

Honda CR-V is coolly efficient

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This robust powerplant delivers lively acceleration and has no problem passing or getting quickly up to highway speed. And it's also pretty fuel efficient at 10.1/7.5/9.0 L/100 km (city/hwy/comb).

Indeed, the CR-V fares well against its competition. With year-to-date sales up 42 per cent compared with overall compact SUV numbers that are only up 16 per cent, this puts the CR-V in the top three of its segment.

Why the continued success? It's not all about price, as this Honda, which starts at \$26,290 for the front-drive base model, is somewhere in the middle of its competitors, many of which also start as four cylinder front drivers.

And the CR-V is more expensive than compact and slightly less compact rivals from Hyundai and Kia.

With Honda, there's a quiet understanding that you get what you pay for. The vehicle lineup has a reputation for outstanding build quality, not to mention fit and finish, and the CR-V is no exception.

It starts with unit-body construction and features many strategically strengthened areas and liberal use of high strength steel for added rigidity. Body panels and interior components are tightly fitted, with what is known as a "zero" gap for the front and rear bumpers, or less than a single millimeter.

Sounds impressive from an engineering standpoint, but what I noticed was a vehicle that had virtually no squeaks and rattles, along with doors that closed with a satisfy-

ing 'thunk' rather than a tinny rattle.

Honda's application of lightweight sound absorbing materials to the floor, firewall, cargo area, side pillars and roof, along with double door seals, have created a fairly quiet cabin. Road noise does, however, intrude at highway speeds.

All CR-Vs also come with an electronically controlled five-speed automatic transmission with grade logic control to improve smoothness and reduce gear hunting on steep grades.

Even the base unit gets a long list of standard items that include 17-inch alloy wheels, air conditioning with air-filtration, power locks and windows, keyless entry, tilt and telescopic steering column, intermittent wipers front and rear, steering wheel-mounted cruise control, conversation mirror with sunglasses holder and four-speaker, 160-watt AM/FM/CD audio system with MP3/WMA compatibility and MP3/auxiliary input jack.

There's much more to explore and it's worth a visit to the Honda website to check out the features and trim levels in detail.

After my time with the CR-V, any one particular aspect of the vehicle, for example styling or performance didn't blow me away. Not that these were in any way lacking, but that everything worked so well together, I simply got in, turned the key and went about my business.

No excitement, no drama. Just a functional, efficient and comfortable vehicle that made my life easier both at work and with my family.

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