

HONDA'S GAME CHANGER



For too long now, the world's most bi-polar car maker has been playing it safe. Now, finally, we have an unadulterated thrill maker and a car worthy of the Type R badge. Kieran Rennie reports

It's October, 2015. I receive an invitation to attend the launch of the much-awaited Civic Type R. My reply (in the affirmative) represents the fastest email I've ever sent.

You see, I come from a family of Honda fans. My mom had a Ballade 160i AMG and my older brother owned the Holy Grail, the S2000. A close school friend built a 600kw turbocharged, nitrous-powered Ballade in his garage. Any petrol head knows what the Tokyo-based manufacturer is capable of.

In recent years though, Honda has disappointed on the performance-car front. This Type R, we're all hoping, will re-light the fire. To say that I'm excited about getting

behind the wheel of the ultimate Civic is the understatement of the year.

But disaster strikes! The launch is postponed! I'm beside myself! When will Honda reschedule? Will I still be on the invite list when it does? Will my life as a car fan ever be complete if I don't get to rip this thing around a race track?

A miracle happens. January 26, 2016 is the designated new launch date. D-Day. Or R-Day, in my mind. Killarney Race Track in Cape Town beckons. The week leading up to the event fills me with unbridled, boyish anticipation. The night before is a sleepless one. The pilot of the Airbus flying us

from Jo'burg to Cape Town isn't pushing the plane hard enough...

Then we're at the track. Honda SA's Operations Director, Graham Eagle, stalls the driving session with a presentation. The information he has for us is important – but it goes largely in one valve and out the other. I'll rely on the company's press releases for salient facts. I need to get into this car to experience it!

They say you should never drive your heroes – never pilot the cars you love the most. The possibility of the actual encounter not living up to expectation – and the resulting anti-climax – is said to be devastating.



Priced from
R 586 400

But this car is not a hero for me. Why? Well, the appeal of the Type R has been limited in South Africa. We've read about them. We've seen videos. But a lot of us have never got to experience them first hand. For us they remain myths, ghosts in an automotive fog.

The world's first Type R was the super-car slaying NSX in 1992. Since then Honda has released Integras, Civics and Accords in Type R spec – but I've never driven one. So, no, Type Rs have not been on my have-to-own shopping list... until now.

What makes a great sports car? It's an almost impossible thing to get right in today's market. Buyers want a car that can do everything. Commute, transport a family, carry DIY stuff or flat screen TVs and still make you feel like a Formula 1 driver

when your significant other is not in the passenger seat.

The problem is that no car can provide all of those things. No car can be all things to all people. Compromise is necessary but ultimately damaging. It's damaging if you're looking for a focused product. What Honda has produced here is as focused a sports hatch as I've ever driven.

They could have stripped it out, welded it up and turned it into a non-road-legal race car – but then none of us would ever have access to it. This car is not about out-and-out power or speed. It's about agility, grip and responsiveness. It's about performance driving fun. And it delivers.

On the day, even as my confidence grows – having not been on a track in more than

a decade – the car is always two or three steps ahead of me. Always sniggering at, but compensating for, my lack of precision... always able to respond to my clumsy lines and over-enthusiastic throttle inputs.

With enough braking power to stop a corrupt government, it is constantly ready to help me look and feel faster than I actually am. It deserves a better driver than me. So I oblige. I ask a mind-bendingly talented race ace, Deon Joubert, to show me how it should be done.

And, as I write this, can I explain the grip and balance? Not really. Can I describe mid-corner speed? No. Can I relay to you how impossibly late Deon is able to brake? I just can't. I can only suggest that you find the money to buy a Type R, then find some extra money to hire Joubert for a day to experience what I went through.

It was sublime. It was monumental. I have driven faster cars. In fact, just two days later I am lucky enough to drive the Mercedes Benz A45 AMG around the same track. The Merc is quicker in a straight line, no doubt. But on the track, it lacks the Type R's focus, feedback and agility.

And ultimately, it is the Honda's lap times which are better. Compare the A45's reported and impressive eight minutes, ten seconds around Germany's famed Nürburgring Nordschleife with the Civic's jaw-dropping seven minutes, fifty seconds.

How does it do this, you may ask? I'm hoping I can relate some of the engineering genius without sliding off into a techno-abys. Firstly, some easy-to-understand stuff: Bespoke Brembo high-performance brakes, custom made Continental tyres and a power-assisted steering rack that's designed to heighten feedback through the column.

