

Honda Accord

Featuring 1.8ES



THERE'S NEVER BEEN A LOT WRONG WITH the enviably reliable and beautifully built Accord, but it hasn't exactly sparkled, and last year's fine tuning didn't do enough to inject flair into a worthy but unexciting model.

This sixth-generation, built-for-Europe-at-Swindon Accord aims to change all that with a model that's re-engineered in virtually all aspects. There's a new range of 1.8 and 2.0 litre engines (2.2 litres for the low-flying Type-R) with the option of Sequential Sports Shift automatic transmission, and there's all-new rear suspension. Thanks to the space-saving nature of this five-link, double-wishbone arrangement, there's now more back seat space in a body that's wider and higher, yet shorter in both overall length and wheelbase.

There's a distinctly one-range-higher feel and smell to the ES model's plush wood-and-leather-clad interior, which suggests that a silky straight six engine would be more appropriate here than the "four" that's provided. Never mind, even this 1.8 litre acquits itself very well. It's smooth and acceptably quiet (it cruises discreetly on a motorway) and gives lively performance. Because of its sophisticated VTEC valve technology, however, the

engine doesn't give of its best until you rev it hard. If you don't, it's doleful, but take it beyond 3000rpm and acceleration feels spirited, and by 4500rpm, it really gets a move on, spinning with such elan that it can hit the spoil-sport rev limiter at 6400rpm before you expect it.

It's a pity that the V-rated, 60-Series tyres add a certain amount of harshness to the low-speed ride, because generally the suspension changes pay off in terms of ride comfort on main roads and motorways. The Accord still doesn't match the class-leading Peugeot 406 and Mondeo for suppleness, but it isn't far short.

It handles well, though, steering accurately and turning into bends with greater precision and eagerness than hitherto, with roll well controlled and a lot of grip at both ends.

Ultimate stopping power isn't as impressive as the provision of ABS and EBD (electronic brake distribution that apportions braking effort to the wheels) would suggest, but we can't really grumble at a best stop of 0.96g, and the pedal has a nicely weighted, progressive feel.

This also applies to the controls in general, particularly the sweet-acting clutch and light, positive gearchange. They're well placed, too, as you sit behind a stylish new

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PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

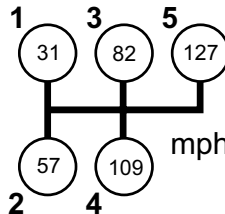
mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		1.9	4.1	6.7	10.2
IN 5TH GEAR		6.7	13.3	19.4	26.2
IN 4TH GEAR		4.9	9.3	13.9	18.9

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		14.0/10.2		12.7/9.0	
			13.3/9.3		12.9/9.6

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
		6300*		6400	6140

* for best acceleration



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade: unleaded Premium, 98 octane	
Type of use - air conditioning off*	mpg
In the city - heavy traffic	18
In the country - quiet driving	45
Typical mpg overall	32
Realistic tank range†	54 litres/380 miles

*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2-4% in winter and 4-8% in summer

FOR THE TECHNICAL

ENGINE

Type transverse four in line, with alloy block and head; five main bearings

Size 85.0 x 81.5mm = 1850cc

Power 136bhp at 6000rpm

Torque 129 lb ft at 4800rpm

Valves belt-driven single overhead camshaft (with VTEC variable valve timing) actuating four valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel/ignition electronic multi-point petrol injection with programmed spark timing via coil and distributor. Three-way catalyser and 65-litre fuel tank with low level warning lamp

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual (four-speed automatic optional); front-wheel drive

Mph per 1000rpm 20.7 in 5th, 16.9 in 4th

CHASSIS

Suspension front: double wishbones with coil spring/damper units and an anti-roll bar. Rear: five-link double wishbones with coil spring/damper units and an anti-roll bar

Steering rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance. 3.1 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 11.1m between kerbs, with 16.6m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 6JJ x 15 alloy on ES (steel on S and LS) with 195/60R15V tyres (Bridgestone Potenza on test car). Full-size spare

Brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear with vacuum servo. ABS anti-lock control and electronic brake distribution standard

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

Assessed on their effectiveness and convenience (the more black blobs the better)

Seatbelts

front ●●●●○ rear ●●●●○

Door locking

central locking? ●●●●○

remote control? ●●●●○

auto window closure? ●●●●○

dead locks? ●●●●○

Head restraints

front ●●●●○ rear ●●●●○

Interior

safety padding ●●●●○

driver's airbag? ●●●●○

other airbags? (3) ●●●●○

side impact protection ●●●●○

Luggage

secure from interior/hidden from view ●●●●○

Alarm

engine immobilised? ●●●●○

Fuel anti-spillage

standard on test car factory fitted option not available

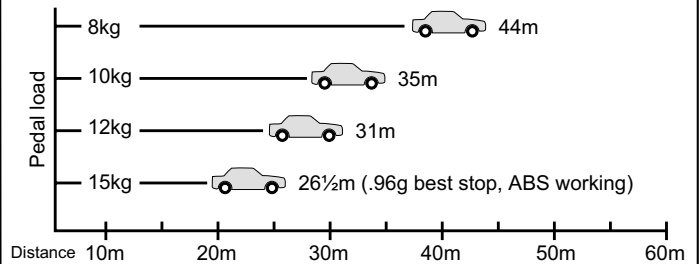
Euro NCAP crash test results - not available

BRAKES

Pedal feel ●●●●○ Behaviour in an emergency ●●●●○ Handbrake ●●●●○

Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with standard ABS)

A good-to-average best stop with ABS is about 26m at 15-20kg pedal load)



