



Honda Civic Type-R



AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Controls/displays	★★★★○
Handling/steering	★★★★○
Comfort	★★○○○
Space/practicality	★★★○○

THE CIVIC RANGE

size and type lower medium (mid-priced) tall 5-door hatchback and 2-door Coupé, shorter and lower 3-door Type-R
trim levels 3 and 5 door: S, SE, SE Executive, SE Sport. Coupé and Type-R: single level only
engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.4 litre/90bhp, 4/1.6/110, 4/1.7/123, 4/2.0/197; diesel: 4/1.7/100 coming soon
drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual, 6-speed on Type-R (optional 4-speed stepped automatic with torque converter – not available on Type-R)
notable features "short nose" design, electric power steering, facia mounted gear lever, flat floors, racing and rallying

BRIEF SPECIFICATION

engine 1998cc, petrol, 16 valves 197bhp/145 lb ft with i-VTEC variable valve timing and inlet camshaft control; 50-litre fuel tank
drive 6-speed manual, front-wheel drive
suspension (stiffened and lowered 15mm); front: MacPherson coil spring/damper struts, lower arms and anti-roll bar. Rear: double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers and anti-roll bar
tyres 205/45ZR17 on 7in alloy wheels
brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear with anti-lock and brake force distribution controls. No brake assist
0-62mph* 6.8sec
max speed* 146mph *maker's figures
official (combined) mpg 31.7

LIKES ...

flat floors front and rear
 two trip meters
 back seat adaptability/load space
 fine NCAP crash test result (5 door)

and GRIPES

front seatbacks have no "memory"
 no sunroof and air conditioning extra
 no roof handle for front passenger
 modest fuel tank capacity and range

THIS NEW AND SPORTING CIVIC follows closely in the scorch marks of those racy thoroughbreds from Honda, the Integra and Accord Type-R models.

Though stylistically tweaked, it's based on the latest three-door Civic, which means that it's 14½cm shorter than the five-door, but has a stiffer shell to improve tautness and precision.

Some of the larger model's remarkable rear leg and kneeroom are lost in this case, but remain acceptable. It helps to be nimble to climb into the back past the tip-and-slide nearside front seat (the driver's doesn't slide), although the entry gap is quite generous.

It takes no time at all to discover just how blisteringly quick this roadgoing racer is. And with variable inlet camshaft timing added to the clever valve train technology, the delicious i-VTEC engine pulls with much more gusto from the mid-range than its peakier partners. It's lively from rest, really comes on strong by 3500, and between 5500 and 8000 goes ballistic, searing its way to sixty in 6½sec and on to 146mph, according to Honda. This feels entirely believable. What's more, it's a joy to listen to.

What helps to keep the engine "up on the cam" is a superb six-speed gearbox with a slick-shifting lever that belies its odd appearance. Although top gear is no long-legged cruiser (20mph per 1000rpm), the engine is smooth and sweet throughout the rev range and is remarkably tractable in the upper ratios.

The Type-R benefits from lower, firmer

suspension and ultra low-profile tyres that give it terrific handling and tenacious road grip without making the ride unpleasantly harsh. If you're looking for exemplary chassis design, look no further. Only the electric steering falls short of ideal; it's too light and lacking in informative feedback. The brakes are excellent.

Silvery centre console trim, a smooth tactile aluminium gear knob and black-on-white dials reflect the Type-R's sportiness. The high-backed hip-hugging seats are special, too, but they lack height adjustment and are short on lumbar support on a long drive. In other respects the interior has the familiar Civic appearance.

Honda says, "The Type-R maintains a 'no-frills' approach to specification." In other words, don't expect air conditioning, a sunroof, side airbags, cruise control or electric seats for your sixteen grand. Fair enough.

VERDICT

Who would have thought that the family-minded Civic could be transformed into such an unforgettable and highly desirable hot hatch? The Type-R is memorable not only for the controlled aggression of its superb engine, but also for the alertness of its finely tuned chassis. It's an instant classic. Fewer than 1000 will be available in the UK in the first full year – and the queue starts behind us.