

Honda Civic 1.6 i-DTEC

By Jim Mc Cauley

The Civic badge is now well embedded in automotive history since the first Honda model to carry the name rolled off the production line 40 years ago. Since then the Civic has evolved as a safe and sensible choice until the dramatic 8th series was launched in 2006. Both the exterior and interior design were a huge departure for

Honda and gave the car a unique and eagerly accepted identity.

Building on its success, the latest model launched in 2011 evolves this design while addressing the few shortcomings of the previous range, among them rear visibility and ride comfort. Initial engine choice comprised 1.4 and 1.8 petrol models as well as a 2.2 litre diesel. But now comes the engine that everyone has been waiting for – the much lauded 1.6 litre diesel in what will be one of the most exciting years for Honda.

As well as the introduction of the new engine, there will also be a new Civic variant, an estate launched recently at the

Frankfurt Motor Show. On the sporting side, the company has also announced its return to Formula 1 and is building the new engine for McLaren's title bid in 2014. My first drive in the new engine was on the sprint course at Cholmondeley Festival of Speed in the summer but I had to wait until recently to experience the car on-road. Initial impressions on a very wet track were very positive and with the Goodwood champion joining me to call the corners I was able to push the car further than I would have otherwise dared.

But back to everyday use and its relevance to the family driver. The new engine has been developed only for Europe, and produces 120 PS with 300 Nm of torque available from 2,000rpm. Driving the front wheels through a standard 6-speed manual gearbox, the 1.6 litre diesel accelerates from rest to 62 mph in 10.5 seconds with the potential to reach 129 mph. The car is solid on the road inspiring confidence and as you apply the accelerator, the turbo announces its involvement with a muted whistling which is all that disturbs the otherwise quiet power unit. The car is particularly sweet as speed with suspension more settled than at lower speeds where it



tends to be a little pitchy between front and rear axles. Steering gnaws at the otherwise precision build of the car leaving response a little vague while brakes are very good, requiring a little more firmness than expected to get the required bite. Instrumentation remains unchanged with a clear digital readout sitting above the rev counter and easy to dim lighting at night including the central information screen. Unfortunately a sole centre-mounted courtesy light looks rather bleak at night as the forward mounted reading lights are manual operation only.



Rear accommodation is excellent with good access from the wide opening doors and the rear seats can be raised for in-cabin storage in addition to the twin floored 477 litre boot.

Stop/start technology is fitted as standard as is a discreet 'Eco Assist' system to advise drivers on how their driving style is impacting on fuel economy. For those who really want to stretch their economy, all models are fitted with an 'Econ' button that activates a gentler throttle map for a more relaxed and less fuel demanding drive. Officially fuel consumption on the combined cycle is given as 78.5 mpg, while I was able to achieve just over 60 mpg over a few

hundred miles in mixed conditions, suggesting that with less enthusiastic driving, the official figure could be closed on.

Styling-wise, the car has been tastefully sculpted from the previous form with front bodywork seamlessly blended to enhance aerodynamics. The rear wheel arches are more pronounced to give the car a more purposeful stance and the entire shell sits 20mm lower than the previous model with a modest increase in width of 10mm. To improve rear visibility, the back spoiler incorporating a high-level brake light now sits lower. Inside the refinements continue with a snug wraparound driving cockpit and notable improvement in instrument presentation and overall quality.

Honda has never rushed to bring a diesel engine to market but in this case the wait has been worth it for the economy offered without any sacrifice in performance and the added benefit of low emissions, just 94 gms/km, putting it in Band A for zero annual car tax.

Equipment-wise and the new model scores well across the five trim levels. The test vehicle was in the second highest ES-T trim which adds navigation to the ES level. It comes with automatic lights and wipers in addition to the specification of the SE trim as well as dual zone air conditioning, Bluetooth connectivity, rear view camera and front fog lights. On the safety front all models come with Vehicle Stability Assist, Hill Start Assist and Emergency Brake Assist as well as the top 5-star EuroNCAP crash test award.

The model tested in ES-T trim is listed at £22,090 and like the other Civic models is built at the company's UK plant in Swindon.