

# Honda gets it

by Joe Sage

Honda brought a new idea to the scene in the late 1990s with the Insight, an exceptionally small and frugal hybrid car with its own quirky looks (soon followed by Prius). But Honda holds a place in our hearts for soon creating the first hybrid that came across as a regular car, just with that nifty extra powertrain trick—the 2003 Civic Hybrid (a variation of a car with us since the 1970s). This bore a conventional look, just being itself without the pretentious constant declaration that it's a hybrid.

The head count of hybrids was still so small and their mission so specific that when Arizona introduced an alternative fuel license plate in 2007, allowing one-occupant vehicles to use our (then new and few) HOV lanes, only Civic Hybrid, Insight and

Prius very specifically qualified.

Honda Accord gained its hybrid version in 2012. The 2023 Honda Accord is all new—generation eleven of a car with us since 1976. Built in Marysville, Ohio, and full of innovations (see sidebar), this mainstream midsize sedan is a tour de force, with a new hybrid powertrain in four of its six trim levels, including our next-to-top Accord Hybrid Sport-L. The (pricier) hybrids are expected to account for about 50 percent of new Accord sales.

The hybrids combine a 2.0-liter Atkinson cycle engine and electric motor to produce a combined 204 hp and 247 lb-ft of torque, while achieving 44 mpg combined (or 48 mpg on the Hybrid EX-L).

Our week with the Accord Hybrid would include 4th of July, but although Honda had enthusiastically okayed a high-mileage holiday weekend road trip, we ended up closer to home, our usual local driving plus a long two-lane run in the countryside on the 4th, somehow without holiday traffic.

Our enthusiasm for this seemingly innocuous midsize sedan set in quickly, as a red light turned green and we tackled a lefthand double sweeper to the freeway, gave it the pedal and hugged the curb as we accelerated—all well beyond the expected for front-wheel-drive and a CVT.

Brakes are excellent—firm, definite, balanced and accurate. Horsepower is mainstream (but still more than an older Corvette or 911), but is helped by the car's nice light weight and balance, especially considering it bears extra battery weight.

We don't always play with drive modes (on the idea that things should be, though seldom are, optimized out of the box). And we tend to take CVTs for what they are (figuring most people will never even be aware they have one). Nonetheless, we did play with modes on the Accord Hybrid, largely in pursuit of optimizing that drivetrain to our liking.

We ran in sport mode for awhile, in line with its persona, but turned this off because the CVT drive-

train was giving us quite a whine (and sport probably offered no big benefits at that moment, as we were cruising on a 60-mph straightaway). But we turned it right back on at our next light and felt an immediate improvement in its posture, just more dead-on tight and accurate. Acceleration was certainly improved, as were lane maneuvers. And we had already been impressed by braking in sport mode. Yet, we didn't care for the driveline noise, so now we had a conundrum on modes. Yet, it's our mission to be paying attention. As with the CVT itself, would most people notice?

We tried eco mode briefly. Coming from sport, there just wasn't much response to our pedal input, and we missed that pep. Then again, we're certain some owners will purposefully choose eco mode all the time and wouldn't change a thing.

The CVT drivetrain does add Linear Shift Control, not described as mimicking conventional shift points, per se, as many do, but rather as mimicking the speed-linked rev feel of shifting conventional gears under acceleration. None of this was particularly noticeable—perhaps most appropriate of all on a family sedan. Sport driving involves full

intent and control. But routine driving in traffic is equal parts intent and response. A transmission with no distractions seems fine here.

Our longest drive out of town started in sport, but we switched out of it to mitigate noise (knowing that, curves and hills aside, we were largely cruising). And we then forgot all about that, normal mode being just fine for ride-ranging conditions.

What's more, we had that fuel mileage potential. We don't hypermile, but do glance at readouts, and the Accord Hybrid is as good as its word, getting 39-40 mpg the whole time, without even trying, just our usual spirited driving, some town, some open road, with a large portion in sport mode. Achieving the 44 mpg rating seems easy.

Normal mode seems to have provided the win-win for noise, performance and fuel mileage probably 90 percent of the time. It's not intended to be a race car, anyway, so this works just fine.

We'd say we had an all-around winning week in the new Honda Accord Hybrid. Add it all up, and it's arguably more like a premium European sports sedan than ever, less powerful, sure, but at half the price and with twice the fuel mileage. ■

*If there's one thing we might modify, it would be to upgrade the audio. It's not urgent, something you might get around to at some time. We wouldn't touch the head unit—those are far too integrated now—but some added power and upgraded speakers could do the trick.*



## SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY.....	Marysville, Ohio
ENGINE/TRANSMISSION.....	Japan / USA
PARTS CONTENT.....	US/Can 50% / Japan 25%
PASSENGERS.....	five
ENGINE.....	2.0L DI Atkinson 16v DOHC Dual-VTC (146 hp) plus AC synchronous permanent magnet motor (181 hp)
HP/TORQUE.....	(total system) 204 hp / 247 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO.....	13.9:1
TRANSMISSION.....	CVT
DRIVETRAIN.....	FWD
SUSPENSION.....	F: MacPherson strut, 27.2x5.0 tubular stblzr bar; R: multi-link, 16.5 solid stblzr bar
STEERING.....	elec power asst dual pinion
BRAKES.....	F: 12.3 vented; R: 11.1 solid
WHEELS.....	19x8.5J matte Berlina black
TIRES.....	235/40R19 96V all-season
LENGTH / WHEELBASE.....	195.7 / 111.4 in
GROUND CLEARANCE.....	5.3 in
TURNING CIRCLE.....	curb-to-curb 38.4 ft
HEADROOM (F/R).....	37.5 / 37.2 in
LEGROOM (F/R).....	42.3 / 40.8 in
CARGO CAPACITY.....	16.7 cu.ft
WEIGHT.....	3488 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY.....	unl; 91 oct rec / 12.8 gal
MPG.....	46/41/44 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE.....	<b>\$33,875</b>
PAINT: Radiant Red Metallic.....	455
DESTINATION CHARGE.....	1095
TOTAL.....	<b>\$35,425</b>

## 2023 HONDA ACCORD LINEUP

Check latest prices. See our sticker price above.

1.5T.....	LX.....	\$27,295
	EX.....	29,060
2.0T hybrid.....	Sport.....	31,345
	EX-L.....	32,990
	Sport-L.....	▼ 33,325
	Touring.....	37,340

## MANUFACTURING INNOVATIONS

Accord has been built in Marysville, Ohio, since Honda's plant opened there in 1982, the first such by a global automaker in the US. Continual research here improves content, quality and worker ergonomics. Highlights for the all-new Accord include:

- New hinge engineering reducing parts, improving quality and boosting worker efficiency while installing the hood.
- A more efficient one-piece two-layer carpet installation process increasing both sound insulation and comfort.
- New in-vehicle Electronic Power Steering calibration flashing system.
- A complete front-end redesign for higher quality and quicker build with both hood fixture and fender location consistently set.
- Sub-assembly of the 3-piece front sub-frame brought in-house for the first time.
- Investments in automation and welding for new rear wheel arch styling.
- One-piece taillight mounting design with new process eliminating welding steps.
- Parts made in-house from material previously recycled, for higher efficiency and accuracy, reduced materials and time.