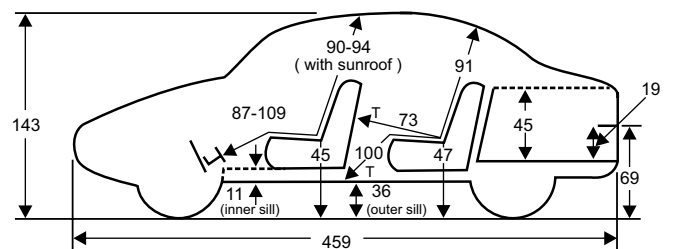
Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:

8kg at start of test, 9kg at end of test (Ideal brakes show no change)

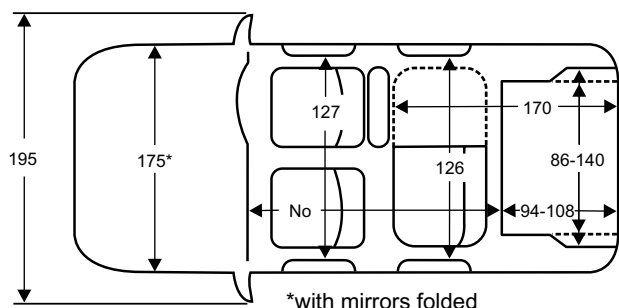
MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres

Four-door saloon



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants



*with mirrors folded

facia and height-adjustable wheel in the electrically powered seat that seems to achieve firmness through thinnish upholstery. It's surprisingly comfortable in the long run, however, even though maximum legroom isn't quite as good as before.

All-round vision is improved, but less impressive are some of the tiny, easy-to-miss warning lights, and the low-mounted and confusing melange of heater, air conditioning and Bose radio/cassette controls. Fortunately, the last are helpfully duplicated on the steering wheel, as are the buttons operating the ES's cruise control.

The Accord's heater must be one of the quickest in the business to warm up, and is complemented on the ES by full climate control that effectively maintains a selected temperature. It works very well, providing a pleasant atmosphere throughout the cabin.

Back seat passenger space is still a little below par for the class, but no real complaints, as there are now a few extra centimetres of kneeroom and legroom compared with the previous model. Headroom is reasonable, foot space is good and the seat is more comfortable because its tall backrest is nicely angled and the cushion is higher, too, for better thigh support.

Fold up the big armrest and there's room for a third rear passenger, who doesn't have much headroom but is provided with a three-point inertia-reel seatbelt and a head restraint to match the others. None of them folds down but they can all be removed. Other safety features include front seatbelt pretensioners with load limiters, two front airbags (ES) and side airbags, as well.

There's a high sill to the spacious, well-lined boot and its volume can be greatly increased by folding forward the 60/40 split/folding backrests (the cushions are fixed) that are released by thiefproof pull loops. The through-loading width is somewhat restricted, but it's a useful facility, nevertheless. How silly, though, to persist with those big boot lid hinge arms that steal so much space (or crush luggage) when the lid is closed.

The new Accord features comprehensive anti-theft measures, including shielded door and bonnet operating mechanisms, fracture-joint key cylinders, deadlocks and a rolling-code immobiliser. All versions have an alarm and central locking with radio-operated remote control.

VERDICT

Though not without its ergonomic shortcomings and the need for a rethink in some areas of detailing, the talented new Accord is a significantly better car and more enjoyable to drive than its predecessor.

Thanks to the improved performance, handling, seating comfort and uprated security, it's now right up with the best that the stiff opposition can offer. Some driver's, however, might prefer to trade some of the sharper handling for a little more suppleness in the springing.

It's a car that's likely to prove more reliable than most, and you get a three-year warranty into the bargain. And it is a bargain – or at least good value, in view of its generous standard specification, particularly in the S and LS versions, which represent the shrewdest buys.

LIKES AND GRIPES

Heated front seats on ES	...	but switches temptingly placed for back seat children
Deep, lockable glovebox	...	but not a cup holder in sight
Red dial needles show up well at night	...	but are difficult to see in daylight
Headlamps provide good illumination	...	but foglamps' switch/tell-tale poorly sited
Illuminated ignition keyhole	...	but horn sounds cheap and tinny
Electrically adjusted driver's seat	...	but it lacks a "memory" button

HOW THE ACCORD COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cyl/cc/bhp)	Revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes* best stop (m/kg)	Maximum legroom - front (cm)	Typical leg/kneeroom - rear (cm)	Steering (p) turns/ circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
HONDA ACCORD 1.8ES	4/1850/136	3380	10.2	26.2/18.9	32	26½/15	109	100/73	3.1/11.1	459
Daewoo Leganza 2.0CDX	4/1998/132	3240	9.4	22.6/16.1	30	26/40	109	102/78	3.2/11.4	467
Ford Mondeo 2.0LX	4/1989/136	3625	9.5	22.8/15.1	30	27/16	110	102/76	3.0/10.4	456
Mazda 626 2.0GX	4/1991/115	2720	8.9	28.2/19.2	32	28/24	107	103/70	3.1/10.8	457
Mitsubishi Galant 2.0GLS	4/1997/134	3095	8.8	23.0/16.5	35	27/16	109	102/78	3.0/11.1	463
Vauxhall Vectra 1.8LS	4/1796/115	2940	11.1	28.6/20.8	38½	24/28	111	101/75	3.0/10.9	448
VW Passat 1.8S 20V †	4/1781/125	3350	10.9	26.2/19.1	31	26½/30	110	102/74	2.8/10.9	468
† performance and economy figures for Estate						* all with ABS			(p) all power assisted	