

The Honda Insight

A touch of elegance...

Motoring has had a bad press over recent years. It seems our need to travel from A to B in areas and at times poorly covered by public transport is not a good idea. It's bad for the environment. It's threatening the well-being of future generations and the eco-warriors have filled us all with deepest angst every time we set off in our automobiles. Well be that as it may, we need our mobility and the car is here to stay, so it's up to the manufacturers to design and produce vehicles that won't hasten the end of civilisation as we know it. Fortunately they are working on the problem and Honda has come up with an elegant solution - the 'Insight'.

This elegant vehicle will seat five in comparative comfort. It is powered by a combination 1.3-litre petrol engine and a battery-powered electric motor. Now although there are other hybrid cars on the market, Honda has uniquely used an improved version of the engine developed in the Civic by integrating it with the electric motor in what is described as a parallel hybrid. The engine and motor work together through a shared gearbox to drive the wheels. Honda claim this Integrated Motor Assist (IMA) system is cheaper, easier, lighter and simpler, to integrate into existing power-trains. Without going too deeply into the technology the result is THE power delivery and low-end torque of a diesel engine without the ecologically unfriendly emissions.

So where does it fit in to the motoring experience? Well given the claimed top speed of 113mph and a get-away figure of 0-60mph in 12.5 seconds it is not the swiftest runner off the block. However for urban motoring it's ideal, extremely comfortable and economical too. The SE version will return a claimed 64.2mpg and the ES and ES-T versions slightly less at 61.4mpg.

Two drive modes allow you to choose a 'normal' drive and 'economy'. Push the green button on the dash. You are now entering the 'green' zone. This mode cuts torque and

adjusts throttle settings. The speedo. will glow green if your feet are light on the accelerator and turn purple if they are not. Then, depending how you drive, a line of trees will grow leaves or shed them, again depending on the lightness of your foot. Carbon dioxide emissions are 101g/km for the SE and 105g/km for the other two. This would normally mean a £35 annual road tax bill. However, Hybrid cars attract a £20 discount which brings the tax bill down to £15. And if you live in London, there's no congestion charge.

The Insight is nicely equipped and the entry level, SE version gets air conditioning, four electric windows with electric adjustable, heated door mirrors, radio/CD/MP3 player and 15inch alloys. To the ES models add steering-wheel mounted gear change, cruise control, tinted glass, front fog lights, heated front seats, rain-sensing wipers, automatic headlights, illuminated glove box, leather steering wheel, USB port and 16 inch alloys. The ES-T goes even further adding Bluetooth phone connect and sat.nav. with traffic information. Safety and security are

well taken care of. The former by active head restraints (including three at the back), side and curtain airbags, Isofix child seat mountings and the normal three-point seatbelts. Security is assured by deadlocks, alarm and locking wheel nuts.

I have already said the vehicle is comfortable, and it is. Wind and road noises have been cut to the very minimum and the ride is on the whole, extremely smooth. My only grump concerns potholes over which it seems to accentuate the bump. But then you can't have everything and the Insight does give you rather a lot of everything else.

As yet there are no NCAP or Insurance ratings available to quote but, if you are an urban dweller, or a long distance driver without pretensions to breaking records, for from £15,490 you are getting economical, elegant and comfortable motoring that won't keep your conscience awake at night, well worthwhile I should say!

Simon Taylor

