

Honda Civic

Featured model: 1.6SE Executive 5-door



AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	★★★★○○
Space/practicality	★★★★○○
Controls/displays	★★★★★○
Safety	★★★★★○
Handling/steering	★★★○○○
Comfort	★★★★○○
Fuel economy	★★★★★★

SPECIFICATION

engine 1590cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 110bhp at 5600rpm, 112 lb ft at 4300rpm; belt-driven single overhead camshaft, 16 valves with variable timing

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 19.7 mph/1000rpm in 5th, 16.3 in 4th

suspension front: independent damper/struts with integral coil springs
Rear: independent double wishbones with coil springs

steering electric power assistance; 2.8 turns lock-to-lock; 11.55m diameter turning circle between kerbs (15.95m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front solid discs rear, with anti-lock control and brake-assist (rear drums on 1.4 only)

wheels/tyres 6in alloy with 195/60R15 tyres (steel on S and SE; 185/70R14 on 1.4); full-size steel spare

LIKES ...

damped-action roof grab rails
plusher door trims on Executive
leather doesn't spoil seat support

and GRIPES

ugly rubber gear lever gaiter
added CD (Exec) but no cassette player
air con always switches on with Screen
7cm of load height wasted below floor

THE CIVIC 5 DOOR RANGE

size and type lower-medium (mid-priced) tall 5 door hatchback; other versions are (shorter) 3-door, Type R Coupé, Stream MPV
trim levels S, SE, SE Executive
engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.4 litre/90bhp; 4/1.6/110. diesel: none yet
drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual. (4-speed stepped automatic with torque converter optional)

THE OUTGOING FIVE-DOOR Civic, built in Swindon, was the last joint venture with Rover – the 400/45 was always closely related in design, if not image.

It's just about time for a replacement and remembering lessons learned from its ex-partner, Honda has produced an impressively roomy family holdall, with rear passenger space to rival most hatchbacks one size up.

It's done by moving the cabin and footwells well forward, giving a short-nosed, semi-MPV appearance. The roofline is about 5cm taller than average and it's about 15cm longer at the kerb than the Focus, Astra or Golf (though slightly shorter than its predecessor).

But it doesn't end there; the interior has a flat floor front and rear, with a gear lever sprouting from the lower fascia area. Apart from the intrusion of the handbrake (although it's tucked close to the driver's seat), one has unimpeded access from front to rear, as well as from side-to-side – safer as well as more convenient, when getting in and out.

Yet despite these MPV connotations, this Civic remains a hatchback, especially in terms of back seat adaptability and load space behind. In fact, though rear leg-stretching space is remarkable, the luggage space behind is modest, with a floor that is actually 7cm higher than it needs to be – just to find room for a full-size spare wheel.

No complaints really about the driving position or major controls, except that the steering wheel and column (with rake but not reach adjustment) are angled more steeply than most; you get used to this, though. That funny-looking gearchange works really well, the dials are clear (though there's no rheostat) and the (normal-height) seat supports well.

There's no doubt that the leather-clad top model gives the Civic's bland interior a welcome aesthetic lift, but the admittedly slower 1.4 is even more refined at speed (with identical gearing) and its (cheaper) 70-Series radials will ease ride comfort, as well; on the 1.6 it's nothing special.

Generous equipment means that you don't feel hard done by in a 1.4S. All models have a three-year/90,000-mile warranty, but anti-rust cover is for only six years and both purport to be tied to dealer servicing.

VERDICT

If the previous Civic is anything to go by, this latest one will prove reliable and reassuring. This five-door doesn't set the pulse racing, however; unlike its sporty stablemates, this is the one for the quiet and easy life. As such, look at the 1.4S before you think of spending any more.