It also has a very clever, very advanced dual-axis strut front suspension system that offers a greater castor angle, improving high speed stability and reducing torque-steer.

Next is an advanced electronic damper system which monitors and adjusts the stiffness at each corner every 0,05 seconds—doing so without creating any disconnect between driver and machine.

The rear suspension's H-shaped torsion beam design is totally different from the standard Civic's in that it is a specially developed tubular design rather than a solid block. The result of all of this technology is a car bathed in modernity yet providing good old-fashioned race-car feel.

The looks? It is a radical, angry-looking machine. If Kylo Ren or Darth Vader built a car, it would look like this. If you're in search of subtlety, this is not the machine for you. Honda claims the Type R is the only hot-hatch to genuinely create down-force at high speeds.

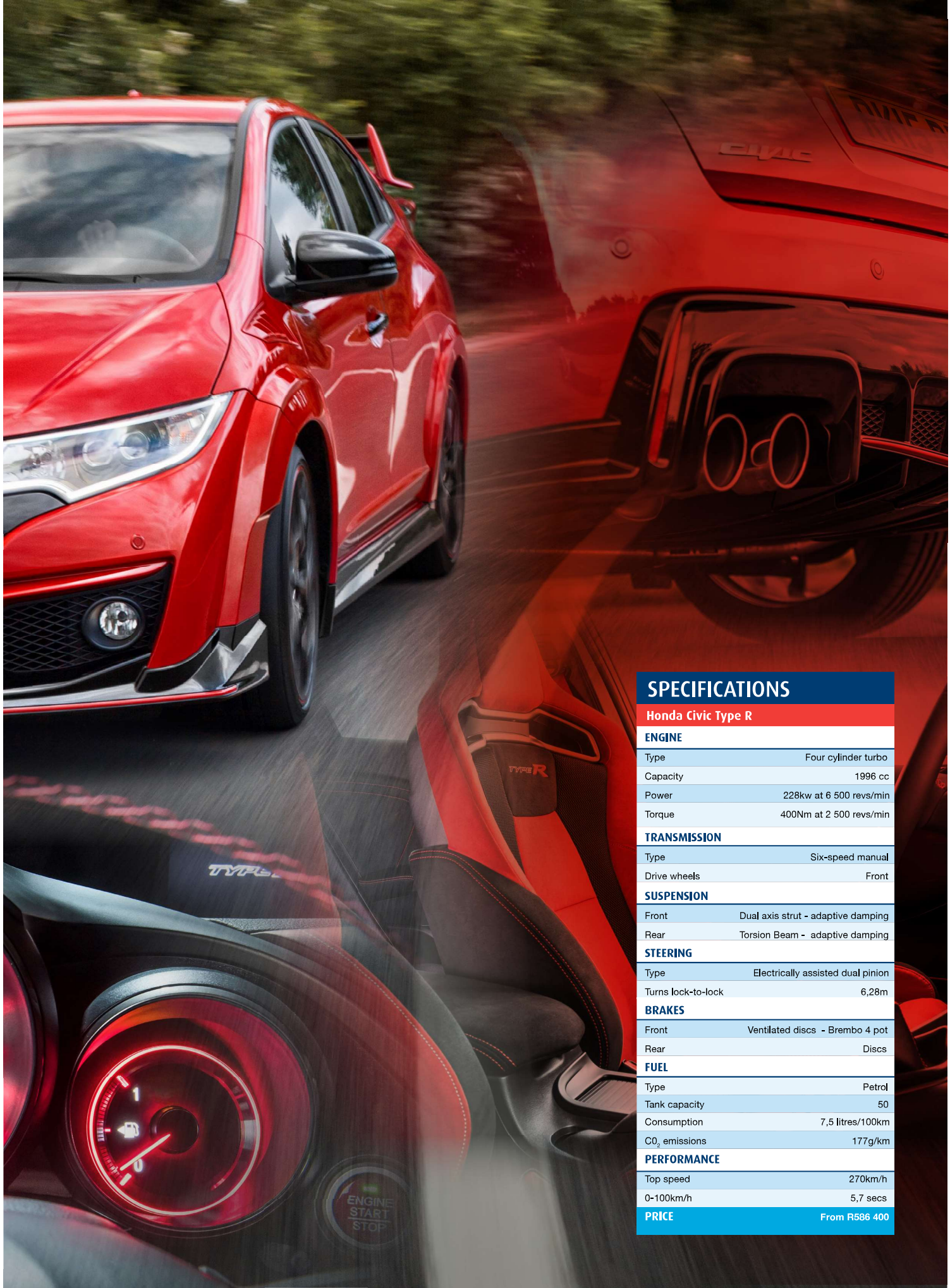
Large areas of the under-tray of the car are flat and work with the rear diffuser to channel air efficiently. A Vin Diesel-esque rear wing complements the aero-trickery to improve the Civic's punch through the atmosphere. It has to be said, the looks are not writing cheques that the performance cannot cash. It looks fast, it is fast.

