



HOT HONDA

# CITY SLICKER

Honda has finally got its styling act together for the new City

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THEY say the third time's the charm and so it is for Honda's Thai-made compact saloon, the City.

The original model was a perfect robbery getaway car — not because it could outrun the cops but it looked so forgettable that no eyewitness would have been able to describe it.

Being recognised wasn't something its replacement had a problem with, if only for all the wrong reasons. If ever there was a car that prioritised function over form, it was the gawky looking second-generation City.

This brings us to the latest version and, as you can see, it's quite a looker. Although

it shares its platform with the new Jazz, the City has completely different interior and exterior styling.

A 15mm reduction in height compared to its predecessor gives the car a more planted stance on the road, while thick horizontal bars across the front grille emphasise its width. It looks modern and proportionate, even mildly sporty.

Perhaps it's just as well the City has convincingly shed its budget car image. The LX model tested goes for \$66,300 with COE, moving it out of the entry-level segment and directly into the path of big names like the Mazda 3, Nissan Latio and Toyota Corolla Altis.

Does it have what it takes to make the cut at this level? First impressions are positive — other than being dressed to impress, it's packed with enticing goodies like a powerful 120bhp engine, a five-speed automatic gearbox with paddle shifters, all-round disc brakes and factory-fitted 16-inch alloy wheels.



Apart from the air vent louvres and centre compartment catch which feel a bit flimsy, most of the switches and controls work with typical Honda precision. Even the steering wheel looks nicely upmarket.

The thick cushioned front chairs appear to have been pinched from a bigger car and rear occupants haven't been left out: They get two-position reclinable seats, which is a nice luxury touch.

Once again the City's cabin is something of a packaging miracle, with much more legroom than expected in a car of this size. The boot is also massive, its 506 litre capacity surpassing even the Lexus LS 460's. If you can't squeeze something in there, you probably don't need it.

From the driver's seat, it quickly becomes obvious how much better the new

City is to drive. The steering, always a weak point in the old car, is now well-weighted and precise. No longer do you have to coax the wheel back towards the straight-ahead position after making a U-turn.

The car is also far more stable when it's being driven enthusiastically. Excellent damping cuts body roll through corners and the suspension easily shrugs off the best efforts of road humps to jolt passengers.

The picture isn't as rosy at low speeds, when the ride is noticeably firm and small bumps are too readily transmitted into the cabin. Things never get jarring, but this does knock the City's comfort score back a bit.

So does the engine's occasionally loud voice. By most standards, the City's power unit is a fine performer, combining punchy power delivery with impressively low fuel consumption.

But such is the reputation Honda has built for itself as a maker of great engines that the 1.5-litre i-VTEC's gritty note at high revs comes as a disappointment. Extra insulation would have helped improve perceived refinement.

This aside, the car is good fun to drive and the improved all-round visibility makes it easier to place on the road. It feels altogether more sophisticated than many of its rivals.

Whether this will be enough to bring in strong sales remains to be seen, however. At this price level, there is no shortage of strong competition and the City's lack of a "Made in Japan" tag won't help its cause.

The car plays the role of a junior Civic convincingly enough. Just try to forget the fact that a mere \$6,700 extra buys you its big brother.

## HONDA CITY 1.5 LX

### UPS

- Finally, a stylish City
- Sharp handling
- Spacious cabin and boot

### DOWNES

- Firm low-speed ride
- High selling price

**AGENT** Kah Motor

**PRICE** \$66,300 with COE

**ENGINE** 1,497cc, 16V in-line 4

**MAX POWER** 120bhp at 6,600rpm

**MAX TORQUE** 145Nm at 4,800rpm

**GEARBOX** 5-speed automatic