



Honda HR-V



WHAT IS THE HR-V? GOOD QUESTION. It's whatever you want it to be really. But it's being marketed as a three-door sports utility vehicle, designed to appeal to young, style-conscious trendsetters with an active lifestyle – much like your average car tester, in fact. “Respectable rebels”, Honda dubs them. It wouldn't thank us for calling the eye-catching newcomer the CR-V's baby brother, so we won't. But it is – well, sort of.

It does, after all, share the CR-V's “on demand” four-wheel drive system that transmits power to the back wheels only when it's needed, and does so automatically via Honda's clever Dual Pump arrangement (see page 3); there are no additional levers or push buttons.

It's a grass and gravel 4x4, though, that will provide additional grip in light snow; it isn't intended for serious mud-plugging, although a ground clearance of 19cm and approach and departure angles of 29 degrees help its off-tarmac performance. Interestingly, a front-wheel-drive-only version (shades of the old Matra Rancho) will be available from next September, for those who like to look hip but don't need the grip.

A unique driveline combination is also on offer: four-wheel drive and (for £900 extra) continuously variable transmission, instead of the conventional five-speed gearbox. Unfortunately we drove the CVT only briefly in city traffic, but were impressed by its

smoothness of take-off and, of course, the complete absence of “shift shock”. Apart from its supreme ease of use, it's likely to result in considerably more relaxed motorway progress, too, because the engine is spinning 830rpm slower at 70mph than in the busy-sounding manual version. If you prefer to do it yourself, however, you'll rarely find a sweeter clutch or a crisper, more-positive gearchange.

Power comes from a 1.6-litre, 105bhp engine that will be common to all versions. It's closely related to the one in the Civic Coupé, but in this case, the 100 lb ft peak torque figure is developed much lower – at 3400 rather than 4500rpm. And the HR-V is a peppy performer – the generous power output and lowish gearing see to that, with 0-60mph in about 11½sec and a claimed maximum speed of 101mph (12½sec and 94mph for the CVT). Expect the two-wheel drive to be a shade quicker and slightly more economical.

As we said, it's a bit frantic on a motorway, but at least it's such a smooth, rev-happy little motor (the tachometer is red-lined at 7000rpm) that it never sounds strained. It's a lot more subdued at lower speeds (and practically inaudible at tickover), which results in hushed cruising, aided by quiet tyres and low wind noise.

Its initials stand for High Rider Vehicle (and, incidentally, CR-V stands for Compact Recreational Vehicle), yet in spite of its tall build, the HR-V feels a lot

more wieldy and rolls less than you might expect when driven with gusto. Despite lacking genuine feedback, the light, positive steering adds to the model's sporty feel, as well. Its crisp response and brisk turn-in make the HR-V surprisingly entertaining to hustle round the bends.

Ride comfort isn't sacrificed, either. Although some firmness comes through on transverse ridges and broken surfaces at lower speeds, progress is generally smooth and easy-going. Braking performance, aided by ABS and electronic braking distribution, is reassuring, too, with a nicely weighted pedal action.

The high driving position provides a clear view of the big, blue-faced instruments set in a twin-cowled binnacle. In fact, there's a lot of blue about, including the somewhat slippery nylon-like upholstery. It's comfortable up front, but some drivers found the wheel slightly too far away (it only adjusts for height) and the

brake pedal a little too close. Vision is good, except in the interior mirror, but removing the back seat head restraints helps a lot; the big, electric door mirrors are excellent. There are twin lidded gloveboxes below the passenger's airbag and numerous pockets and drinks holders, into which a movable ashtray fits. The cars we drove had tilt-up glass sunroofs, but these won't be fitted to cars for the UK – we'll be getting air conditioning only.

A five-door version of the HR-V is due in March 2000, so for now we have to make do with the three-door. It's none too easy to get to and from the back seats, particularly on the offside because, unlike the other front seat, the driver's doesn't have a tilt-and-slide arrangement. Annoyingly, neither has a backrest memory function. With tall front occupants who aren't prepared to compromise, the HR-V is little more than a 2+2,

LIKES AND GRIPES

Pleasant switches and controls	...	but some warning lights far too small
Excellent fit and finish	...	but a lot of plastic panelling on view
Heating and air con work well	...	but no rear footwell outlets provided
Comprehensive secondary safety features	...	but seatbelts not adjustable for height

FACTS AND FIGURES

ENGINE

Type longitudinal four in line

Size 1590cc

Valves belt-driven single OHC, 16 valves

Fuel/ignition multi-point petrol injection with programmed spark timing vial coil and distributor. 55-litre fuel tank

