

2008 Honda Civic Si Sedan
Enthusiast's All-Star, Covering all the Bases
By: David Ray www.hookedondriving.com
For: The Wheel



Proper journalistic technique would, at this early point in the article, pose questions and issues about a car, with leading statements that would tease you to continue reading...With the Honda Civic Si, I couldn't bring myself to any of these tricks...we're going to blow the drama right away on this one. The Honda Civic Si Sedan is a perfect car for a LOT of folks in the SCCA, and represents a spectacular value when the entire package is taken into consideration. We mentioned that Honda covered all the bases:

Performance: OK – we're not being seduced by the covers of Autoweek and others that are feeding the fanatical horsepower race – the Civic Si has a very perky 197 horses from its VTEC four cylinder engine, with a redline up at a motorcycle-like 8000 rpm's, pushing a svelte 2945 lbs. Keep in mind though, that this is a "momentum hot rod," as torque numbers are at 139 lb ft, making it important for the driver to remain in the sweet spot of this engine's power range if he really wants to go. And, to whit, just stay away from drag racing altogether. Fortunately, the 6-speed gearbox in the Si is a sweetheart – very short throws without any notchiness – just a willing and solid thunk into gears as we "stir the drink." At around 6100 rpm, the engine turns on (almost like my old 390 V8's four barrel carb kicking in....on second thought, nah – not like that at all...) As for handling, we had a chance to sneak three laps at Thunderhill and immediately started the plans to do minor improvements to the car for track days. And those improvements had nothing to do with the handling – just a small upgrade in brakes to handle the ham-footed track driver. Otherwise, this very economical and practical sedan comported itself VERY well on track. The Civic Si sports a MacPherson strut front and independent multi-link rear suspension that somehow hides the scary weight distribution of 60/40 front/rear – the car feels quite neutral. With an excellent turn-in (we could almost divine the input from racing drivers on handling here – the car takes a set and rotates once you get the hang of it), surprisingly

well-dampened and controlled roll and dive, driving the Civic Si is like dancing with one of the “Dancing with the Star’s” hired professionals. It felt good enough for us to want to head down to the Autopower store, pick up the roll cage and put numbers with an “SSB” on the side of the car. As for the improvements? They would all be Showroom Stock legal – an upgrade in brake pads and fluid to accommodate the late braking racer in many of us, and a bit more exhaust note behind the low emission vehicle catalytic converter.

Comfort: While the front seats of this sport version of the Civic are probably best for the not-too-out-of-shape, the overall package is excellent. Staying with cloth interior, one feels at home upon first touch of this cabin. What is truly surprising is the ample back seat in this otherwise quite trim package – not to mention (oops there, I did) the gi-normous trunk. Figuring into this comfort package is the extreme quiet, especially considering that at 2900 lbs, Honda has had to remain conservative about sound insulation. Seems like this car is screwed together pretty tight, and the wind noise is negligible. To the point on wind noise: We reviewed the 07 Civic Si Coupe, essentially the same car, and panned it for its bold proboscis and windshield that seemed to be in the next time zone ahead of the driver. We still don’t like this big gob of cubic air serving as its own biosphere out in front of the front seat passengers. It definitely creates a blind spot along the flying buttress roof pillar as one turns into an intersection. However, having now spent two weeks driving this configuration, we’ve gone almost neutral on this previous negative. And to the point, this long sloping windshield certainly has an upside, that of a low drag coefficient and the corresponding quiet slice through the wind at 75 mph. If you were to select package that was not only going to live the life of most of us who work for a living, yet cruise to Grandma’s down Highway 5, take a romantic side trip to Mendocino with the moonroof open, and once a year the foray to Seattle to see the cousin’s, this would be a surprisingly effective player for such a diverse role – doing it without pain. Speaking of pain – as we just said, there is none involved here. With the taught handling described above, you’d think there would be the vertebrae shattering stiffness to accommodate this benefit – NOT. Even on the choppiest, most poorly maintained stretch of freeways (our tax dollars at work), the Civic swallows the chops with firmness, yet somehow insulates our body parts from shock very well. In fact, earlier this year, we had a quick trip in the “S Type” version of the Acura TL, a bigger, heavier, more expensive sedan built by Honda’s luxury brand. And shock of shocks, the Civic out-rides this big cousin by a fair margin.

Economy: Even with all the praise for the Si as a sporty performer, EPA fuel mileage comes in at a very respectable 21 city, and 29 highway. This, in addition to its status as a low emission vehicle puts it well over onto the socially acceptable side of the green ledger.

Value: We’ve listed three of the bases above; performance, comfort, and economy – but with this base, Honda completes its in-the-park-homerun. (Let’s face it; we might need more than 129 lb ft of torque for it to get all the way over the center field fence.) If one has just a bit of self-control, you’ll price this Civic Si sedan, capable of doing almost anything short of towing your GTA car, UNDER \$25,000. This will NOT be a stripped sedan. With 8 disc changer, sport interior, power moonroof, 17 inch sport wheels, and the very amble standard equipment, you’ll be ready to take on this harsh world in a real All-Star – hitting all the bases as you drive.