

New Honda Civic 1.6 i-DTEC EX Plus

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The Honda Civic is sharp, not just to look at but also to drive. Handling is precise and steering is direct – and for an oil-burner, the 1.6 i-DTEC has punch.

Fair play; the Japanese model used to have a bit of a 'beige' image - with the exception of the Civic Type-R. But the 2005 manifestation was drastic enough to change that impression.

In 2012 the car went for plastic surgery again and the Civic is now even more aesthetically agreeable - and it's enjoyable to drive too.

Inside, the Honda has a lively cockpit arrangement; a small and sturdy steering wheel, as well as funky blue door lining illumination. Its six speed manual gearbox changes up and down like a knife through butter, while stiffer suspension ensures meticulous cornering. Comfort isn't affected though; as a matter of fact, the latest Civic has better refinement and an unwavering ride - especially at high speed.

Fuel economy is extraordinary with the 1.6 i-DTEC Civic. My week driving the EX Plus model along country roads and dual carriageways returned a figure not far off the official average of 76.3 mpg.

And if that's not impressive enough, the Honda only produces 98 g/km of CO2.

For extreme efficiency you can push the green ECON button on the dashboard. This smart gadget ensures an even swell in torque for a more calming drive and reduced fuel consumption. Obviously an engine is at its most sanitary when it's not running at all - that's why idle stop equipment is also fitted.

Honda makes cash-saving motoring entertaining too - the Civic's speedometer lighting alters depending on how weighty your right foot is, or how lingering your gear changes are. It glows blue when the car is at rest and stays that shade during a sudden increase or decrease in speed. It converts to green if you drive it in a thrifty way, and in the intervening time, blue-green lighting shows with tender touches of the throttle.

Cabin space is no issue for the Civic, particularly with Honda's 'Magic Seat' logic. Flip up, fold down or tilt back - you can convert the interior at the lift of a handle or the flick of a switch. For instance, the rear seats can be folded down entirely to give a level load zone which is large enough to carry, say, three bikes, three large suitcases or three golf bags.

In EX Plus guise, the Honda Civic is a very congenial place to be. Paraphernalia includes smart keyless entry and start, semi-electrically adjustable seats, electric windows and climate control. Indeed, the in vogue Civic is a well screwed-together hatchback.

Made by a firm with a celebrated name for dependability and comfort, the motor is one of the best to drive. What's more; the Civic is produced in the UK together with its well-liked siblings, the Jazz and CR-V.

There's only one drawback – the Civic is expensive. With the flagship EX Plus model, on test here, you're looking at not far off £30,000. For that amount of wedge you're heading into premium executive car territory.

PROS

- Good looking
- Comfortable
- Efficient • Roomy

CONS

- Expensive

FAST FACTS

- Max speed: 129mph
- 0-62 mph: 10.5 secs
- Combined mpg: 76.3
- Engine: 1597 cc 4 cylinder 16 valve turbo diesel
 - Max. power (bhp): 118 at 4000 rpm
 - Max. torque (lb/ft): 221 at 2000 rpm
 - CO2: 98 g/km
 - Price: £26,460 on the road