Inside, the racing-style seats are very much function before fashion. But they suit the vibe of the car perfectly. They are also totally necessary considering the levels of grip the chassis provides. Press the R button on the dash and an already-responsive, stiff vehicle becomes noticeably more hard-core.

Can you use this car every day? Yes. If the radical looks don't put you off, the model's road manners are firm but acceptable. It has a decent back seat and large enough boot. If you're into track days, you'll be hard-pressed to find better value for money. No, I'll go one further. If you're into track days, at R586 400, the Civic Type R may just offer the best bang for your buck.

Sorry, I'm not finished. The model is sold with a five year /200 000km warranty and a five year /90 000km service plan. ▶





SPECIFICATIONS

Honda Civic Type R

ENGINE

Type	Four cylinder turbo
Capacity	1996 cc
Power	228kw at 6 500 revs/min
Torque	400Nm at 2 500 revs/min

TRANSMISSION

Type	Six-speed manual
Drive wheels	Front

SUSPENSION

Front	Dual axis strut - adaptive damping
Rear	Torsion Beam - adaptive damping

STEERING

Type	Electrically assisted dual pinion
Turns lock-to-lock	6,28m

BRAKES

Front	Ventilated discs - Brembo 4 pot
Rear	Discs

FUEL

Type	Petrol
Tank capacity	50
Consumption	7,5 litres/100km
CO ₂ emissions	177g/km

PERFORMANCE

Top speed	270km/h
0-100km/h	5,7 secs

PRICE

From R586 400

NEW CADDY... not just a functional face



Volkswagen is in a titanic battle to regain its status as the world's leading motor manufacturer – and one thing is for certain: its products remain compelling. Kieran Rennie reports

Priced from
R 226 800

Lifestyle vehicles form a significant and growing percentage of South Africa's car buying focus. Families and small businesses alike are looking for a one size fits all solution for carting the little ones to school, for family holidays with the dog and/or mom-in-law or to be used as a general work run-around.

The post-bakkie version of the Volkswagen Caddy, launched in 2004, made an immediate impact in both the MPV as well as panel van segments of the market. Since then, its popularity has grown noticeably, swelling from a 6,3% share to an incredible 72,4% in 2015, with the MPV variant's foothold expanding from 33,8% to 54,8% within the period. Strong numbers indeed.

The fourth generation Caddy sees improvements in spec levels, safety features, comfort options and, perhaps most importantly, wheel-base and seating options. First, let's unpack – pun intended – those changes.

The new car is now offered in four variants. Panel Van – a purely commercial application; Crew Bus – a blend of work vehicle and people mover; Trendline – a comfortable, feature-packed MPV; and the Alltrack – which replaces the Cross Caddy.

The Panel Van, Crew Bus and Trendline are all available in short or long (Maxi) wheelbase configurations. The longer version adds a sizeable 469mm to the body's length. The second (and third, if optioned) row of seats are relatively easy to remove (a two-person job). To increase the load area, the front passenger seat also folds forward and flat.

The Maxi panel van offers a truly cavernous 4,2 cubic metres of total load space and can carry a payload of 815kg. The derivative also has a maximum load height of 1 244mm – that's equivalent to cricketer Temba Bavuma standing almost upright in the van.

The SWB version has a reduced total load space of 3,2 cubic metres. Rear access is through a centre split wing door arrangement while a sliding side door on the left flank makes for easier kerb-side and cramped parking lot use. A driver's side sliding door can be optioned.



Do the engineers at Volkswagen think of everything? The sliding doors run on a roller integrated into the roof rails, ensuring that those mechanicals do not interfere with optimal use of load space.

