

FIRST
DRIVE

Honda Stream



CALL THE STREAM AN MPV IF you must, but Honda would prefer us to think of its slippery looking, Civic-based seven-seater as new and unique: a rakish coupé-style SAV (sports activity vehicle) with the accent on sports.

A clue to its performance and handling lies in the fact that one of its key customers is the ex-GTi driver, now thirtysomething and with offspring. The old "stork forces sale" syndrome.

So it's pretty lively, then? In a word: not half. But then with 153bhp on tap, that's not surprising. Honda claims 0-62mph in 9.4sec and a top speed of 127mph. And with variable inlet camshaft timing added to the clever valve train technology, this i-VTEC is more willing to pull from the mid-range than its "peakier" partners. But it will still happily howl up to the 6800rpm red line, which is also close to the maximum change-up point for the optional five-speed automatic transmission.

This not only operates smoothly when left to its own devices, but also provides snappy and sporty sequential shifts via the handy facia-mounted selector. It's an excellent system.

The Stream's sportiness is further demonstrated by its roll-resistant cornering and surprising swervability for a sizeable multi-seater. It doesn't feel its size when being hurried along twisting roads, and it rides well, too.

The trouble with the driving position is that the steering wheel adjusts only for rake and the higher you raise the seat the

less thigh support you get. In some light the instruments aren't easy to read, either. Otherwise it's an agreeable cabin with practical stalk controls and sensibly high radio and heater push buttons.

The Stream falls midway between the Vauxhall Zafira and Chrysler Voyager in length, but quite frankly, you have to take Honda's claim that it "seats seven adults in comfort" with a pinch of salt. Only two full-size seats form the centre row, so a third passenger sits on the 50/50 split with no side shaping for support. That said, there's good kneeroom and foot space, plus generous headroom.

Not so in the cramped one-piece rear bench seat, though, which is best suited to youngsters. And because it's a bench, you can't seat a sixth passenger with additional luggage alongside.

With two up and the centre seats slid forward a spacious load deck opens up when the back bench is folded down, but it's more of a palaver than with the Zafira and the result isn't as tidy.

VERDICT

Where the Stream shines is in its superb power train, swift performance and surefooted handling. But is that enough? If you're expecting something special in terms of space utilisation, seat folding and comfort, you'll be disappointed. Well-equipped though it is, there are few surprise and delight features, either. Close rivals will be breathing a sigh of relief.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

THE STREAM RANGE

size and type upper-medium (mid-priced) MPV

trim levels 1.7 VTEC SE, 2.0 i-VTEC SE Sport

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.7 litre/123bhp, 4/2.0/154; diesel: none

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (5-speed sequential shift automatic optional on 2.0)

notable features SE: side airbags, sunroof and air conditioning, ABS and EBD, alarm, deadlocks, alloy wheels. SE Sport adds: automatic climate control, rearmost air vents, headlamp washers

VITAL STATISTICS (cm)

length x width <i>(inc mirrors)</i>		457x192
front - legroom		92-105
- headroom <i>(with sunroof)</i>		95-97
centre row	- typical legroom	104
	- typical kneeroom	72
	- headroom	100
	- hiproom	130
minimum load space <i>(all seats in use)</i> <i>(litres/cu ft)</i>		220/7.8
load length <i>(seats up/folded)</i>		36/105
maximum load width		121
load sill height <i>(inside/outside)</i>		15/66
boot/load aperture height		51/90

LIKES ...

deep, well-shaped sun visors
front seats padded at rear shin level
smoothly damped grab handles
dirt shield on underslung spare wheel
plenty of drinks holders

and GRIPES

no toe-room for front passenger
red dial numerals/needles hard to see
rear centre seatbelt lap-type only
rearmost air vents in right side only
rear bumper lacks scuff protection