

TESTDRIVE

HONDA Honda Civic 1.8 (A) \$72,000 with COE



Civic Re-mindedness

A very light facelift does the Civic little favours since it was already pretty damn good to begin with

By Derryn Wong

THE LONG AND short of the story is that the Honda Civic has been facelifted for 2009. Usually when a car gets refreshed its makers will point out how many new components have been added, or what's been replaced, or where the kitchen sink is and so on.

This isn't one of those facelifts. If we could show you the rear end too, anyone with some knowledge of the current Civic would be able to spot all the differences: on the front are new, smoked headlights and on the back are redesigned hexagonal taillights. That's all folks, thank you and goodnight.

Okay just kidding, but really that's the

majority of the facelift. Honda decided its excellent eighth-generation Civic (which debuted in 2006) is still good enough to take on the competition with just a few tweaks to make it look nicer. Other than the abovementioned lights, the front grille gets a reworking too, with a different motif and slightly altered shape. For discerning buyers, there is one last detail and that's a new choice of two paint colours. There's Urban Titanium Metallic (gunmetal grey) and Polished Metal Metallic (almost black metallic), which brings the total tally of paint choices to seven.

And for those who missed the boat, we'll remind you why the Civic is the class-leading Japanese medium sedan. First off is the engine: a 1,799cc inline four cylinder unit with Honda's proprietary intelligent Variable Valve Timing and Electronic Lift Control (i-VTEC), which allows it to make a healthy 140bhp and a big, fat 174Nm of peak torque. That's

enough to bring the car to 100km/h from a standstill quicker than most of its closest rivals, in just 10.2 seconds. Coupled with a five-speed automatic transmission, the 1.8-litre mill is tractable and gives plenty of poke no matter what the engine speed - no doubt thanks to the i-VTEC system. One added bonus is the Sport mode. For more rapid but fuss-free progress just sling the shifter to S. You can then shift manually using the steering wheel mounted paddles for more involvement.

The steering wheel is a little down-sized from the norm, but big steering wheels just mean you poke your passenger in the eye. The Civic's is nicely-sized, neither too thick nor thin and the feel is feedback-rich without being too heavy.

Honda worked its magic on the suspension to give the car poise when entering corners and it doesn't roll as some competitors are wont to do in their quest for luxury. A clue to the sharper handling dynamics of the Civic are the double-wishbone rear suspensions, not normally found in non-performance vehicles. It's all about balance, as the Honda engineers have managed to build a car that's sporty without being harsh and comfortable without being a wallowing manatee.

If you haven't sat in a Civic yet then you should try one out for yourself, as the cabin is still as space-age as when it was launched back in 2006. Speed and essential driving information are up near the windscreen, near the driver's eyeline, with the tach closer to the wheel.

Honda designs most of its cabins with utility in mind (like in the very useful Jazz for instance) and it's not different here, despite the high tech visual theme. Everything is easy to figure out and falls easy to hand, plus there's a lot of useful

stowage spaces for all your knick-knacks. To top it off, rear legroom and boot space is pretty generous too. You probably get the idea by now and understand why the Civic hardly needed any touching up when it arrived at the halfway mark of its product life. Involving, balanced driving dynamics, a useful and cool interior, and some newly improved good looks mean the Civic is still a class-leader.

A SIMILAR CAR TO CONSIDER

Nissan Sylphy 1.5 (A), \$69,500 with COE

The Sylphy is roomier than the Civic - in this respect it apes its bigger brother the Teana. Cavernous interior doesn't translate to lardy looks either, but in it does lag behind the Civic when it comes to driving enjoyment though. 0-100km/h in 14 seconds isn't slow but looks lardy next to the Honda.

NEED TO KNOW

Honda Civic 1.8 (A)

ENGINE TYPE	1,799cc, 16V in-line 4
MAX POWER	140bhp at 6,300rpm
MAX TORQUE	174Nm at 4,300rpm
GEARBOX	5-speed automatic
TOP SPEED	197km/h
0-100 KM/H	10.2 seconds
PRICE	\$72,000 with COE
WARRANTY	3 years/ 100,000km
CONTACT	Kah Motor
TELEPHONE	6840-6888

PLUSES Good everything really: Good driving dynamics, good-looking and utile interior, good looks.

MINUSES Uh...Honda could have upgraded a few more things?

VERDICT Still the class leader