



REVIEW

Honda Hybrid Hum

Brand new Civic put through its paces

Words: Shaer Reaz
Photos: Rahin Sadman Islam



The shift towards hybrid cars in Dhaka is gradual but persistent. It's still not completely mainstream, but the focus on hybrid cars in the brand new cars segment shows that the dealerships are pushing for a cleaner, more efficient alternative to CNG conversion in the country, offering up high-quality hybrid cars that are also more environment friendly.

Shift featured Saif Al-din Abdullah's 2010 Civic soon after it started being published, and when his dad's company went looking for a new company car, it had to be a Honda.

The brand new Civic is equipped with a 1.5 liter four cylinder petrol engine combined with Honda's Integrated Motor Assist (IMA) system, wrapped in an all new body with a redesigned interior. Combined efforts produce only 110 horsepower, but naturally torque figures are high enough for city driving: 127 lb-ft. The powertrain is almost silent at low speeds, and the combination of petrol and electrical charge result in astonishingly smooth and effortless acceleration characteristics. Braking regenerates the electrical motors, and on Dhaka's streets, there's very little chance of the battery being drained completely since the brakes need to be applied every two feet on the jam-packed roads.

When we ask Saif about the differences in the drive between his 2010 non-hybrid Civic (which he still

owns) and the new one, Saif nods his head appreciatively, saying the new one is more refined and smooth by comparison, and the added fuel efficiency benefits make it noticeably better.

One issue he has faced so far is getting used to the kick of the electric motors when they're engaged suddenly. The surge of electric power during frequent stop-starts in heavy traffic is unnerving at times, especially when the car in front is just a few paces away. Eventually it's easy to adapt to, gauging the distance in front and braking/accelerating accordingly gets easier with more practice.

The design is a lot more upmarket, and the



influence of the executive segment Accord on the design is clearly evident. The front end is longer and the rear end nicely slopes up to meet the C-pillars, and the boot-lid makes it look a bit like the Ford Fiesta sedan. Rakes and surface changes make the rear bumper look less bulky, and the LED effect taillights are a very nice touch. The windows are tall and stretches to the front, giving an airy feel to the interior, with lots of light reaching in.

The interior itself has a ton of space in the front and rear for tall-legged passengers. The instrument cluster is driver focused and the heads up display shows the vital information you'd need, from amount of charge left to the mileage you've achieved so far. The boxier, edgier design is a bit of a step down from the funky dash layouts of the previous generation, but the 2013 Civic is still a nice place to sit in.

Are the fuel efficiency gains worth it? Saif says the increase in MPG is significant, the car comes with a ton of standard safety, and entertainment features, so overall, the new Civic is well worth it, providing great value for money, priced at 38.5 lakh taka.

As far as a company car goes, though, the Civic makes a brilliant option, the quiet little Honda having all the necessary up-market touches but at a relatively low cost. Best bit, the reduction in fuel bills will save the company a huge amount of money.

SPECS

2014 Honda Civic Hybrid

Engine: 1.5 litre i-VTEC SOHC I4 (90 horsepower and 97 pound-feet of torque)
Battery: Lithium-ion battery pack
Mileage figures: 53 mpg (imperial units, manufacturer's quote)
Transmission: CVT gearbox
Curb weight: 1,294-1,304 kg



Plenty of boot space and no need for CNG tank.



New vs old, watered down versus funky good looks.

PROJECT CARS

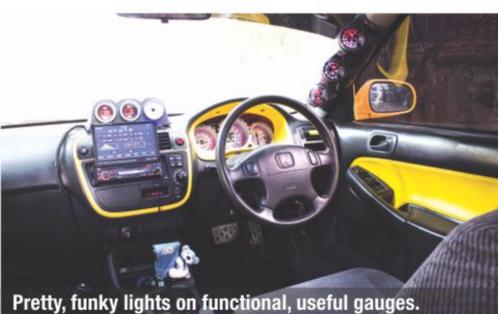
Ferio Dreams

Bright as sunshine 1999 Civic Ferio Vi-RS

It's yellow. You could of course see that in the pictures, a beautiful shade of sunny, happy, smiley yellow. Yellow also means a cautionary color. It says pause. You know the yellow in traffic lights? It says pause. The red light is about to come up.



Lack of a spoiler, understated body kit and the right color = clean awesomeness.



Pretty, funky lights on functional, useful gauges.

This is the 6th generation Civic. Some say it is the best generation of all the Civics. The ones before this were lighter, had better power to weight ratios and were simpler. This generation, with its beak like front, came with added features. It was the start of bulking up. The new ones? Too big, too heavy, still great to drive though. The 6th generation is the choice for racers, ricers and people in between who like to have something light, smart, sharply designed and reliable.

