

WHEELS

Odyssey has all the right features

By JIM ROBINSON
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The only problem Honda faces with its new minivan, the Odyssey, is keeping customers at bay until they go on sale in mid-December.

"Brilliant" is a word I seldom use with any vehicle, but the new Odyssey is just that. As we should have expected from Honda, it is nimble, capacious, and innovative all at the same time.

My first view of the Odyssey was walking around a corner looking for the new V6-powered Accord and being met by a minivan of Villager proportions.

With a rather pretty pug nose, the Odyssey was a surprise and yet very Honda all at once. On the outside it uses four doors instead of a sliding unit at one side.

Inside, it is airy and bright with startling headroom. Like the Civic, the inside room belies what seems to be outward compactness. And sitting behind the steering wheel, one knows instantly he/she's driving a Honda thanks to the familiar gauging and placement of switchgear. For anyone who loved their Civic or Accord, they are going to be made to feel very much at home. You've heard minivan makers say their vehicle drives like a car; but

in fact, they drive like a mini-van particularly the first-generation ones with rear drive which were based on small pickup trucks. The Odyssey really does drive like a car. At one point, my co-driver was going 80 mph on a two-lane road and I thought we were doing 60 mph. In some of the other frontdrive minivans, 80 mph (140 kmh) is a very noisy place to be, but not so in the Odyssey. That's due to the adoption of four-wheel, double wishbone independent suspension with Honda Progressive Valve (HPC) shock absorbers and stabilizer bars all of which were factored to make the vehicle feel like an Accord. Braking is by four-wheel discs with ABS as an option.

The only power plant available is Honda's trusty 2.2-litre, four cylinder, 140 hp, 16-valve engine, mounted transversely and driving the front wheels though a four-speed, electronic automatic transmission, the only one offered, a five-speed manual being unavailable. Also unavailable (until perhaps next year) is the 2.7-litre V6 which has finally found its way into the Honda lineup. Based on my time with the Odyssey, I don't believe the V6 is necessary. However, that was done with just two on board. The full-load family

test will be coming early in 1995.

At this writing, Honda had not finalized pricing but it should be in the \$26,000-\$28,000 range. Honda brass used Previa, MPV, and Villager as segment targets. No mention was made of Caravan/Voyager.

All Odyssey models in Canada come in a single trim level with standard features including dual air bags, air conditioning, power windows-mirrors-locks, and 15-inch wheels with all-season tires. As all four doors have windows, it's thought this should supply enough secondary ventilation. The rear side windows are fixed.

Odyssey comes in two seating plans.

The six-seater has two captain's chairs in the middle row that can be removed individually while the seven seater has a fold-forward, 50/50 split centre bench seat.

The front two seats are captain's chairs.

It is with the rear seat that the innovation can be found. It can be folded down to disappear under the floor. It can be folded flat (along with the centre bench) to create a day bed. Lastly the seat cushion can be folded up and the seat back down to create a rearward facing twin seat which the Japanese have dubbed "fishing mode".

And it should be noted that the second and third rows of seats come with headrests for safety.

And speaking of safety, the Odyssey meets all 1997 safety requirements for side impact protection plus a 30-mph offset front, frontal and rear impact protection, crush zones designed in.

Honda has learned well from the competition; and while being among the last of the big automakers to offer a minivan, they have taken the genre another giant step forward.



Honda's minivan, the 1995 Odyssey, is a bright, innovative design that is truly car-like to drive.

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