

Seamless

Bit-of-both-worlds tech BY JOE SAGE

Skim the specifications for this Honda Clarity Plug-In Hybrid. Try to find any downside. Not that long ago, such a car's battery would have been heavy and bulky and taken room from passengers or cargo. The model would likely be relatively expensive yet small overall, short on power and maybe not even that great on fuel economy.

But now, in the mid-\$30s, you get a roomy cabin, spacious trunk—along with over 200 hp, over 100 MPGe and 47 miles of electric-only range. You can plug in to boost hybrid power and range—or to have a pure EV. You can run in Normal or Sport hybrid modes, or with many daily routines within its 47-mile EV range, you can run in Econ mode and maybe never even visit the gasoline pumps. Or forget all that and drive indefinitely on just gasoline—no limits to your weekends, 42 mpg—and by applying HV mode, recharge your battery, too.

The fuel tank is just seven gallons, but that's good for about 300 miles of gasoline-only driving (Honda states 340 miles as a combined EV-only and gasoline-only range).

It's a seamless set of powertrain options, covering a full range of power and/or fuel economy.

Superlatives include Honda's widely implemented righthand rear camera; smooth, quick power; a long-overdue elimination of front-drive torque steer; intuitive drive mode switching; a silent launch in EV mode; and a seamless switch to gasoline—almost imperceptible even if focused on it.

That smooth EV-to-gasoline operation is reflected in an also-seamless binnacle graphic that runs from green (charge) to blue (power). Even the auto start/stop function runs seamlessly in this car.

Clarity PHEV is one of an equally seamless set of powertrain options from Honda. The Clarity lineup includes a full EV, this PHEV and a Fuel Cell model (once the only Clarity). For a hybrid, not plug-in, you visit the Accord Hybrid and for 2019 also the return of the Insight, Honda's original hybrid model.

We could divide this into the good, the bad and the jury is out—but that might put too much emphasis on the bad, and we did thoroughly enjoy driving the Clarity PHEV. Power on tap always felt like even more than its numbers, whether lane-changing, jockeying for freeway ramp preeminence or cruising the open road. We also always love Honda's LaneWatch right-side-rear camera.

The bad were: a first-seen-in-Acura shift interface that's a collection of rectangles, circles and trapezoids that you either push or pull, all of which distract; the lefthand mirror's wide-angle split (at odds with horizontally-set human eyes); and a touchscreen entirely too demanding of attention (even one off-on-volume knob could solve a lot).

The new-last-year Clarity lineup evokes the rear-wheel-skirt styling of the original two-seat Insight a bit, though the newer Insights no longer have that. Our jury is out on this—distinctive but somewhat awkward, arguably the opposite of seamless, and to us ironically looking more like an older Insight than the new Insight does.

The benefits of a PHEV—perhaps the least understood powertrain, but often the most popular to those who are familiar with it—are both profound and subtle. In a nutshell, unlike a hybrid, which is basically a closed system that gets its electricity from the actions of the car itself, the plug-in hybrid introduces electricity from an outside source, but is not limited to just that as on an EV. It's arguably a best of both worlds or at least bit-of-both-worlds solution. And it works. Seamlessly. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

SEATING CAPACITY	five
ENGINE	1.5L 16v DOHC i-VECTEC inline-4
HP/TORQUE	103 hp / 99 lb-ft
ELECTRIC MOTOR	AC permanent magnet synchronous
HP/TORQUE	181 hp / 232 lb-ft
TOTAL SYSTEM HORSEPOWER	212 hp
BATTERY	17 kWh Li-ion, 6.6 kW onboard 32A charger
FULL CHARGE TIME	(240v) 2.5 hrs / (120v) 12 hrs
TRANSMISSION	fixed, single speed, variable ratio
DRIVETRAIN	FWD
SUSPENSION	F: McPherson; R: multi-link
STEERING	electric power assist rack & pinion
BRAKES	F: 12.3 vented disc / R: 12.2 solid disc
WHEELS	18" hybrid aerodynamic
TIRES	235/45 R18 94V Michelin Energy Saver
LENGTH / WB	192.7 / 108.3 in
TURNING CIRCLE	38.4 ft
LEGROOM (F/R)	42.2 / 36.2 in
CARGO CAPACITY	15.5 cu.ft
WEIGHT (DISTRIB F/R%)	4059 lb (57/43%)
FUEL / FUEL CAPACITY	regular unleaded / 7.0 gal
FUEL ECONOMY	MPG 44/40/42 (city/hwy/comb)
.....	MPGe 110 (comb)

BASE PRICE **\$36,600**

EVERYTHING IS INCLUDED: aluminum hood/trunk/fenders/doors, var interm wipers, security system w remote entry, one-touch signals, LED taillights, body-color spoiler, smart entry w walk-away lock, body-color pwr mirrors, LED signals, LED DRLs, LED headlights w auto on-off & high-low, dual-zone climate, pushbutton start, HomeLink remote, auto-dim mirror, pwr windows auto up-down w illum switches, pwr locks w programmable auto lock, cruise, tilt-tele wheel w illum controls, center console w armrest & storage, illum vanity mirrors, LED map lights, glasses holder, 12v pwr outlets, cupholders, sliding visors, seat-back & smartphone pockets, electronic trunk release, rear defroster, cargo light, heated front seats, 60/40 rear seats w armrest, 180w 8-spr audio, 8" touch display, Android/Apple, SiriusXM, HE, Bluetooth, Pandora, SMS text, USB interfaces, adaptive cruise, lane keep assist, road departure mitigation, vehicle stability, ABS & EBD, brake assist, multi-angle rear cam w dynamic guides, fwd collision warning, lane departure warning, collision mitigation braking and more.

TOURING TRIM (\$3200 DIFF) ADDS: perforated leather-trim seats, 8-way power 2 memory driver's seat, 4-way power passenger seat, leather-wrapped steering wheel, satellite nav w voice recog & turn-by-turn & digital traffic,

DESTINATION CHARGE
 890 |

TOTAL
 \$37,490 |

