



NEW (AGAIN) AND IMPROVED

2013 HONDA CIVIC EX

MSRP: \$18,165 (LX) · AS TESTED: \$21,605 (EX)

The 2013 Honda Civic is substantially new, and that's unusual. Why? Because Civic was all new last year.

Some brief background. The compact car segment where Civic lives is always one of the top selling sectors in the U.S. auto market.

Since it was introduced stateside in 1973, Civic has enjoyed practically a reserved seat in the front row of the compact class. So, when the ninth generation models received some good-not-great reviews in the automotive press when they rolled out in 2012, Honda took up the challenge. Rather than giving consumers the usual, mild makeover that one expects, a year removed from a new generation car, they responded with wide-ranging changes — and a much improved product.

The 2013 lineup is expansive. Civic is offered in Coupe and Sedan body styles. LX, EX, EX-L and Si models are available, and the sedan side of the lineup also includes Hybrid, Natural Gas and HF versions. My test car was an EX sedan, with an as-delivered price of \$21,605.

What's new for '13 starts with the styling. The sedans get an extensive refresh, front and back. The sheet metal makeover includes a new hood, trunk lid, grille, bumpers taillights and trim.

Last year's Civic took a rap for an underwhelming interior design. Honda has countered with the addition of soft-touch materials on dash and door trim in place of the former, hard plastics. This, along with revised textures and trim, kicks the overall look upscale several notches. The two-tier dash design is interesting and eye-catching. Front and center in the lower level is a big tachometer. Tachs are useful in sports cars, particularly manual shift-



ing models, so the driver can keep the engine on the boil, without boiling over. So, the Large and In Charge tach makes sense in the sporty Si. Its use in the other models is more a matter of selling the sizzle rather than the steak. The top tier of gauges includes a digital speed readout.

Its location — just below the bottom of the windshield — means that your eyes don't have to stray very far from the road to check on your speed. Nice idea.

The after-dark look is cool, too, with light bars flanking the speedometer that change colors to remind you when you're driving more (or less) economically. I did, however, pick up some windshield reflections owing to reflected, night lighting. Climate controls and sound system switchgear are uncomplicated in design and within arm's reach. New standard equipment inside includes several

useful items. A rearview camera allows you to see potential hazards behind you, before backing into them. Bluetooth links allow you to wirelessly link your tunes to the audio system, and there are USB/iPod connections, Pandora interface, and an SMS text feature.

Civic seats adults in both rows without complaint and visibility is good in all directions. Small stowage spots are scattered around the cabin. Large items head 'trunk-ward', where Civic has 12½ cubic feet of cargo capacity. The liftover height in back is low, but if you're packed full in back, trunk hinges may impinge on your gear. Rear seatbacks fold flat to allow long items. The seatbacks are split on EX, EX-L and Si models, which gives you more floor plan flexibility.

Mainline Civic models run the Honda 1.8-liter

four-cylinder engine, while the Si gets a 2.4-liter. It's paired to a five-speed manual on LX models. A five-speed automatic is optional on LX and standard on EX, EX-L and HF models. Si models are linked to a six-speed manual gearbox. The 1.8 (140 horsepower, 128 lb. ft. of torque) has adequate power around town or on the highway. It's loud enough to be noticeable under pedal-to-the-metal acceleration, but noise levels are otherwise unobtrusive. Honda spent some time on NVH reduction for the 2013's, and it shows. Civic is overall a quiet compact. EPA mileage estimates peg the 1.8/auto combo at 28 city, 39 highway. I logged 24 mpg's during my test drive.

Both the suspension and the steering system were recalibrated for this year's Civic. Steering is nicely weighted and the EX feels agile and stable if not out and out sporty. Ride quality will not disappoint.

Typically, when an automaker brings out an all-new model, they follow with modest tweaks for several years, before rolling out another new version. In the interim, any issues needing improvement are either addressed (if practical) on a year to year basis, or absorbed (if not) until the next full redesign. To their credit, Honda took note of the critiques by the auto press and stepped up with substantial revisions — just one year after an all-new model. As a result, the 2013 Civic is both new and improved, and the car once again resumes its place in the front row of the compact class.

A regular contributor to the Times Union for the past 20 years, Dan Lyons is the award-winning author of six books, and photographer of 135 calendars. Read Dan's recent reviews on line anytime at www.timesunion.com/cars.

