



Honda CR-V Downhill

Are things going downhill with SUVs? Sport Utility Vehicles started out as luxury off-road vehicles. Gradually the emphasis shifted more and more to the comfort element with their off-roading capacities being abandoned. The Honda CR-V is the newest example of a modern SUV with enormous similarities to an ordinary car yet with few connections to its roots. Is this a good or bad thing?

The previous generation Honda CR-V was portrayed in the sales brochure surrounded by mountains. With Honda's SUV, you could reach the remotest of regions. You were the great adventurer. However back in the UK reality is a little different. The average expedition generally stretches no farther than the Mediterranean every summer.

Space

Judging by sale figures, this SUV's attraction certainly hasn't deteriorated. The CR-V has a robust appearance with its nose raised high in the air, massive wheels and robust protection encompassing the car. At the same time its appearance betrays the fact that it was never meant to be an off-road vehicle. The nose might be able to conquer any steep slope; however the rear has just the right amount of overhang to get caught on any bump.



Inside, the CR-V has absolutely no resemblance to a tough workhorse. The seats aren't placed at a straight angle but lean back as in a normal car. With its very attractive highly placed seat, the CR-V not only has a great overview but also that feeling of mightiness.

The space in the front and the rear is more than ample. The gear stick isn't on the floor but in the middle of the dashboard, bringing it within easy reach as well as allowing extra room for movement.

The luggage space is just as roomy and has all the necessary accoutrements. The rear seat is on rails, so that as necessary

either more leg or luggage space can be created. The back of the rear seat can be folded down separately in two different sized parts to accommodate larger objects in the boot. It is also possible to separate the boot laterally into two for improved storage of smaller items. The optional second rear shelf can be attached halfway up, where it functions as a second load surface up to a maximum of 10 kg.



In the front, the materials used as well as the design are strongly reminiscent of an ordinary car. There are no easily washable plastic surfaces for muddy feet and wet bags. Just an abundance of fine fabrics and elegant equipment for that business-like appearance.

The test car which was the ES model, comes standard with dual zone climate control system, light and rain sensors, cruise-control and an abundance of storage space. Steering wheel controlled radio/CD player with mp3 compatibility is also standard.



Driving

The CR-V is available with either a diesel or a petrol engine. The test car was equipped with the latter - 150 hp/192 Nm four cylinder engine. It won't come as a surprise but as soon as the key was turned in the ignition the CR-V has little in common with any tough off-road monster. Whether it be cold or warm, the engine has all the refinement so characteristic of a Honda.



The engine is linked to a six-speed gearbox. On the one side the gearbox shifts gears very nicely; however on the other side there is that unfortunate positioning of its sixth gear which is inconveniently placed beside reverse. According to Honda the gearbox is equipped with a safety system whereby it is impossible for the car to go from full speed into reverse. However it would be less disconcerting if the reverse were positioned beside the first gear where there is less likelihood of things going wrong. A low gearing - an extra set of powerful gears used off-road - hasn't been installed.

Completely in line with the character of CR-V, the two litre petrol engine is not designed for off-roading. There is insufficient strength at low rpms. At high rpms, the risk is great that the car spontaneously digs in. Partly due to this lack of low gearing, the CR-V had a lot of trouble climbing the steep slope of the breakwater on top of which it was photographed. When the CR-V was required to act as a tow truck, the preference went to the diesel engine (140 hp/340 Nm).



The petrol engine is just fine for the daily home-work commute. The CR-V 2.0 is certainly not a fast car, but there is sufficient power with enough still in reserve when necessary. Overtaking safely and moving away quickly from the traffic lights aren't a problem. In sixth gear, the CR-V is noticeably quiet and pleasantly efficient on the motorway.

Four-wheel drive

Regardless of the type of engine, the CR-V is always equipped with dual sump pump four-wheel drive. Under normal circumstances, the power of the engine is transmitted to the front wheels. This prevents any superfluous mechanics from working, causing unnecessary high consumption. When the electronics detect that the front wheels are losing their grip, the power is automatically divided over all four wheels.

Such situations are rare, as the CR-V has an exceptionally good road handling for a SUV. This is due to the relatively low centre of gravity, a sporty but solid suspension and also a certain sluggishness. This may sound negative but it is not intended to be so. The CR-V reacts smoothly to steering movements, but it does take a little time before the car starts to lean. Before there is time for the car to become unbalanced, it has usually righted itself again with the danger long gone.



Conclusion

Is Honda going downhill with this off-roader that isn't an off-roader? The answer is dependent on the driver, as Honda has made a conscious choice with this new CR-V. This newcomer in spite of its appearance is not meant for the great adventurers of life.

The manufacturer has done everything to give this latest SUV the character of an ordinary car. It is solely its appearance and the amount of space where it resembles an off-road vehicle. The character of the engine, its road handling, its equipment and comfort are all similar to that available in a car with the same price tag. The road handling is so good that the CR-V is the best steering SUV in its class. ■



Specifications

Honda CR-V 2.0i VTEC ES

Size and weight

Length	453 cm
Width	182 cm
Height	168 cm
Wheelbase	263 cm
Kerb weight	1469 kg
Trailer	600 kg
Trailer - braked	1600 kg
Fuel capacity	58 l
Luggage space	556/955 l

Engine and performance

Capacity	1997 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/4
Max power	150 bhp @ 6200 rpm
Max torque	192 Nm @ 4200 rpm
Drive	vierwielaandrijving
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	10.2 secs
Top speed	190 km/h
Average mileage	8.1 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	10.4 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	6.7 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	192 gr / km



Price

Price	£ 20,215
Price base model	£ 18,990