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SHIFT

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TEST DRIVE

2017 HONDA CIVIC

The brand new Honda Civic has many people screaming, dying and crying all for the right reasons. It's like a prelude to a rock concert comeback. You're excited but not sure a hundred percent if it will be awesome like yesterday. What Honda did very well with the Civic was offer a sub-compact car for the masses that could sniff fuel while still offering sharp handling fun. The car kept growing and growing with the current 10th generation being big enough to tip a negatively cambered toe into the mid-size segment.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT THIS CAR?

Turbo. Everything is turbo now. And finally Honda jumped into the game offering a thoroughly revised 'everything' to usher in the new era of 'phush, phoosh' driving.

Power form the 1.5 litre engine is 174 hp at 5,500 rpm and 220 Nm of torque from 1,800 to 5,000 rpm. That's a very wide range where all that torque is available. And it's evident each time we floored the throttle at highway speeds. It approaches triple digits like a housefly that has mistakenly entered a table tennis tournament and got hit by the champs bat.

DOES IT WORK?

Performance is linear due to the CVT. Drop the transmission into sport mode and you get the horsepower about 500rpm lower. It's a big-ish car pulling like a much smaller car. While the steering doesn't convey everything on the roads, it does offer a meaty tactile feel with its thick rim and gradual stiffening at speed.

EXTERIOR

Also another big change is the profile design. It is now a fastback shape that gives it a sleeker, pouncing shape similar to that Jaguar hood emblem. What car doesn't want to be a Jaguar emblem? And then there is that uniquely cool boomerang shaped rear taillight that ensure everybody knows what just went past. I hate the wheel design though. A butch shape like this needs beefier wheels. Nothing beats a TE37. Our sub-editor Mahbub Hussain dislikes the rear buttresses, and says the rear lip spoiler saves the day. I quite like it.

ON THE ROAD

They've made two significant changes. They have shortened the steering lock to lock form the previous 3.1 turns to 2.2 turns. And the new Honda has fluid filled bushings for engine mounts and lower suspension components for added vibration/noise reduction. The car is quite as a classroom where the teacher has just had an emotional outburst. There are things to learn. One of those is that the turbo blow-off is nearly silent. You don't want drama? This is it.

INTERIOR

Everything has been pared down a little it seems. Traditional cues have been brought in to simplify. Gauges and dials are minimal with everything focused on the driver. Turbo guage is the best I've ever seen. I love my buttons but I don't miss the distinct hideaway of buttons here.

ANNOYANCES

The fan should have had a simple dial or button up front instead of requiring access via the display. Car guys would prefer a bit more turbo noise - one of our sub-eds think its too quite for a turbo car. Enthusiasts might want a bit more "*phoosh*".

FUEL EFFICIENCY

We had nearly a full tank of fuel. And it was a weekend. So we drove. And drove. And pushed it to only to see it still returned and average of 12kmpl. Makes you wonder what you can do when you drive gently.

VERDICT

I prefer small cars but this bright red Civic brings together my inner 18-year old hoon and impending mid-life crisis into a civilised coffee meeting. It has left behind all pretense of being an economy car. There is more space than you know what to do with. It handles sharp, goes like stink and stays level on the corners without sacrificing composure over our massive man eating potholes. In the end, it also does everything else you want it to in a city like Dhaka: that is to look better than everything else in its class while keeping you cool.

PRICE: TK 42 lakh

Available at DHS Motors. For full specs and exclusive photos, visit our site at www.thedailystar.net

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PHOTOS: RAHIN SADMAN ISLAM

COLLECTIBLES

1/43 ASTON MARTIN DB4

While the Aston Martin DB5 is known to even the least knowledgeable person regarding cars, all because of its silver screen partnering with Bond, James Bond, few outside a circle of automotive purists know that the DB5's iconic shape is merely an evolution of the original Aston heartthrob of the era - the DB4.

This exquisitely modeled Aston comes in 1/43 scale and will cost you a little over 1500 taka, and considering the quality of the paint, chrome finish and light treatment, the DeAgostini model will definitely find a spot in your heart and your model shelf. Otherwise you might as well be excited by driverless cars made by tech companies.