The floor is flat and can easily accommodate a standard (1 200mm x 800mm) euro pallet. There are six lashing rings on the SWB derivative and eight on the Maxi. The interior is covered with internal panelling up to window level to protect the outer skin. The panel van is priced at R234 000 for the 81kW petrol-fuelled version and at R317 900 for the diesel-driven, 103kW Maxi, which features a DSG gearbox.

In my view, Crew Bus and Trendline options are where this vehicle really begins to shine. All too often with today's SUVs, the luggage space or boot disappears as soon as the third row of seats is unfolded. Not so in the Caddy.

The Maxi versions of these two vans combine genuine seven-seat (adult) passenger carrying capability with a generous boot. The third row of seats is also an option on SWB models but selecting them means they occupy space you might want to use for carrying luggage. Point is, the option is there and the choice is yours.

With seats removed, the Crew Bus has almost exactly same load capability as the panel van. A top-hinged rear door is an option while sliding doors on both sides help egress and ingress. Cost? An impressive R226 800 for the 81kW petrol-fuelled SWB derivative.

Pit that against a Toyota Avanza 1,5 manual, at R220 300, and the Caddy more than noses ahead. A top spec (103kW TDI, Maxi DSG) Crew Bus costs R331 100.

The Trendline rolls into a ring currently beset with any number of stylish, luxuriously

PRICES VOLKSWAGEN CADDY	
Panel Van	
Caddy Panel Van 1.6i 81kW	R234 000
Caddy Panel Van 2.0 TDI 81kW	R265 700
Caddy Maxi Panel Van 2.0 TDI 81kW	R289 400
Caddy Maxi Panel Van Sport 2.0 TDI 81kW	R312 400
Caddy Maxi Panel Van 2.0 TDI 103kW DSG	R317 900
Crew Bus	
Caddy Crew Bus 1.6i 81kW	R226 800
Caddy Crew Bus 2.0 TDI 81kW	R270 500
Caddy Maxi Crew Bus 2.0 TDI 81kW	R302 600
Caddy Maxi Crew Bus 2.0 TDI 103kW DSG	R331 100
Trendline	
Caddy Trendline 2.0 TDI 81kW	R351 200
Caddy Maxi Trendline 2.0 TDI 81kW	R369 900
Caddy Maxi Trendline 2.0 TDI 103kW DSG	R399 300
Alltrack	
Caddy Alltrack 2.0 TDI 81kW	R365 400
Caddy Alltrack 2.0 TDI 103kW DSG	R395 000

equipped SUVs and MPVs. Question is, will families – with a decent amount of buying power – opt for the spruced up but essentially commercial vehicle based Caddy? Or will they go for something slicker, more attractive and more car-like to drive?

With standard safety features like fog lamps (with static cornering lights); fatigue detection; and Post Collision Assist (the brakes are applied automatically after an accident to eliminate the possibility of a second impact), the Caddy is certainly competitive.

Other standard features – apart from the now obligatory electrically powered windows, mirrors and an air-conditioner that features climate control – include a touch-screen audio system that connects to your phone via Bluetooth.

Options include Bi-Xenon lights, park distance control, a removable tow bar, a reverse camera,

NEW MODELS

a more sophisticated infotainment system and light and rain sensors.

Engine choices extend to the 81kW TDI and the 103kW TDI. The super slick DSG gearbox is available on the Maxi 103kW version only. Pricing for the Trendline starts at R351 200 and tops out at R399 300.

The Alltrack is available in SWB only and comes with an increased level of standard equipment. I do find it questionable, however, that features like park distance control, a reverse camera, and the Bi Xenon lights are not included as standard trim on a R395 000, top of the range (the 103kW) family car.

At this price (and in this segment) value for money is everything. Remember, the space where the Alltrack competes is probably more form (and cool-to-have gadgets) over function and there are other brands offering more bling for fewer bucks. The 81kW Alltrack will set you back R365 000.

Fuel economy figures – factory claimed and measured in the combined cycle – are: 8,2 litres/100km for the 81kW petrol; 5,7 litres/100km for the 81kW TDI and 6,3 litres/100km for the 103kW TDI.



Available for testing on the day of the launch were the two TDI powered cars – and both performed well. You'd want the more powerful option if you were planning to hauling heavy loads (or more people) more often. At the risk of harping on about the DSG gearbox, it is fantastic. If you can't afford it as an option, take a loan.

