



Honda CR-Z Electrifying

Car review | Hybrid cars are bought by two groups of customers. The first consists of idealists who want to save the world by driving an environmentally-friendly vehicle. The second group is made up of business men who mainly want to save their own wallet. Now Honda thinks it has found a third group, because thanks to hybrid drive, the CR-Z is supposed to offer extra driving pleasure. Is this green sports car actually electrifying?

You can't blame it on the design. Those who complain that all hybrid cars have the same teardrop shape, will be pleasantly surprised by the CR-Z (Compact Renaissance - Zero). This sports coupé is short and muscular. The headlights look angry and the LEDs underneath make the car seem wider. The CR-Z is available in sparkling colours, which give this car strong presence.

Interior

The daring design isn't limited to the exterior, the interior is at least as exciting. Stepping into the CR-Z means lowering down into the cosy interior in which the occupants lie down rather than sit down. The CR-Z is a bit too cosy for tall drivers; people taller than 6 feet will constantly hit the roof.



Just like most other coupés the CR-Z is hard to look out of. Vision in the rear view mirror is obstructed by the split tailgate. To optimise aerodynamics the outside mirrors are very small, which also doesn't improve visibility.

"Luxury problems" like these are part of the CR-Z experience, because the attraction of this car is all in the presentation. The steering wheel is nice and small,

the gear lever short. To literally set the tone an "iPod dock" can be found in the centre console. This is a closed compartment with a USB-connector and space to safely store the iPod itself. Only the hard, cheap-looking plastic on the dash does affect the experience.



Behind the steering wheel deep, round dials can be found, just like in a classic sports car. However, the lighting seems to be inspired by a UFO. When the engine is ignited a blue glow illuminates the dials. Depending on the driving style, the colour changes ("Ambient meter"). When driving fast, the ring around the rev counter is red; driving efficiently results in a green light.

Hybrid

The test drive starts in the green, because a hybrid car is traditionally know for its frugal character. A hybrid vehicle has two engines: a traditional internal combustion engine and an electric motor. The power required for the electric motor doesn't come from a wall socket, but is generated while driving (while braking and coasting).



The CR-Z cannot be propelled by the electric motor alone. Instead the electric motor merely assists the petrol engine when it has to work hard (and therefore consumes a lot of fuel). The relatively simple construction is cheap to produce and makes it possible to use a traditional (six-speed) manual gearbox. The latter enhances the sporty feeling.

With the push of a button the driver can choose an efficient or a more sporty character. In the eco-mode the engine is tuned down to save fuel, and even the air conditioning steps down a notch.



To help the driver save fuel, a wide range of driving aids are available. Displays near the speedometer show when the electric motor is assisting or charging. Also the braking and acceleration patterns can be shown, so the driver can try to adopt a smoother driving style. A shift indicator shows the most economical moment to engage a lower or higher gear.



As if that isn't enough, the CR-Z even has its own coach on board. When driving efficiently for a long time, trees appear in the display. Gradually branches and leaves grow on these trees. Eventually a trophy is shown to reward for consistently driving efficiently. No matter how elementary or belittling this may sound, it does really inspire to save fuel. Thanks to all the aids it is actually possible to use just 5 litres per 100 km (56 mpg), just like Honda promises.

Sport!

That is, as long as the eco-mode is engaged. Because pushing the "sport" button completely changes the nature of the beast. The steering becomes heavier, which immediately gives the driver more feeling of the car. Also the reaction of the accelerator is much more direct. Instead of helping the driver to save fuel, the CR-Z now dares the driver to go faster!

Now the aim of the hybrid-drive train is not to make the CR-Z more frugal. Instead, both engines work together to improve performance. Without doubt Honda succeeded in reaching its goal: the CR-Z does offer more driving pleasure than all other hybrids in existence.

That pleasure is mainly thanks to the suggestion of high speed, not absolute performance. The sprint from 0 to 62 mph takes 9.9 seconds and the top speed is 200 km/h (124 mph). That makes the CR-Z a quick, but certainly not a fast car. Yet the low seating position, the sporty ambiance and the instant reaction to the throttle do make the car feel pretty fast anyhow. The strongest point of the CR-Z is that this sporty coupé even uses very little fuel when carelessly playing around. Even after a full day of fun and play, the trip computer showed a modest fuel consumption of 6 litres per 100 km (47 mpg).



Handling

A sports car isn't about horsepower alone, handling is just as important. Because the CR-Z is short, low and wide the car is very agile by nature.

However, do take care when trying to find the limits. Because of the heavy battery pack in the rear, this coupé might behave differently than expected. The suspension is relatively soft, which makes this car tilt in the corners.

Sudden movements can easily make the back step out ("oversteer"). The CR-Z is fitted with an electronic stability system, but it kicks in rather late. Therefore, the advice is to carefully get to know the CR-Z, then the provoking character isn't a drawback but eventually makes the car even more enjoyable.

Conclusion

Did Honda succeed in making a hybrid car that isn't just kind to the environment but exciting at the same time? Certainly! This is thanks to the clever concept, which has been executed perfectly from start to finish.

The experience starts with the exciting design, the low seating position, the small steering wheel and the array of electronic gadgets. The high expectations are subsequently fulfilled by the direct steering and spritely handling. The hybrid-drive train delivers no more than fair performance, but that wasn't the main goal. Apart from that Honda found a unique balance between performance and fuel efficiency. Therefore the Honda CR-Z isn't particularly fast, but it certainly is electrifying. ■



Specifications

Honda CR-Z 1.5 GT

Size and weight



| | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Length x width x height | 408 x 174 x 140 cm |
| Wheelbase | 243 cm |
| Kerb weight | 1.119 kg |
| Trailer | unknown |
| Trailer - braked | unknown |
| Fuel capacity | 40 l |
| Luggage space | 225/595 l |
| Tyre size | 195/55R16 |

Engine and performance



| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Capacity | 1497 cc |
| Cylinders / valves | 4/4 |
| Max power | 124 PS @ 6100 rpm |
| Max torque | 174 Nm @ 4800 rpm |
| Drive | front wheels |
| Acceleration 0 - 62 mph | 9.9 secs |
| Top speed | 200 km/h |
| Average mileage | 5 l / 100 km |
| Mileage urban | 6.1 l / 100 km |
| Mileage extra urban | 4.4 l / 100 km |
| CO2 emissions | 117 gr / km |

Price

| | |
|------------------|-----------|
| Price | Â£ 19,999 |
| Price base model | Â£ 16,999 |