

Honda Concerto 1.6i



THE HONDA CONCERTO AND ROVER 214/216 roll off the same production line at Longbridge. But despite many similarities between them, separate marketing strategies, along with a few cosmetic and underbonnet differences, have managed to give each model its own discrete identity.

Each has a loyal following, too, of course, with Rover now firmly re-established in the mass market, largely on the strength of the 214/216, while Honda's versions provide the same good-looking package, but with Honda power units under the bonnet and slightly more Japanese flavour inside.

The Concerto has remained largely unchanged since its introduction, but along with the recent adoption of fuel injection and catalytic converters across the board, Honda has revised the model line-up and thrown in a few interior improvements for good measure.

The new line-up consists of the entry-level 1.5i, developing 89bhp (virtually unchanged from the

previous 1.4GL), this 110bhp 1.6i (up 4bhp on the former 1.6EX), and finally the double overhead cam 1.6i-16, although the catalyser trims its peak bhp from 130 down to 121. The 1.6i-16 is also available in SE (Special Equipment) form, with alloy wheels and full leather upholstery complementing an already impressive inventory of standard equipment.

Originally, all but the 1.5i were to be available as either four-door saloons or five-door hatchbacks, but Honda has clearly decided that the new Civic saloon encroaches too far into Concerto territory. So, four-door Concertos are likely to disappear, with additional Civic saloon models added later, to fill the gap.

AT THE WHEEL

Common to both Honda and Rover versions, Honda's single-cam 1.6-litre engine develops 110bhp in its latest cat-equipped form. This is about 6bhp down on its non-cat fuel injection form in the Rover 216, but 4bhp higher than in twin-carb form in the now-

superseded Concerto 1.6EX. With the 1.6i-16's former 24bhp advantage over the single-cam version more than halved, now that cats have been fitted, there's less incentive for keener drivers to opt for the sporty Concerto over this 1.6i.

The 1.6i Concerto has lively, if not quite hot-hatch, performance, dispatching the 30–70mph sprint in a brisk 9¹/₂sec and pressing on to a maximum speed of 113mph at the test track.

As with many Honda power units, though, this one needs to be revved freely to deliver its best, as hinted at by its relatively high 5200rpm torque peak. However, the super-smooth engineering under the bonnet means that it's still reasonably responsive lower down, and becomes vocal only when pressed hard.

The Concerto's slick gearshift, smooth light clutch and easy minor controls give the driver a relaxed time at the wheel, while power steering (standard on all models, unlike the Rover) provides reasonably high-gear, nicely weighted responses at the helm – or should do! Curiously, our test car lacked straight ahead bite and felt generally woolly in turns. However, this untypical trait was in contrast to fairly taut steering on all the other power steering-equipped Rovers and Concertos we've driven, suggesting a fault or a previous kerbing impact, perhaps, peculiar to our test car.

As in most versions – Rover and Honda – low overall gearing helps to promote a lively feel in the lower gears, but it also intrudes on the tranquillity when cruising on a motorway. Similarly, the suspension provides the taut, agile responses preferred by keener drivers, but the Concerto's "busy", always slightly agitated ride is less impressive over in-different surfaces.

Commendably, anti-lock brakes are standard on all except the 1.5i model. Honda's three-channel ALB set-up works progressively and feels well-weighted in normal use. There's good fade resistance in more severe use, but the anti-lock function seems a little over-enthusiastic, resulting in disappointing all-out stops.

INSIDE STORY

Apart from chrome badges instead of decals on the tailgate, there's little to identify the latest, cat-equipped Concertos from outside, but the interior gets an up-grade with brighter, more attractive trim, together with a new tilt-adjustable steering wheel.

In-car entertainment has been upgraded, too, with a high-powered Blaupunkt radio/cassette unit standard on all models. The 1.5i has to make do with two speakers, all the others have four.

Subtle specification differences cloud direct comparisons between Rover and Honda-badged versions, but however you approach it, the Concerto's standard inventory runs rings round the Rover's. Power steering, central locking, split-fold back seats, a catalytic converter and electronically operated tilt-and-slide sunroof come as standard on all Concertos, together with electric windows and door mirrors, a

centre rear armrest and anti-lock brakes on all except the cheapest version.

Anti-lock brakes are £1000 extra on the Rover, while power steering costs a further £400 on most models. With the Honda priced close to or even below the equivalent Rover, the Concerto wins the value-for-money stakes hands down, although Rover offers a more extensive model range.

Boot space is reasonably generous, though the wheelarches are quite intrusive and the flimsy hard-board spare wheel covering seems a bit tacky.

LIVING WITH THE CONCERTO

Although not top of the class, the Concerto's accommodation is reasonably generous. The Rover's cabin exudes a slightly more luxurious atmosphere, however, despite the Honda's redecorated interior.

