAK

The Honda Insight will tell you how efficiently you're driving and rate you accordingly. **By Samuel Ee**

**P**LAY a video game well and you get a high score at best. Drive the new Honda Insight efficiently and the petrol-electric hybrid will tell you if you've won in the eco stakes. The prize? A smaller fuel bill. The Insight literally keeps score with its Eco Assist feature, which is short for Ecological Drive Assist System, and which in turn is a combination of three functions – Econ Mode, the guidance function, and a scoring function.

Whatever convoluted labels the Japanese may use, there is no denying that this is an interesting way to track the Honda's fuel efficiency. The Econ Mode is activated by pressing a button.

With this, the sophisticated hybrid system takes control of everything from the 1.3-litre petrol engine's output and continuously variable transmission, to the regenerative battery charging under deceleration and the air-con unit's energy saving pattern. All these to optimise consumption.

In Econ mode, the Insight activates the idle-stop function (start/stop if you're more familiar with European cars). When the car is stationary, or even when gliding to a stop, the petrol engine cuts off, only to fire up again automatically when you are about to set off.

The air-con compressor switches off

during "auto stop" mode but the blower remains in operation to maintain on-board ventilation. In Econ mode, the maximum idle-stop duration is 90 seconds. But depending on the cabin temperature, the engine is activated before conditions become uncomfortable.

The guidance function is basically the colour background for the digital speedometer, which is blue under hard acceleration, and progresses to turquoise if your lead-footedness abates somewhat, before turning to green if you're treating the accelerator pedal in the most optimum fashion.

Your driving behaviour is then tabulated under the scoring function. While on the move, the Eco Guide denotes "environmental responsibility" with the number of leaves on five available stems. At the end of the drive, the Eco Score shows the drive cycle results as well as the lifetime results.

The more fuel-efficient you become, the more leaves sprout to be turned into full-fledged flowers. There are three levels to ascend for that holy grail of eco heaven as symbolised by a trophy and laurel wreath.

So much for the arcade aspect of the Insight. The car itself scores surprisingly well in terms of design and handling. As a purpose-built hybrid and not a variant of an existing model series, the Insight five-door hatchback has distinctive styl-

ing. The large glass tailgate means the boot is capacious but the split window treatment requires some getting used to when looking through the rear-view mirror.

The interior is equally spacious and the dashboard has the familiar Honda multiplex meter. Thankfully, the cabin doesn't appear as plasticky as some Japanese cars even though it is.

But as with most Hondas, it is the way the front-wheel-driven Insight handles that should be its most satisfying quality. The steering is light but accurate, and the suspension softly sprung but composed. Another attraction is the Green Vehicle Rebate, which lowers the Additional Registration Fee to make the sophisticated hybrid model less expensive.

Honda's hybrid principle is the IMA or Integrated Motor Assist. The petrol engine provides the main oomph, with a small electric motor to complement it when it is working less efficiently, such as when the car is moving off from stationary or during overtaking. At its maximum, the total torque output of 170Nm is close to a 1.8-litre car, while combined consumption is 4.6l/100km.

This means the Insight can still provide some driving fun if required, something that should appeal to those who aren't diehard tree huggers but still want to drive something green.

[samuelee@sph.com.sg](mailto:samuelee@sph.com.sg)



## SPECS

Honda Insight

Engine 1,339cc

Max power 88 hp @ 5,800 rpm

Max torque 121 Nm @ 4,500 rpm

Max motor power 14 hp @ 1,500 rpm

Max motor torque 78 Nm @ 1,000 rpm

Transmission Continuously variable

0-100 kmh 12.6 secs

Top speed 186 kmh

Price \$106,900 (with COE & after 40% GVR)

Distributor Kah Motor

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