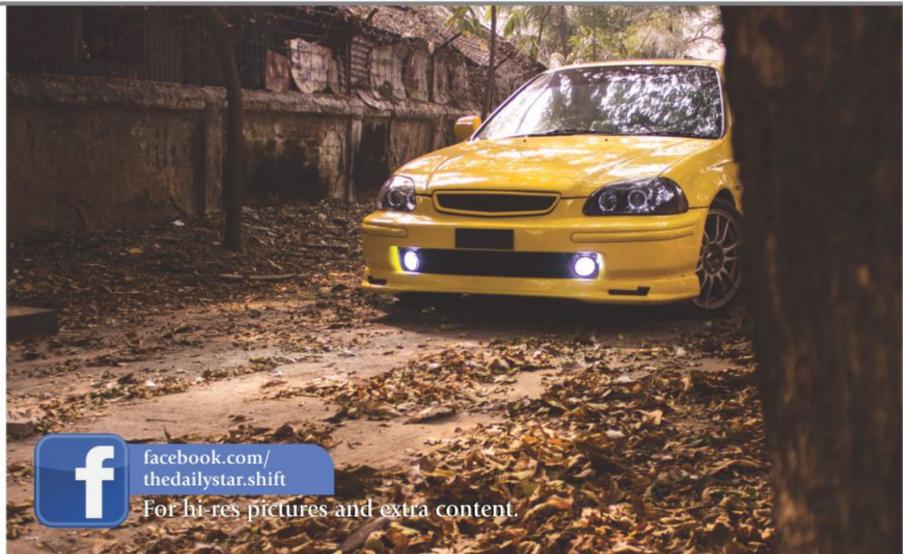
My first introduction to the 6th generation Honda Civic was way back when these things were new, in 1998. A friend had it and he beat the living daylight out of it. The car back then and the yellow buttery machine here are/were both the Ferio Vi-RS. That means a D15B with a 3-stage VTEC engine good for almost 130hp. Back then, in my post-pimply adolescent state, I was considering myself to be nearly grown up. I was entering university, and driving cars were all about impressing the girls. Of course, the Civic my friend had, had too many scratches to be attractive. But man it could pull. It was a manual 5 speed and that meant you could launch it to 3000rpm so the VTEC would activate. Except we didn't know all that. This was before the age of the internet when we were all actually talking to real people to socialize. All we knew was to hold the revs and shift at 3k. Many burned tires later, that car became a fond memory.

It's been a while now. And I've properly grown up. And now I find this beautiful Civic to rekindle some old memories. For starters this one is almost the same. Except it is in immaculate condition inside and out. No soda bottles rolling around in the back seat. No duct tape holding the headlights in place. And it has a CVT gearbox. No manual.

This modern-ish car has aged very well, the lines are still sharp and appealing with all the right proportions of a car: long, low front, mid length cabin and appropriately short buttocks. This Civic also has a well maintained interior. Everything still feels mint. And in typical Honda fashion, all necessary controls are well within arm's reach.

So what's it like on the road? It's not blisteringly fast but it is pretty quick. That subtle difference in syntax is necessary to explain its appeal. This is a road car with a restrained wild side, and that CVT is proof that this technology works if maintained right. This car is more than a decade old and the CVT transmission still works like butter. The handling is tight with minimal body roll. It's a "cool" family car unlike the fat and slow modern offerings.

Being low, it needs to be driven with care. Having a CVT gearbox, it is smooth and quick and those 130 horses still gallop pretty with gusto. Turns out those end-of-school memories in a fast Honda weren't just full of nostalgic misinformation. It was pretty fast then, compared to the stuff available in the early 2000s. And it's still pretty fast. This car will get faster as a new heart transplant is in the works (starts with a B, ends with a C).

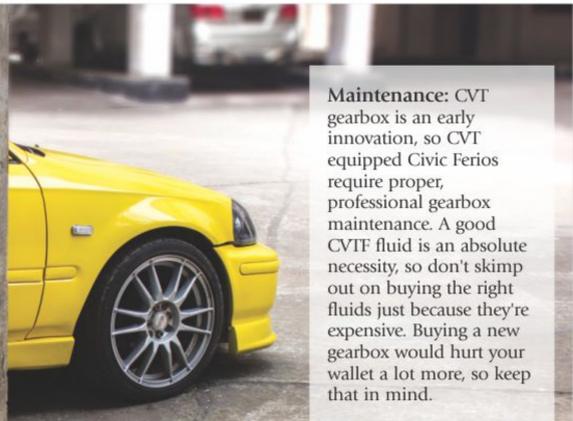


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For hi-res pictures and extra content.

Want one? EK series Civic pros and cons.

Parts availability: Civic relatively cheap compared to other Honda models, but obviously more expensive than Toyota's equivalent cars. If you find a store that sells Honda parts, stick to it and forget about looking around more. Great thing about Honda parts, they're all genuine, because not enough demand for replicated parts.

Performance: Stock D-series engines are not that fast, but economical. SOHC, 4-cylinder engine sound isn't particularly inspiring. For a lot more grunt, B16A and B16B engines provide bang for buck performance. If your budget can be strained, B18C is a terrific choice.



Maintenance: CVT gearbox is an early innovation, so CVT equipped Civic Ferios require proper, professional gearbox maintenance. A good CVT fluid is an absolute necessity, so don't skimp out on buying the right fluids just because they're expensive. Buying a new gearbox would hurt your wallet a lot more, so keep that in mind.

Body: Can be made to look good very easily, with just a few cosmetic additions here and there. One annoyance faced by owners of this generation of the Civic is that any work on the front of the car that requires the headlights removed, requires removal of the front bumper first. This also means that every bump your front bumper takes, has a chance of making the headlights pop out of their fittings.

Re-sale value: It IS true that Hondas have very little re-sale value, but this generation of the Civic has managed to hold its value up quite well over the years. What this means is that finding and buying good condition Civic is going to be kind of expensive. Expect to pay around 5.5-6.5 lakhs for a late 90's model (prices found online). Be wary of the already modified ones. When and if you sell it off again, don't expect all of your invested money to come back to you.

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WORDS AND PHOTOS: EHSANUR RAZA RONNY