The Panel Van and Crew Bus are sold with Volkswagen's two year/unlimited kilometre warranty and a three year/60 000km service plan. Trendline and Alltrack models are offered with

a three year/120 000km warranty and three year/60 000km service plan.

The Caddy is never going to win any beauty contests but it is a handsome, determined-looking vehicle. Volkswagen's renowned build quality is palpable in every aspect of the van's fit, finish and performance. The upgrades will surely see its popularity increase.

In my view, if genuine space, resale value and reliability are priorities, the Caddy in all its forms should be on your shopping list... 



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REBEL IN A SUIT

Mercedes-Benz refreshes its A Class range and gives the already blistering A45, wait for it, more power! Kieran Rennie reports



Priced from
R389 200

Mercedes-Benz's A Class is an important model in the brand's line-up. Globally, the company's compact car offerings – A Class, B Class, CLA and GLA – sold 226 000 units in 2012.

That number grew to 582 500 in 2015 and the A Class accounted for a majority of sales. When talking about buyers who left rival brands to choose Merc, spokesmen for the company claim a conquest rate of 65%.

In a struggling new car market – where buy-down trends are manifest – luring customers away from other brands might be the only way to increase sales. The A Class is doing this wonderfully for the Stuttgart-based goliath.

Let's get down to brass tacks. What's changed in the revised model that's recently been launched in South Africa? Visually, not much at all. The cliché: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" comes to mind.

Minor changes to the front and rear aprons improve the looks of what was already a head turner. The diamond grill – previously only an option with the AMG pack – is now standard across the line-up. LED head and tail lights polish the overall visual appeal. There are also a couple of new colours to choose from.

While the interior of the outgoing A Class was a very nice place to spend some time, the new model features improved materials, a bigger infotainment screen and a choice of 12 different colours of ambient lighting.

Biggest addition to the features list is Dynamic Select, a collection of drive modes that enable the pilot to tailor the set-up of the car to his or her mood.

The range now unfolds like so: There are two oil-burners, the A200d and the A220d, and two petrol-fuelled derivatives, the A200 and the A250 Sport. Finally, there's the A45 AMG. In my view it appears to run on neither on petrol nor diesel, instead using dragon's breath.

Stats for the diesels are; power outputs of 100kW and 130kW respectively, with each of the models having claimed consumption figures of 4,5 litres/100km. The derivatives are priced at R419 200 and R460 100.

The A200 petrol produces 115kW, uses a claimed 5,7 litres//100km and costs R389 200. A 7G-DCT dual clutch transmission can be ordered as an option for all of the models, costing an additional R18 000.

Of all models in the above line-up, the A250 is the least appealing to me. Remember that the derivative is not the ultimate performance option in the range. Sure, 155kW makes for swift enough progress, but the vehicle's suspension set-up feels too firm for my liking – race track ready rather than public road ready, even in comfort mode. The model will set you back R491 500.

Finally, we come to the star of the show -- the rebel a tailored, skinny-legged suit, wearing hand-crafted leather brogues with steel toe caps. The AMG A45!

Stat alert: With power output rated at 280kW, the car's engine remains the world's most powerful four-cylinder production unit. It also produces a G-force inducing 475Nm of torque and can propel the model to 100km/h from standstill in 4,2 seconds. Top speed is electronically limited to 250km/h. And drive is to all wheels.

Make no mistake – this thing is an animal. I drove the car, pretty much back to back, with the already highly acclaimed Honda Civic Type R on Cape Town's Killarney Race Track.

In summary, the A45 is noticeably quicker in a straight line than its Japanese rival and is certainly a more plush and luxurious – though not more comfortable thanks to firm suspension.

Also, its safety systems – ABS, seatbelt pre-tensioning and collision alert feature, for instance – are not conducive to hard-core track use.

That said, the reality is that most buyers, even in this segment, will never take their vehicles to the track – so decide what you're after and pick your weapon. 🏁

PRICES MERCEDES-BENZ A CLASS

A200	R 389 200
A200d	R 419 200
A220d	R 460 100
A250 Sport	R 491 500
A45 AMG	R 683 600

Sticking to its guns



Toyota's latest rendition of the Land Cruiser reinforces the vehicle's go-anywhere heritage. Kieran Rennie reports

All too often in life as well as in the motor industry, people venture off a beaten track into someone else's territory – and get bitten.

I'm not suggesting that we can't learn new things by exploring uncharted ground; I'm saying that there is power in understanding the strengths of a product and sticking to the recipe that made it great.

