

Honda's 8th-Generation Civic Is All Grown Up

by Mark Maynard

The Honda Civic coupe seems all grown up now, ready to please adults with its confidence and style.

It used to be that this little two-door was fit for a first-time buyer, but the eighth generation 2006 model has been fleshed out in size, substance and safety.

It's a good choice as a refined and stylish high-mileage commuter car.

HONDA CIVIC - The Honda Civic coupe is in its eighth generation and has been fleshed out in size, substance and safety. CNS Photo courtesy of Honda. The 140-horsepower, four-cylinder engine gets 40 miles to the gallon on the highway and 30 around town. The five-speed automatic transmission is an \$800 upgrade. The five-speed manual is rated 38 mpg on the highway and 30 around town.

And not only is this engine thrifty, it gets the government's LEV-II rating as an ultralow emissions vehicle.

Weighing in at 2,700 pounds, performance is brisk. The automatic is efficient and tuned to give eager upshifts. Grade Logic electronics hold a gear on downhills for engine braking.

All it needs to make it more fun than a stickshift are the steering wheel paddle shifters offered on the smaller Honda Fit.

Power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering is light to the touch and yields a tight 35.4-foot turning circle. The disc brakes have an overengineered feel for stopping power and include advanced logic ABS and electronic brake force distribution.

Michelin Pilot Exalto tires on alloy wheels are smooth and quiet rollers.

The base Civic, with its \$15,110 five-speed manual gearbox, is still a good starter coupe for a young driver.

Stepping up to the topline EX model at \$21,560 puts sophistication in the driving experience with all the expected power conveniences and a navigation system and XM satellite radio.

No faux wood trim here, but a tastefully contemporary choice of plastics, textures and fabrics.

The navigation system's digital screen integrates cabin functions and audio control, with redundant radio controls and cruise on the steering wheel. Accessing the features seemed confusing at first, but I adapted quickly.

There's adult-size front headroom, even with the standard moonroof. The back seat is snug but not uncomfortable.

Honda's two-tier gauge layout has raised eyebrows among critics, but the design puts the speedometer, fuel and temp gauges up high for a head-up, eyes-on-the-road placement. A big tachometer and other warning lights are below.

Everything inside and out is Honda perfect, from panel alignment to quality of materials and the safety suit, which includes side curtain air bags.

If a Mustang seems too retro baby boomer, the Civic coupe will take a few years off the image. SPECS: 2006 Civic EX Coupe with XM and navigation system Body style: Subcompact, 4-passenger, front-wheel-drive 2-door Engine: Aluminum, 140-hp SOHC, 1.8-liter, 4-cylinder, with i-VTEC valve timing; LEV-II ULEV emissions Transmission: 5-speed manual, optional 5-speed automatic EPA fuel economy estimates: 30 mpg city, 38 highway; 30/40, automatic; 87 octane recommended

DIMENSIONS: Trunk space: 11.5 cubic feet Front head/leg/shoulder room: 37.8/42.6/53.9 inches Rear head/leg/shoulder room: 34.7/30.3/52.1 inches Length/wheelbase: 174.8/104.3 inches Curb weight: 2,701-2,767 pounds FEATURES: Standard equipment: Remote locking, air conditioning with dust filter, cruise control, tilt and telescopic steering wheel, blue back-lit gauges, driver-seat height adjustment, 60/40 split folding back seat, one-touch open-close power moonroof, center console with sliding armrest and storage, variable intermittent wipers, decklid spoiler, power windows and mirrors, chrome exhaust tip, door-pocket storage, passenger-side seatback pocket, map lights, floor mats, 7-speaker 350-watt XM ready audio system with subwoofer and MP3 input jack, full-tank of gas on delivery Safety equipment: Dual-Stage, dual-threshold front air bags, front side air bags with passenger-side occupant position detection system, side curtain air bags PRICING: Base: \$21,560, with \$550 destination fee; options on test car: None Where assembled: Ontario, Canada PLUSES: Contemporary shape, sophisticated EX interior treatment, refined driving and 40 mpg on the highway. MINUSES: Automatic transmission deserves the paddle shifters, which are standard on the Honda Fit 5-speed automatic.

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