

Road Beat: Honda Civic Si – a wolf in sheep clothing



The Honda Civic Si is simply incredible. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Let's get one thing straight, all Honda Civics are super cars. All Civics get the fabulous 1.5L turbo charged DOHC, 16 valve engine with a minimum of 174 hp. That's a lot of moxie for cars that weigh 3,000 pounds or less.

The Si is Civic's super super car with a six-speed manual and 205 hp at a low 6,000 rpm. Honda didn't even stop at the Si as they also make an ultra-super, super car, the SR, with over 300 hp. After you finish with this Road Beat, you will be able to imagine what the SR can do.

Back to the phenomenal Si. First about the only

differentiation from the rest of the Civics, including the fantastic Hatch Sport version which stickers for a shade over \$21 large, is some badging and a blacked-out grille. Inside are special seats and as with my Civic Coupe that I tested a year ago, this Si was done in energy green. If you want to be seen from five miles away or are extremely safety conscious, this is your color. No one will ever miss you. People with 20/400 vision will see this car from a good distance. OK, enough about the color.



Specifications

Engine

1.5L turbocharged, direct injected, DOHC, 16 valve inline four cylinder 205 hp @ 5,700 rpm

192 lb.-ft. of torque @ 2,100-5,000 rpm

Redline 6,500 rpm

Fuel requirement regular unleaded

Transmission

Six-speed manual

Configuration

Transverse mounted front engine/front wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 106.3 inches

Length 177.9 inches
Width 70.8 inches
Height 54.7 inches
Track (f/r) 60.5/61.2 inches
Weight 2,889
Weight distribution (f/r)
61/39
Fuel capacity 12.39 gallons
Trunk capacity 11.9 cubic
feet
Passenger volume 88.6 cubic
feet
Wheels 18X7.5 inch alloys
Tires 235/40X18W
Steering lock to lock 2.11
turns
Turning circle 37.8 feet

Performance

0-60 mph 6.20 seconds
50-70 mph 3.03 seconds
50-70 mph up a 6-7 % grade
3.92 seconds
Top speed 150 mph easy
Fuel economy EPA rated at
28/38/32 mpg
city/highway/combined.
Expect 33 mpg overall and 41
plus mpg on the highway at
legal speeds.

This Civic Si is about driving fun, and I would have to give it a fun quotient on the 10 scale of about 12. Civics look quick standing still. Their design is sleek and slick with a strong, edgy character line giving it some shape along with some muscle, with strong wheel wells and shoulders. Best looking Civic ever, even though the grille might over power the rest of the design, at least in the SI, it's done in

black.

It has a spectacular powertrain, its 205-horsepower mill (at a low 5,700 rpm) plus a massive 192 pounds of twist from a low of 2,100 rpm to 5,000 rpm (at 5,700 rpm it is still pounding out 189 pounds of twist), demonstrates almost no fall off or loss of cylinder efficiency at peak hp meaning it's still pulling like a freight train right to its red line of 6,500 rpm where a rev limiter interrupts the fun. It drives the front wheels through a six-speed manual cog-swapper via a limited slip differential. If rockin' is what the Civic does then it's theme would be Mississippi Queen by Mountain. Zero to 60 mph arrives in just 6.20 seconds. A level simulated pass from 50-70 mph happens in just 3.02 seconds and a six percent grade only slows that number to 3.92 seconds. Turbo lag isn't, but it takes about 2,500 rpm before it begins to boil and by five grand things get nuclear. In normal driving 1,500 rpm will be ok in the first three gears and add about 500 rpm for each of the next three gears for reasonable performance.

While gearing appears to be similar to the Civic Hatch Sport tested a few months ago and while it sports only 25 less hp, its performance numbers while still very good are not as good as the Si by significant numbers. In my three parameters the Hatch Sport recorded 6.99, 3.80 and 5.09 seconds. The Si buys you a lot in the quickness department.

In the Si driving hard is guilt free. The EPA rates the Civic Si at 28/38/32 mpg city/highway/combined, about an mpg less than the 180 hp Civic Hatch Sport. In reality the Civic Si returned 41.4 mpg in a two-way run on a level highway at a constant 70 mph. Overall in extremely aggressive driving for about 300 miles, the Civic averaged 32-33 mpg including the performance testing. But on a 200-mile round trip to Carson City from Placerville which included about 80 miles of aggressive two lane twisty driving and many full throttle passes, the Civic averaged an astounding 39.6 mpg. I told you this Si is absolutely guiltless. I could probably do 40 hard

laps at Thunderhill Raceway and still have enough fuel to make it home (150 miles). Rpm is a reasonable 2,600 at 70 mph.

And what an absolute blast this Si would be at Thunderhill. I think Si stands for simply incredible. It has all the creds, super quick, variable ratio electric rack and pinion steering (2.11 turns lock to lock), low profile, fat tires (235/40X18), fat roll bars at both ends, state of the art independent suspension, huge disc brakes, adaptive dampers and real sport tuning to give it a real edge, a true sports car feel and ability. It simply follows your commands and inputs perfectly with no vices, twitches or missteps. It follows orders to a Tee. It is water through a proverbial hose that just doesn't want to let go in the twisties. All the time maintaining a flat attitude. Fabulously fun. Weighing less than 2,900 pounds helps too.

Ride quality won't impress your grandmother. It sits low so getting grandma in the car and even out of the car might be a problem. The ride is firm and tire noise is an issue on rough or coarse roads. The body is solid and while compliant in the bumps, it is firm and reasonably quiet on smooth asphalt. Let's leave it at that.

There is no compromise in safety with most of all the basic acronyms. But Civic, in addition, has that wonderful side view camera when making right turns. I love that feature. Headlights are very good, low and high.

Inside is a quality interior with Si exclusive buckets that are perfect for aggressive driving or the long haul. While they are heated, they are not power but have a height adjustment. All appointments are first quality and the instrumentation is complete. The center stack does its job and functions are now becoming second nature.

Now here is the deal, this sports rig sticks for the bargain price of \$24,100 plus \$875 for the truck/train from Alliston,

Ontario Assembly plant. There are, as with most Hondas, no extras, \$24,975 is the deal. It's quick and its fun, lots of fun with no guilt, either in acquisition or gas consumption. Kudos to Honda and in Energy Green everyone within three miles will see you coming and mostly going.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.