

Honda puts fun into owning a hybrid with 2011 CR-Z

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*Metroland Media Group
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Can you have fun and drive a hybrid?

Honda thinks they have the answer to that in the 2011 CR-Z.

For those who go back a bit, the CR-X made from 1983-1991 was one of the most endearing cars Honda ever made. It was a small sporty coupe based on the Civic that had basically two seats with pert, chopped off tail. It didn't have a lot of power but the CR-X more than made up for that with nimble handling, frugal operation, affordable pricing and a whole lot of character.

That Honda chose the name CR-Z was not lost on journalists attending the press launch in Toronto although Honda claims it's just a coincidence. Right.

Nonetheless, the CR-Z is also a two-seat sporty coupe with a pert, chopped off tail and styling that screams, 'this car is a blast'.

And while the old CR-X was great on the gas, the new car goes a big one better; it's a hybrid.

The CR-Z starts with a 1.5-litre, SOHC four-cylinder gasoline engine based on the unit used in the Fit. By itself, the engine produces 113 hp and 107 lb/ft of torque. It is then hooked up a new, thinner, lighter electric mo-



Looking like the sassy sporty car it is, the 2011 Honda CR-Z is also one of the most affordable hybrids on the Canadian market. It is seen as a return to Honda core values of being frugal to operate and fun to drive.

tor which is part of Honda's Integrated Motor Assist (IMA) approach to hybrid cars.

Unlike Toyota where the engine augments the battery, Honda uses the lithium-ion rechargeable battery to give the engine an extra shot of acceleration and torque, kind of like an electric supercharger.

The motor gives 13 more horsepower, but more importantly, 58 lb/ft

of torque. When they are combined the CR-Z gives a rated 122 hp and 128 lb/ft of torque. You may notice that 107 and 58 lb/ft of torque don't add up to 128 lb/ft. That's because the two power plants make peak torque at quite different RPMs. The 128 lb/ft therefore is a rating of what torque is produced in real world conditions.

FYI, estimated fuel consumption is 6.5/5.3/6.0L/100 km city/highway/com-

bined with the standard six-speed manual transmission and 5.6/5.0/5.5L/100 km city/highway/combined for the optional Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT).

When it comes to the fun part, there are actually several ways to do it.

We'll get to the ride and handling in a bit, but first is the 3-Mode Drive System. To the left of the instrument panel are three buttons marked Sport, Normal and Econ.

Normal is the standard setting for engine response, steering, IMA and air conditioning. The engine always defaults to Normal at startup. Econ optimizes the system so IMA uses less power for better fuel consumption along with cutting back the power draw of the air conditioning. Power gives IMA priority toward performance by increasing throttle and electric steering response.

Similar to the Honda Insight Hybrid, you can turn watching your fuel consumption into a game.

The main instrument ahead of the driver is a very large tachometre in the centre of which is a round gauge giving a digital display for speed and other driver info. But around the edge of this gauge is a coloured ring that ranges from green for good mileage, to blue for not the best mileage to red for being fuel naughty.

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