Power 103bhp at 6200rpm

Torque 100 lb ft at 3400rpm

TRANSMISSION

Type Dual Pump four-wheel drive. Five-speed manual gearbox or continuously variable transmission (CVT)

Mph per 1000rpm manual: 18.7 in 5th, CVT: 24.0 in high

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent MacPherson coil spring/damper struts with single lower arm and an anti-roll bar. Rear: coil-sprung beam axle with telescopic dampers, trailing arm and Panhard rod location and an anti-roll bar

Steering rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance

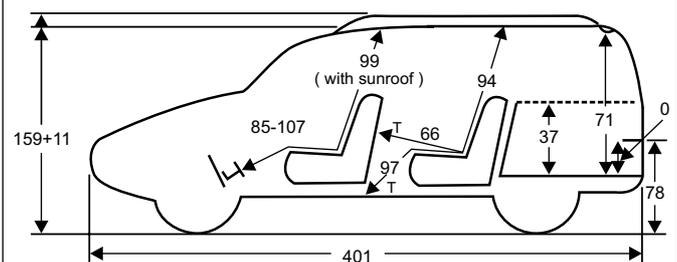
Wheels 6JJ x 16 alloy with 205/60R16H tyres. Space-saver spare

Brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear. ABS and EBD (electronic brake distribution) standard

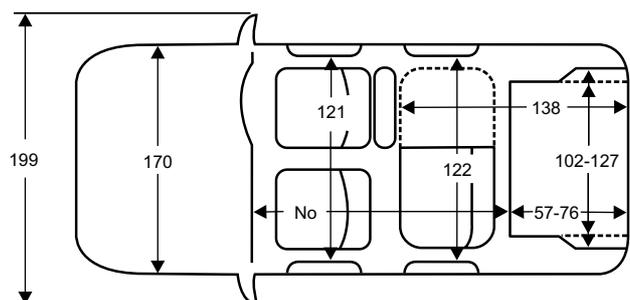
MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres

Three-door SUV



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants



because kneeroom can be tight. You sit high, though, with generous foot space and headroom, and there's an unusual, panoramic view out of the "wide screen" (fixed) side windows.

Luggage space beyond the lift-up tailgate is generous and can be almost doubled by removing the rear head restraints and folding the 50/50 split backrests on to the fixed cushions. The big release catches aren't thiefproof, though. Another gripe is that the luggage deck is high, so a big lift is called for when loading. Beneath the stout, lift-up floor, a waterproof compartment sits snugly within the space-saver spare

wheel. A wide range of accessories is available from Honda to personalise the model.

VERDICT

Understandly, Honda UK isn't calling the HR-V the Joy Machine, as they do in Japan; it's good fun all the same, and could well make a big impression in a small niche.

Compact interior dimensions make it decidedly cosy inside for four, but with just two up there's a lot of room. It's lively, it rides and handles well, and has the sort of chic and cheerful looks that should make it an entertaining alternative SUV to the likes of Vitara, Terios and RAV4, for those active twenty- to

How Dual Pump 4WD works

For most of the time, only the HR-V's front wheels are driven; it's only when they begin to lose grip that the Dual Pump system starts to send power to the rear wheels. This is achieved by a hydraulic torque-split system, consisting of a conventional front-wheel drive arrangement, complete with transfer case, a propeller shaft running the length of the vehicle and a Dual Pump system integrated with the rear differential. This is the heart of the system and comprises two hydraulic pumps, one driven by the front wheels via the prop shaft, the other by the rear wheels via the rear differential.

During normal levels of grip the front and rear wheels, and their respective pumps, turn at the same speed; hydraulic pressure circulates between the two pumps, but no pressure is generated. If the front wheels begin to lose

traction and start to spin faster than those at the rear, the two pumps turn at different rates; hydraulic pressure proportional to the difference in their speeds is generated, which in turn opens a valve body and activates a mechanical, multi-plate clutch.

This clutch then connects the front prop shaft to the rear diff, which feeds precisely the correct amount of torque to the rear wheels to re-establish overall traction. The more the front wheels slip, the greater the torque fed to the rear wheels.

The Dual Pump arrangement weighs less than a conventional four-wheel drive system and demands little maintenance – just a fluid change at 72,000 miles and thereafter every 36,000 miles. A further advantage of this design is that it automatically disengages under braking, thereby allowing the ABS to operate.