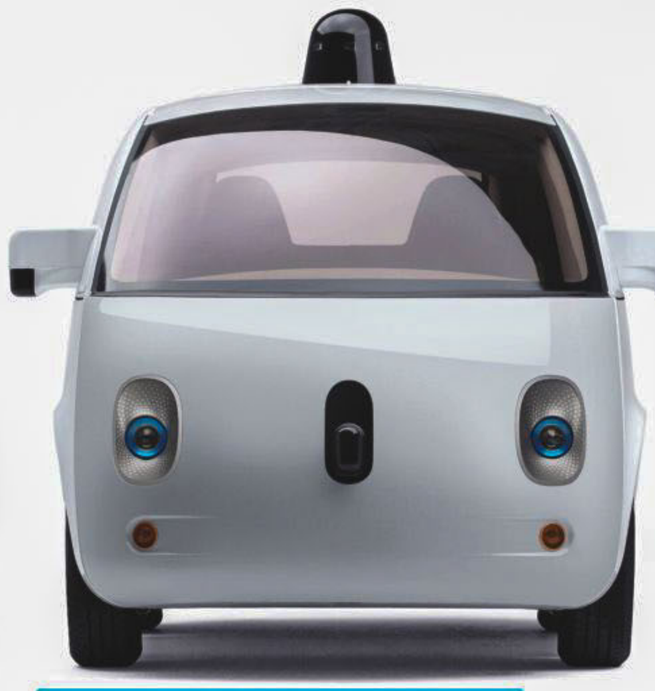
Pros: Paint finish, chrome finishing, light detail, weight.

Cons: Doesn't come with a display case and some of the smaller bits like the mirrors and door handles are quite fragile. Take care when handling or you'll hate yourself forever.

WORDS AND PHOTOS: SHAER REAZ

AN AUTONOMOUS FUTURE

The world of automobiles is changing as fast as computer processing power allows it to. From info-tainment systems to onboard diagnostics to propulsion systems, the lines between the tech and auto industires are being blurred, fast. A big part of that push for high tech automobiles is coming from tech giants. Google is already on the ground, testing truly driverless technology, while Apple is rumored to be entering the foray soon. While mainstream manufacturers have the funds and the R&D strength to pursue sustainable propulsion systems to reduce the environmental impact of motorised transport, these tech companies are pursuing a slightly different path - taking what they've learned in tech to apply the knowledge to cars, in the efforts to realise their vision of the future.

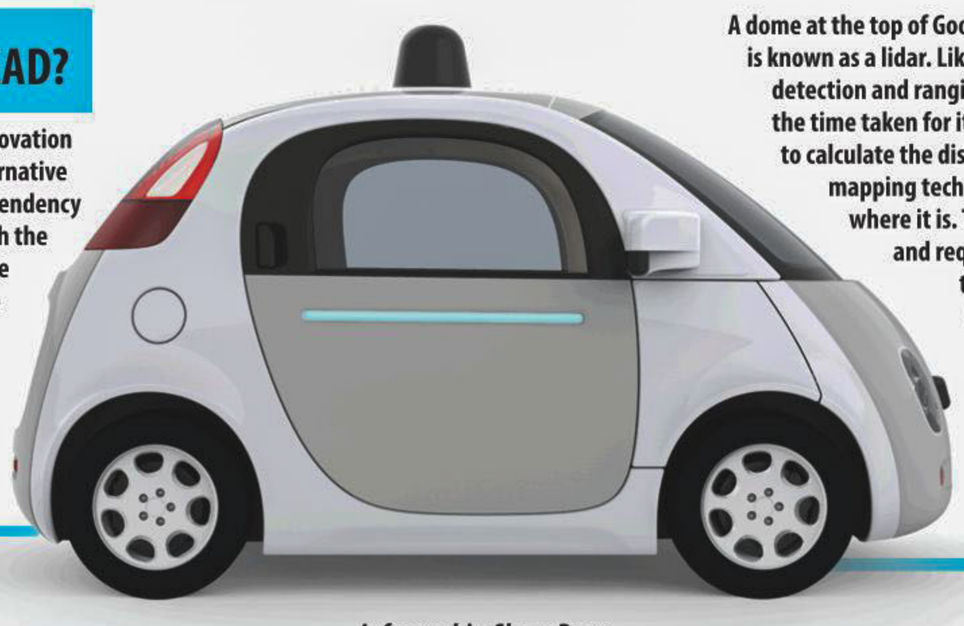


HOW WOULD ONE WORK?

A dome at the top of Google's prototype pod-car houses what is known as a lidar. Like sonar and radar, except lidar - light detection and ranging - sends out a laser pulse, and uses the time taken for it to bounce back from another object to calculate the distance to that object. Google's precise mapping tech and GPS tracking lets the car "know" where it is. The prototype is in its learning phase and requires a human in the car at all times, till the car can "learn" how to react to different situations. Like whether to stop for a random crocodile on the road (just Australian things) or run away from it screaming. Humans know the right answer but the machine needs to learn if saving a croc is moral or not.

WHERE DOES THIS LEAD?

Driverless technology is non-vital innovation at present, since finding a viable alternative to petrol and reducing fossil-fuel dependency is way more important. However, with the interest of tech giants like Google, the future of the automobile is sure to be more streamlined and connectivity will go far beyond what is possible today. Driverless cars will come, but for the motorists of the world to accept it as a mainstay will surely take some time.



Infographic: Shaer Reaz