

Civic Aims at the Germans

It's a struggle that will continue long after...well, perhaps it will never be overcome. Maybe the folks at Honda - and other B and C segment manufacturers - will never get it done. Not because they don't know how to build good cars but because BMW (as an example) has been building luxury saloons for a considerable amount of time. They also manage, somehow, to continue to raise their own bar.

All of that notwithstanding, the Civic is, in Honda's own words, hoping to lure buyers away from 'entry-level' small saloon options from the big three - 318i, A3 Sedan and CLA. Before we get into how that might work, let's talk about this new car.

The big news is the inclusion of a smaller capacity, turbo-charged motor. The 1.5l four-pot produces a healthy 127kw and 220nm. I was excited to drive this new car until I heard it was mated to a CVT gearbox and that that was the only option. My heart sank.



➤ *Front angle - Sleek, handsome lines. The new Civic is a joy to drive*



➤ *Back angle - Perhaps not it's best angle visually but interior space is improved*

The line up

- 1.8 Comfort CVT – R330 000
- 1.8 Elegance CVT – R370 000
- 1.5T Sport CVT – R430 000
- 1.5T Executive CVT – R460 000

CVTs are, in my opinion, only suited to people who have no interest in how their cars feel to drive. If the car works, they're happy.

I am happy to report, however, that Honda have created a CVT which I think I might be able to live with. It is far more definitive in its selection of ratio and hunts and hangs far less than other CVTs. "This new engine's flat torque curve has allowed our engineers to program the CVT's CPU better. The box's brain struggles far less to chose the right ratio or shift point," says Graham Eagle, VP Honda Southern Africa.

Even in entry level trim, the car is well spec'd, spacious and (according to the manufacturers claims) fuel efficient. The existing normally-aspirated 1.8l motor will be found in the two entry level cars with fuel efficiency improved by a claimed 8.8 per cent. The 1.5l turbo option - 5.6l/100kms - powers the Sport and the Executive.

From a styling point of view, the front is sleek and stylish but I'm not sold on the lines at the rear. Those bulkier lines, it has to be said, have allowed for a considerable increase in rear seat and boot space.

So will the R460 000 Executive draw buyers away from, let's say, a R488 100 318i BMW? Power output is higher from the Civic as are the spec levels and interior space. The factory warranty - 5yrs/200 000km is also a win for the Honda. Fuel economy is very similar. Allow me, then, to place these thoughts in your mind. If you're buying a car with practicality, value for money and individuality in mind, then this car will compete strongly. If brand power and driving dynamics are your focus, the BMW will be your choice.



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