

STREET CRED.

Honda Civic Si shows itself to have a noticeably high popularity-to-price ratio.

BY JOE SAGE

The sporty version of Honda's compact Civic—the Si—has been around for over 30 years, first in the Japanese domestic market, soon arriving in the US, and going through many evolutions and eight iterations over ten Civic generations, with changes in the body type basis for the model, degree of engineering versus style adaptations, engines and transmissions—each the subject of hot debate among the cognoscenti, in its time and often ongoing. If you want to revisit it all, prepare to spend a good week digging deep in the enthusiast forums online. You can parse all the details, but overall, it speaks to the enormous enthusiasm for the model over its entire history.

But today we will talk about today.

The 2017 Honda Civic Si we are driving here is the latest, arriving after a gap for 2016. It's the first to use a turbocharged engine—a 1.5-liter direct-injected four-cylinder low-inertia mono scroll turbo with electronic waste-gate and dual variable valve timing control (VTC), generating 205 hp (more than a gen-one Boxster) and 192 lb-ft of torque. Virtually every component of the engine has been thoroughly reengineered and optimized. Your foot now triggers this beast via a drive-by-wire throttle system, which cuts weight and increases precision and responsiveness. This power runs through a nice, tight six-speed manual, the only transmission build

for this model—also reengineered for quicker shifts and increased endurance, packaged in a stronger and lighter case. Shift points are right where we wanted them. We could drive it like a performance 4-speed on surface streets and a 5- or 6-speed on the freeway or for the long haul.

This compact powerplant outperforms the prior 2.4-liter engine in every spec, and its power and torque curves come on tap much more quickly, now at 5700 rpm for power (improved from 7000) and a stunning 2100 rpm for torque (vastly improved from 4400). Yes, it's a rocket, surely the best Si yet.

It's sometimes easy to gauge the subjective response to anything we're driving, from our fellow travelers. Our Energy Green Civic Si Coupe predictably turned many a head and inspired many a boy racer during our week. Maybe it's the paint, perhaps the aggressive bodywork, but we soon felt that for \$24 grand, we had almost the persona of an Italian supercar—and in a corner of the Valley that has no shortage of those.

Part of this feel comes from the car's aggressive stance—wheels planted well toward the corners, enhanced by the fastback form and rear wing—creating handling that is pure magic. The car still exhibits a bit of front-drive torque after all these years, not the kind that would wander into another lane, but enough to feel

while powering through a freeway sweeper. The good news is, more power conquers this. In fact, it's mild enough that you can still shift during a turn—problematic torque steer would require both hands on the wheel. The important thing is you're in control, not the car. The market for this car pretty much lives and breathes front-drivers, anyway, so most would probably not only not notice but probably like that.

The interior is a knockout, with red stitching, carbon-look inserts and handsome Si-embossed sport seats unique to this model.

The screen interface (which continues the Si theme with red graphics) is very touch-dependent for a car that invites high attention to driving itself and could benefit from a knob or two (though audio volume and such can be controlled from the wheel). Speaking of which, the Si's 450-watt, 10-speaker audio is top-notch, with clean DTS sound across the full range with just three-band EQ.

Civic Si includes Honda's breakthrough right-hand rearview camera in the screen. Though nothing should replace looking over your shoulder and checking your blind spots (a habit you don't want to break, as you'll need it in other vehicles), it's very responsive in such a responsive car, definitely augmenting your ability to know your surround-

ings while shifting, turning, exiting or even just changing lanes on the freeway.

Our sample is the Civic Si Coupe; the model is also available as a sedan, just 17 pounds heavier but otherwise spec'ing the same on the basics.

Buying is a breeze: there is just the one thoroughly outfitted Si trim, and the price is the same for Coupe or Sedan. Options are minimal: one wheel option, and beyond that such minor items as cargo net or wireless phone charger. Basically just pick a color (or take what they have on the lot, as these are sure to be red hot sellers).

Also of note is the upcoming Civic Type R, a 306-hp, 295-lb-ft 2-liter turbo hatchback at \$33,900. This halo car will undoubtedly drive enthusiasm for the Civic Si higher, too, especially for those who want to save \$10 grand at purchase and about 4 mpg at the pump, ongoing.

And yes, we had that telltale thing of an enjoyable car: when it was time to go home, we could always invent just one more errand because we never felt like parking the Civic Si quite yet. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	.....1.5L dir inj turbocharged 4-cyl
HP/TORQUE	.....205 hp / 192 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	.....6-spd manual
REAR END	.....helical limited slip differential
DRIVETRAIN	.....FWD
BRAKES	.....F: 11-in vented, single-piston; R: 11-in solid single-piston, alum calipers
STEERING	.....double-pinion variable ratio elec
SUSPENSION	.....F: MacPherson strut w 27x4.5mm tubular stabilizer bar R: multilink w 18mm solid stabilizer bar
WHEELS	.....18" machine-fin alloy, gloss blk insert
TIRES	.....235/40R18 91W
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....177.4 in / 106.3 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....37.8 cu.ft
CARGO VOLUME	.....11.9 cu.ft
WEIGHT / DISTRIB	.....2889 lb / 61.4/38.6%
FUEL CAPACITY	.....12.4 gal
MPG	.....28/38/32 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE: \$24,100

EVERYTHING IS INCLUDED: Premium 10-sprkr-subwoofer audio, 7" display, multi-view rear camera, Bluetooth hands-free link, USB audio, Android/Apple, HD Radio, SiriusXM, Pandora, Honda LaneWatch, pushbutton start, filtered dual-zone climate, front heated sport seats, leather wheel & shift knob, 60/40 fold rear seat w cargo access, one-touch up/down front windows, elec parking brake, sport pedals, 12v power outlet, cruise, power moonroof w tilt, auto on/off headlights, fog lights, LED taillights, rear wing spoiler, center outlet sport exhaust, smart entry & security system, heated power mirrors, variable intermittent wipers, capless fuel filler, stability assist, ABS/EBD, LED daytime running lights.....incl

DESTINATION CHARGE:.....875

TOTAL**\$24,975**

2018 HONDA CIVIC LINEUP

SEDANS	LX-Touring	.....\$18,840-26,700
	Civic Si	.....24,100
COUPES	LX-Touring	.....\$19,250-26,325
	Civic Si	.....24,100
HATCHES	LX-Sport Touring	.....\$19,900-28,500
	Civic Type R	.....33,900