OVERTAKING ABILITY ★★★★○					
<i>Much livelier than old 1.5 VTEC E in gears, but similar through-gears acceleration. Very tractable (30mph in top and gearchange ultra-smooth)</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear		
20-40mph	3.3	9.1	12.4		
30-50mph	4.0	8.7	12.1		
40-60mph	5.2	9.0	12.2		
50-70mph	6.5	9.1	12.4		
30-70mph	10.5	17.8	24.5		
max speed in each gear (*using 6000rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	27½	51	77	98	117

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★★★○			
<i>Vast passenger space, yet both lugggae behind and oddments room limited. Prominent A pillars and rear headrests impede view; poor lock, too</i>			
<i>in centimetres (5-door hatch)</i>		inside	(† with sunroof)
outside		front - legroom	89-107
length	429	- headroom	94-98†
width - inc mirrors	193	rear - typical leg/	102/
- mirrors folded	170	kneeroom	76
height (no roof bars)	150	- headroom	96
load sill height	10/	- hiproom	127-128
(inside/outside)	69	load space (all seats in use)	
steering		(litres/cu ft)	380/13.4
turns lock-to-lock	2.8	load length	74-147
turning circle (metres)	11.55	full length to fascia	250
easy to park/garage?		load width	105-130
	★★★★○	load height (to shelf/	45/
		to top of aperture)	77

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★★★○	
<i>Commanding position with good pedal layout and supportive seat that locates well. Twin roof lamps, deep sun visors but rear wiper sweep poor. Easy passage to nearside kerb for driver</i>	
	

SAFETY ★★★★○	
<i>Excellent NCAP result – for pedestrians, too. Reassuring, consistent brakes and locking arrangements – alarm on all except S grade</i>	
braking	
pedal feel	★★★★○
in emergency	★★★★○
handbrake	★★★★○
dry road stopping distance <i>from 50mph (with standard ABS)</i>	
pedal load	distance
10kg	29½m
16kg	26½m best stop
+4kg ie 20kg	28m

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS (tested June 2001)			
front impact	69%	side impact	89%
overall	79% ★★★★★○	pedestrian rating	★★★★○

SECURITY FEATURES			
central locking	✓	alarm (not S)	✓
remote control	✓	immobiliser	✓
auto window closure	✗	luggage security	★★★★○
deadlocks	✓		
✓ standard	0 factory option	✗ not available	

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★★★○
Impressive, grippy neutral cornering attitude spoiled by electric steering – too light and lacks “feel”, with sticky feeling on our test car, too



COMFORT ★★★★○
The 1.4 is a shade quieter at dual-carriageway speeds, but 1.6 otherwise demure. Ride choppy over poor roads, but lots of space and seat comfort all round

FUEL ECONOMY ★★★★★			
<i>You'll need a diesel to beat this – a taller geared version would do even better. Marvellous tank range and easy filler</i>			
AA test results (mpg)		official figures (mpg)	
worst (hard/urban)	29	urban	33.2
best (gentle/rural)	50	extra urban	51.4
overall mpg on test	42½	combined	42.8
realistic tank capacity	53 litres	CO ₂ emissions	156g/km
typical range	500 miles	car tax band	B

HOW THE CIVIC 5 DOOR COMPARES	engine cyl/cap/power (no/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes – best stop from (*) 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering (p) turns/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
HONDA CIVIC 1.6i	4/1590/110	3550	10.5	24.5/17.8	42½	26½/16	107	102/76	2.8/11.6	429
Ford Focus 1.6	4/1596/100	3150	10.8	29.1/20.1	40½	26½/15	107	100/71	2.9/10.6	415
Vauxhall Astra 1.6	4/1598/100	3440	11.2	23.6/16.3	41½	26/21	108	99/75	3.1/10.4	411
VW Golf 1.6	4/1595/105	3540	10.3	23.3/17.3	38½	27½/18	111	95/71	3.1/10.4	415
Renault Megane 1.6	4/1598/110	3280	10.2	23.7/16.6	41½	26/55	107	97/69	3.5/10.7	413
previous Civic 1.5 (1996)	4/1493/115	2890	10.5	38.5/22.4	43	24½/18	111	100/71	3.5/10.5	432

(*) all with ABS

(p) all with power steering