

Review: The Honda e electric car

Motoring journalist Mark Gallivan test drives the all-new [Honda e](#) electric urban car.

Honda hasn't exactly been enjoying its moment in the sun. The only frisson of excitement in the range is the Civic Type R that gets the pulses racing. There is also the Audi R8 rivalling NSX supercar but that's not on sale here.

Yet, bang out of the blue, they decide to pull a rabbit out of the hat. Welcome to the all new Honda e, a battery electric urban car. It was due to go on sale this November but the Government lockdown looks like changing the timetable.

The Honda e is priced at €29,995 for a standard e with 136 PS and €32,995 for the more powerful 154 PS Honda e Advance. The Tokyo company pitches the Mini Electric as the car's primary rival. I'd debate that one.

The Honda is a five-door B-segment car whereas the Mini is restricted to three doors. From next year the truer price rival looks like the forthcoming Mazda MX-30 all-electric five-door crossover SUV. I have driven the pre-production MX-30 and that's the car that should worry Honda more than the impractical Mini.

Honda sparks up its electric car fleet

Honda has set a target to electrify all of its range by 2022. This includes cars, motorcycles and the brand's power products. The green shoots of this strategy will see Honda launch six EV cars by 2023.

This rush is dictated not by consumer demand or fluffy environmental commitments but the directive to comply with the EU's tough Regulation (EU) 2019/631 that sets out 95g CO/km emissions across every new car on an individual fleet. The fines for breaching these targets are severe.

Did the new Honda e spring out from nowhere? Not quite. It was three years ago when the Yuki Terai designed subcompact Urban EV Concept broke cover. If the press fawned over the cutesy exterior the interior was a breath of air.

But, as always with car concepts we were resigned to the fact that regulations and financial

whatnots would put paid to the final car ever resembling the 2017 concept.

Honda, it seems, has the bit between its teeth. It was determined to deliver the striking car we see today. Speed read: the Honda e is a subcompact, five-door, rear wheel drive fully electric city car with a 222km (WLTP) range on both models from a 35.5 kWh battery, 0-100km in 8.3 seconds with 315Nm (e Advanced) and weighs a portly 1,514kg. We will get back to the small battery range in a moment. Honda says it is expecting to sell between 150 and 200 units in Ireland during 2021.

Look and feel

In the metal the Honda e is not the micro car you might think. It looks larger and is taller. Imagine an Audi A1's actual footprint.

Yet by choosing rear wheel drive – an unusual approach for any urban car - the Honda's turning circle is a small 4.3m (14.2 feet). The pipsqueak Fiat 500 needs over twice that to pull a u-turn with 30 feet. The Honda's 4.3m turning circle is the learner drivers' dream car. Having to perform three-point turns with a wheezy tester next to you might be a thing of the past in the e.

Few car interiors are as surprising as this new e. The door handles are recessed like an Aston Martin and one side pops out to reveal a tall frameless door. Honda clearly knows its current customer base as the 1,512mm height allows you easier access without bending down to get in. If you've seen the photos of the car's dashboard it does look as striking as you'd think.

On my test drive I found the new Side Camera Mirror System slightly distracting and frequently glanced across to the wrong place when driving.

I accept the purpose of replacing large external door mirrors with camera pods is to reduce wind drag and improve economy. Yet the true test is the weight difference between regular door mirrors and the electronic system's mechanicals to operate them. There is the potential for the mirror system to fail or be damaged and the higher cost of replacing them. Audi showcased something similar on their e-tron electric SUV. But credit to Honda; the system is innovative and the mirror pods are a concept-car delight.

Power and performance

Pop open the front bonnet's centre charging hatch and Honda says an 80pc charge is available in 30 minutes using DCC rapid charger. The 35.5 kWh Lithium-ion battery also supports a type two AC connection.

You will need over four hours to fully charge up. But no matter how different the car looks the 222km range is a limiting factor for the car's broader appeal. By contrast the Peugeot e-208 offers a 340km range yet starts from €21,450. The Honda e still makes a buying statement like few other

cars in this class.

The whole dashboard is replaced with a bank of five screens. A digital display is located behind the steering wheel and to the left of that are two 12.3-inch LCD touchscreens with a proliferation of shortcut menus and icons.

All primary controls are accessed by pushing and swiping icons and it is even possible to swap screen displays to enable front seat passengers to use the system. The novelty value of this is present but having someone accessing menus while you're driving would become distracting after a few miles let alone weeks into the car's ownership.

The resolution of the screens is good but there is a latency between activating a shortcut to the menu being displayed. Apple CarPlay and Android Auto smartphone mirroring is standard. The fresh thinking applied to the dashboard design and should offer appeal for the buyer lured by the wizardry of the system.

The Honda e is fitted with Parking Pilot as standard. The system helps a driver locate a space big enough for the car using four cameras and 12 sonar sensors. Once a space is identified the driver presses a button on the dashboard and the car automatically parks the car into the space without using any primary controls.

For me, the Honda e's best moment comes when you drive the car. The suspension is commendably smooth. I liked the pleasant consistency of the steering and brakes. Honda sensibly engineered the car to be a decently relaxing BEV experience with the sufficient zip when needed. Passengers will need to pack light as this is still a city car and rear seat accommodation is restricted to two adults with legroom at a premium. Don't be fooled by the expectation of a big boot. With the rear seat in place just 171 litres is available but expands to 861 litres when folded.

A longer test of the Honda e will be covered in early 2021. Judged on a short drive, it is fun, looks different and spearheads a new interior lexicon for cabin infotainment. Honda has created a BEV-of-one. That is no brutish hyperbole. Whether you like the exterior design and tech biased interior or not, Honda should be applauded for breaking the electric car same again mould. The best new cars always raise discussions and arguments. Be thankful that Honda started one with the e.

You'll like: It's fresh and different. Looks (if you like them). Smooth and cultured. A doddle to park. Cabin.

You'll grumble: Expensive and impractical. 222km range. Minuscule boot space. Looks (if you dislike them).

By Mark Gallivan

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