Fuel consumption – already disadvantaged by low gearing and a fairly hefty kerb weight – deteriorates further with the addition of a catalyser. It falls from the merely average 34mpg we obtained for an uncatalysed Rover 216 to a distinctly mediocre 31¹/₂mpg overall for the 1.6i – no better than we achieved with a previous 1.6EX model with automatic transmission.

Tailpipe emissions are cleaner, of course, but the 1.6's poor thirst pushes it further down the fuel economy league table. Its brisk performance is some compensation, however.

Surprisingly, a much-needed low-fuel warning lamp isn't provided on the Concerto. There are about 14 litres (3 gallons) left in the tank when the gauge reads empty; this tank isn't the easiest of fillers, either. Together, these factors combine to restrict the useable range between refills to a poorer-than-average 300 miles.

Underbonnet, the Concerto's complex looking machinery does little to encourage DIY attention, although routine top-ups present few difficulties. Honda's 7500-mile service intervals demand more frequent visits to the dealer than with a Rover, while Honda-sourced parts tend to be more expensive, too.

VERDICT

Keenly priced, well equipped and with reasonable urge under the bonnet, the Concerto has plenty to offer in the lower-medium sector.

Without two-tone flanks, it states its case a little more discreetly than the Rover, but Honda's build quality and engineering set impressive standards. Fuel economy is disappointing in the latest catalysed form, however.

The vexing question as to which badge to choose – Rover or Honda – is very much a personal thing, of course. Rover's model range, fleet support and dealer network is far more extensive than Honda's, but for private buyers, at least, the Concerto wins the value-for-money race by a country mile.

PERFORMANCE

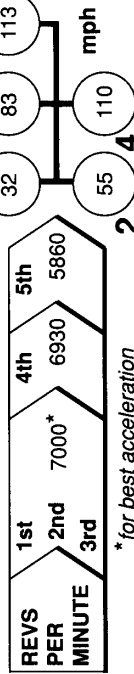
Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph 3.1	0-60mph 9.3	1/4 mile 17.1
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mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		1.6	3.5	6.2	9.5
IN 5TH GEAR		6.0	11.9	17.9	25.3
IN 4TH GEAR		4.4	8.6	13.4	18.5

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		13.3/9.4	11.9/9.0	11.9/8.6	13.4/9.9

Maximum speeds



FUEL CONSUMPTION

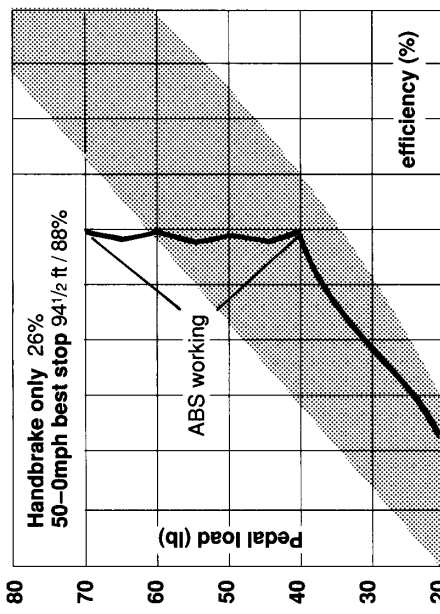
Fuel grade for tests: 95 octane, unleaded

Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	25
Short journeys in the suburbs	27 ^{1/2}
Motorway – 70mph cruising	31 ^{1/2}
Brisk driving, mixed roads	33
Gentle driving – rural roads	36 ^{1/2}
Typical mpg overall	31^{1/2}
Realistic tank range*	43 litres/300 miles

* based on gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience

SAFETY

Brakes How pedal loads affect braking



Braking efficiency shown as a percentage of gravity (ie 100% = 1.0g). Ideally the braking curve should fall within the shaded zone of this graph. If it's above, the brakes are too heavy; if it's below, they are too light – particularly on cars without ABS. When the curve becomes broken, the wheels are skidding.

Fade test

How hard use or water affects braking. (Ideal brakes show no change.)

Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)

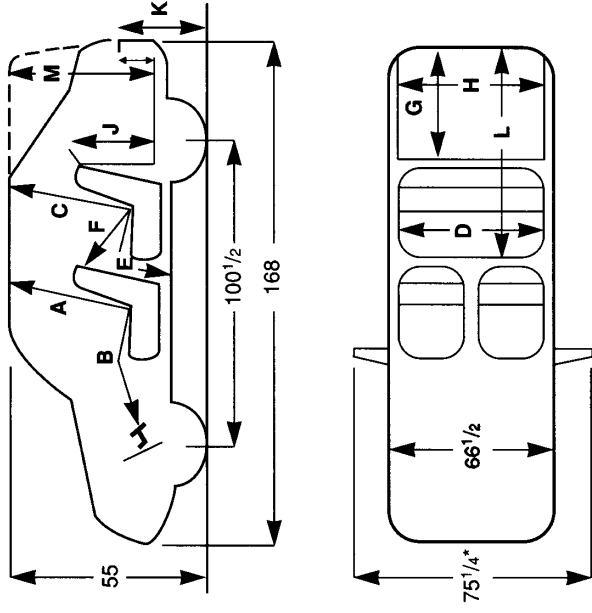
At start of test	34
After constant use	32
After severe use	34
After watersplash	-
Number of stops to recover	-

Safety check list

Steering	true 'feel' of the road?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Brakes	powerful?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	sensible effort?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	fade resistant?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Seatbelts	front – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	rears – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Head restraints	front – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	rear – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Interior	thoroughly padded?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Fuel	shielded filler? protected tank?

MEASUREMENTS

Dimensions (inches)



* mirrors don't fold

Kerb weight in lb (full of fuel)

2469

Inside (inches)

A Front headroom

36^{1/2}

G Load length

33

B Front legroom (min - max)

35-42^{1/2}

H Load floor width (mid - max)

34^{1/2}-53^{1/2}

C Rear headroom

35^{1/2}

J Load height

18

D Back seat width (between armrests)

50^{1/2}

K Sill height (inner/outer)

6^{1/2}/25^{1/2}

E Typical rear legroom

39^{1/4}

L Load length (max)

58

F Typical rear kneeroom

28^{1/4}

M Load height (to tailgate hinge)

31

* "Typical" represents the mean measurement behind the driver's seat set at 39in legroom and the passenger's seat set at 41in

HOW IT COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Max speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom - front (in)	Typical leg/kneerom - rear (in)	Steering † turns/circle (ft)	Overall length (in)
Honda Concerto 1.6i (c)	1590/110	113	9.5	25.3/18.5	31½	80/40*	42½	39¼/28¼	3.4/34½	168
Rover 216 1.6GSI	1590/116	118	9.7	23.3/17.8	34	94/40*	42	38½/27¼	3.5/34½	166¼
Fiat Tempra 1.8ie SX	1756/110	122	10.2	24.8/16.2	33½	90/60	41½	40/28¾	3.0/35½	171½
Ford Orion 1.6 Ghia Injection	1597/107	116	9.8	30.5/20.9	34½	90/50+*	42	39/29	3.0/34	166½
Hyundai Lantra 1.6CDi (c)	1596/112	114	10.6	27.0/19.1	32½	90/30	41	39½/29¼	3.4/34¼	171½
Peugeot 405 1.6GRi (c)	1580/89	106	13.3	31.3/21.5	36½	93/85	42¼	39½/28½	4.2/35	173½
Volvo 440 1.7GL	1721/109	112	10.8	25.2/19.3	33	90/38	43	38½/27½	3.0/33½	169¾
(c) catalyser fitted						* with ABS			† all power-assisted except Peugeot 405	

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, transverse 4 in line; water-cooled. 75mm bore x 90mm stroke = 1590cc. Aluminium alloy block and head; 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 9.1:1

Valve gear single belt-driven overhead camshaft actuating four valves per cylinder via rockers

Fuel system Honda PGM-FI electronic multi-point fuel injection, three-way regulated catalyser and lambda sensor. 55-litre (12.1-gallon) tank, no low-fuel warning lamp. Fuel required: unleaded only, 95 octane minimum

Ignition system fully programmed electronic, integral with fuel injection, via integral coil/distributor

Maximum power 110bhp at 6300rpm

Maximum torque 101 lb ft at 5200rpm

TRANSMISSION

Clutch 7.9in dry plate, diaphragm spring; cable-operated. Pedal load/travel: 20 lb/5¼in

Gearbox 5-speed (all synchromesh) and reverse. Ratios: first 3.25, second 1.89, third 1.26, fourth 0.94, fifth 0.77 and reverse 3.15:1. (4-speed automatic transmission optional on all models)

Final drive 4.44:1, to front wheels

Mph per 1000rpm 19.3 in top, 15.9 in 4th

Rpm at 70mph 3640 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by MacPherson damper/struts, radius rods, coil springs and an anti-roll bar.

Rear: independent by double wishbones and trailing arms with concentric coil spring/damper units.

Dampers: telescopic all round

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion (standard on all models) with 3.4 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 34½ft between kerbs, with 58¼ft circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5J x 14 steel (optional 5J alloy on test car) with 175/65R14 82T tyres (Pirelli P4000 on test car)

Brakes 10.3in ventilated discs front, 9.4in solid discs rear, with vacuum servo. Honda three-channel ALB anti-lock system (standard on all models except 1.5i)