Toyota knows this and, over the years, the Japanese company has produced models and variants thereof which remain deliberately focused. All too often, people in my line of work bemoan the brand's perceived predictability and lack of flair – but the fact persists: consumers want their cars to do "what it says on the tin." We know this because Toyota continues to out-sell rivals.





The Land Cruiser represents a perfect example of the theory. Over time, the King of the Off-Roaders – Toyota’s words, not mine – has become a pricy and feature-packed status symbol. But it’s never lost its serious off-road credibility and its rock-solid reliability.

Introduced in 1981 with the function-over-form 60 Series, the model has evolved and today it is as relevant in Parktown as it is in Paternoster.

The new LC200 continues onward and upward. Toyota has done away with the petrol option, leaving the two variants – GX and VX – powered by the workman-like, 4,5-litre, turbocharged diesel V8.

In my view this is a good decision since the engine is impressive, reliable and well-suited to the Land Cruiser application. Power delivery is smooth and sufficient. It neither snaps your neck back nor struggles for pace. The vehicle’s cabin is well insulated, so very little diesel clatter intrudes.

I found the quiet, confident V8 rumble an attractive feature entirely in keeping with the model’s character. Though 175kW might not sound like a lot of power in terms of the output of some upper end SUVs, the 615Nm on tap allows the vehicle to cruise along effortlessly.

A top speed of 210km/h is way more than most drivers are likely to ever want or need. The motor also propels the 2 740kg behemoth through 4x4-only trails with enjoyable ease. Claimed fuel consumption is 10,3 litres/100km – which I suspect will be nigh on impossible to achieve in real world conditions. I’m not suggesting that the Land Cruiser’s fuel bill is likely to break the bank –

but it won’t be frugal. This is a big SUV with an old-school thirst.

Overall off-road capabilities have benefited from improved ground clearance and enhanced approach and departure angles, while towing capacity of 3 500kg is rated among the best in class.

How do we rank the LC 200 against its competitors? Well, in truth, it almost doesn’t have any. It’s not trying to be the soft-roading, ultra-luxurious Camps Bay kerb climber – nor is it a bare-bones basic, hard-core off-roader.

That said, the feel and finish of interior materials don’t stack up against those used by the likes of Volvo in its XC90 or Mercedes-Benz in its GLE. But the Toyota will do things off road that those cars simply cannot.

Despite its girth and mass, this SUV tackles daunting obstacles with so little effort they’re almost a non-event. Superb axle articulation and power delivery – enhanced by modern drivetrain control systems – help make even the most inexperienced drivers seem competent.

Our afternoon with the LX took us through the Golden Gate National Park in the north eastern Free State. The trails we covered were off-limits to private vehicles unless accompanied and guided by a licensed, qualified team. We were lucky enough to have these experts book-ending our convoy and, via radio, talking us through each of the obstacles.

It was indeed a blessing and a privilege to be able to experience the breathtaking beauty of this part of the country in such a super-competent vehicle.

New driver aids and comfort features – on the VX only – include a wireless, Qi-enabled device charging station; adaptive cruise control; lane departure warning; a blind-spot monitor; tyre pressure monitors; 18-inch alloy wheels; bi-LED auto headlights; a brake synchronised pre-collision warning system and rear cross traffic alert for safer reversing.

A 360° camera, when used in conjunction with multi-terrain mode, offers the driver a valuable array of angles displayed on a centre-mounted, multi-function screen. The cameras also provide parking assistance. Other features offered on both the VX and GX include hill assist control, crawl control, satellite navigation and active traction control.

While the latter derivative lacks some of the nice-to-haves of its sibling, it is just as purposeful and capable – perhaps even more so since, while still providing occupants with a spacious and comfortable cabin, it is a vehicle many owners would be far more content to take into the bush.

The decision to re-introduce the ‘entry level’ option was, in fact, taken by Toyota South Africa – with the blessing of Toyota Japan of course – following consultation with the Land Cruiser Club. The enthusiasts spoke and Toyota listened. The GX is offered with 17-inch steel wheels, barn door style rear doors – for ease of loading – and a snorkel.

Pricing for the range starts at R850 000 for the GX and R1 141 700 for the VX. Each version is offered with a three-year/100 000km warranty and a five-year/100 000km service plan. Service intervals are at 10 000km intervals. 🌈