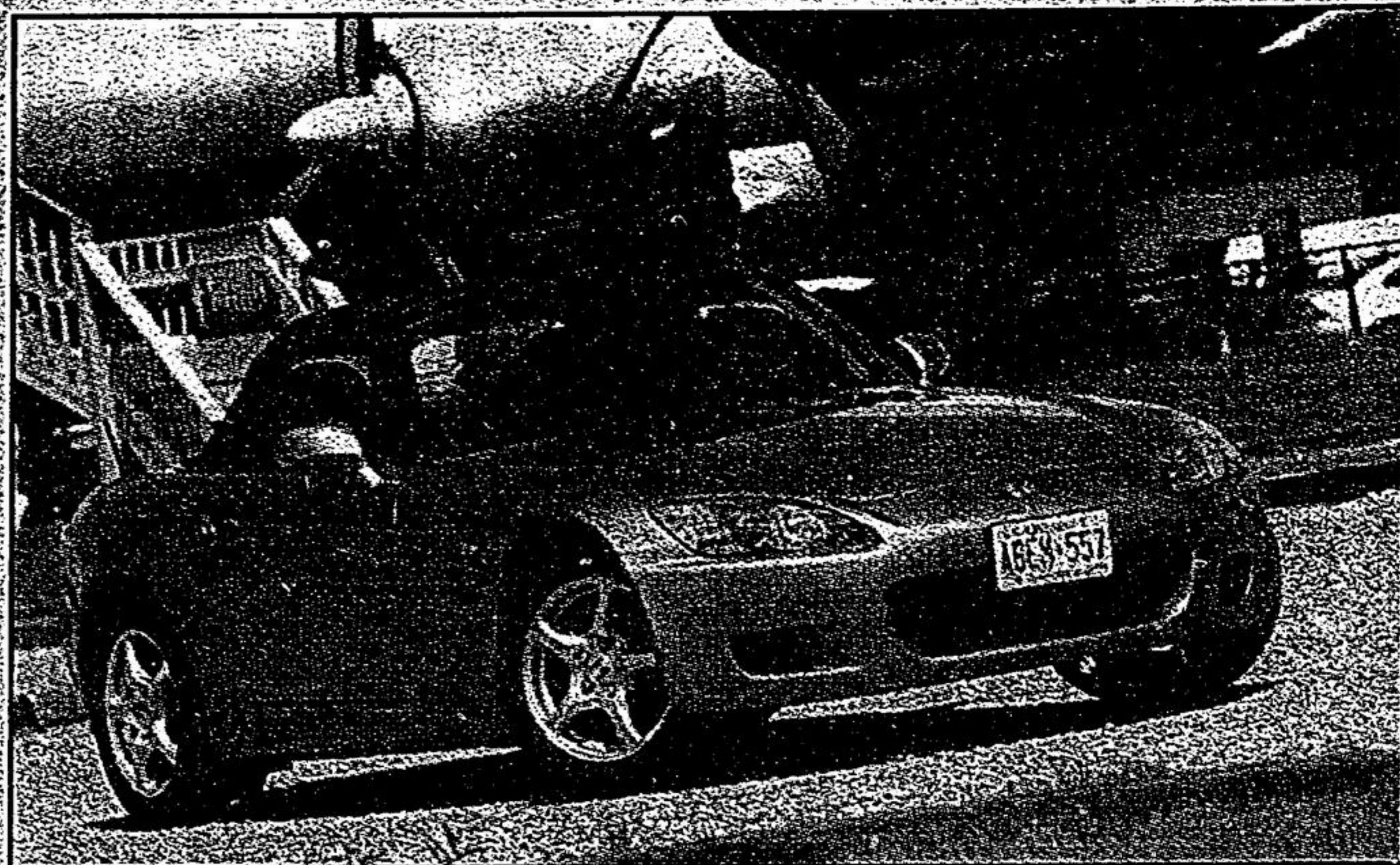


\$2000 speeds down the track

Shown here (right) is the cockpit which controls the 2.0L 240 hp VTEC engine



from page 15

Enough looking around. Key the ignition to on and reach to the far left for the red button marked "Engine Start." I love that button. I know it's a minor, almost frivolous detail. But just the fact that the button is there speaks volumes about Honda's attitude, intent and the race car personality of the S2000.

Push the button and you awaken a 2.0L, 16-valve 4-cylinder VTEC engine that redlines at 9000 rpm and harnesses 240 hp @ 8300 rpm and 153 lb-ft of torque. That's an amazing 120 horsepower per litre - the highest power output per litre of any normally

aspirated engine in the world - yet its fuel-efficient design meets California's LEV standards.

Slip the car into gear, start rolling and the memories of those hot laps on the race track come back even stronger. Okay maneuvering the S2000 through a transport truck slalom on a rainy 401 may seem a long way away from top-down motoring on an open race track but that engine sound, the notchy little six-speed shifter, the performance and taut handling seem to bring it all back again.

Where other sports cars rely on big engine muscle, the S2000 uses the thoroughbred high-revving technology from its Formula One disciplines. As one auto scribe put it, "Ya gotta drive it like ya

just stole it." Even at a sedate 100 kph, the engine revs at 3500 rpm in sixth gear.

Don't expect to be pampered in the S2000 either. The ride is firm and rugged, in keeping with traditional no-bones-about-it roadster handling that's biased towards performance, not comfort.

Sure, there are modern comforts: Power roof, Power windows, Keyless entry. But there are also a few things missing that I've put on my wish list. Like an insulated roof that doesn't expose a tangle of metal next to your head. Like a better audio system. And like a glass rear window - what were they thinking? - instead of the cheesy plastic backlight.

But, in the end, who cares? Nit-picks fade like tire dust when you floor the accelerator and begin to snick the stubby shifter through the short throws.

First gear, slip the clutch and acceleration is smooth and linear up to about 6000 rpm when the VTEC engine shifts into a different cam profile, boosting torque with a turbo-like surge that pushes you, vroom, into the seat and up to 9000

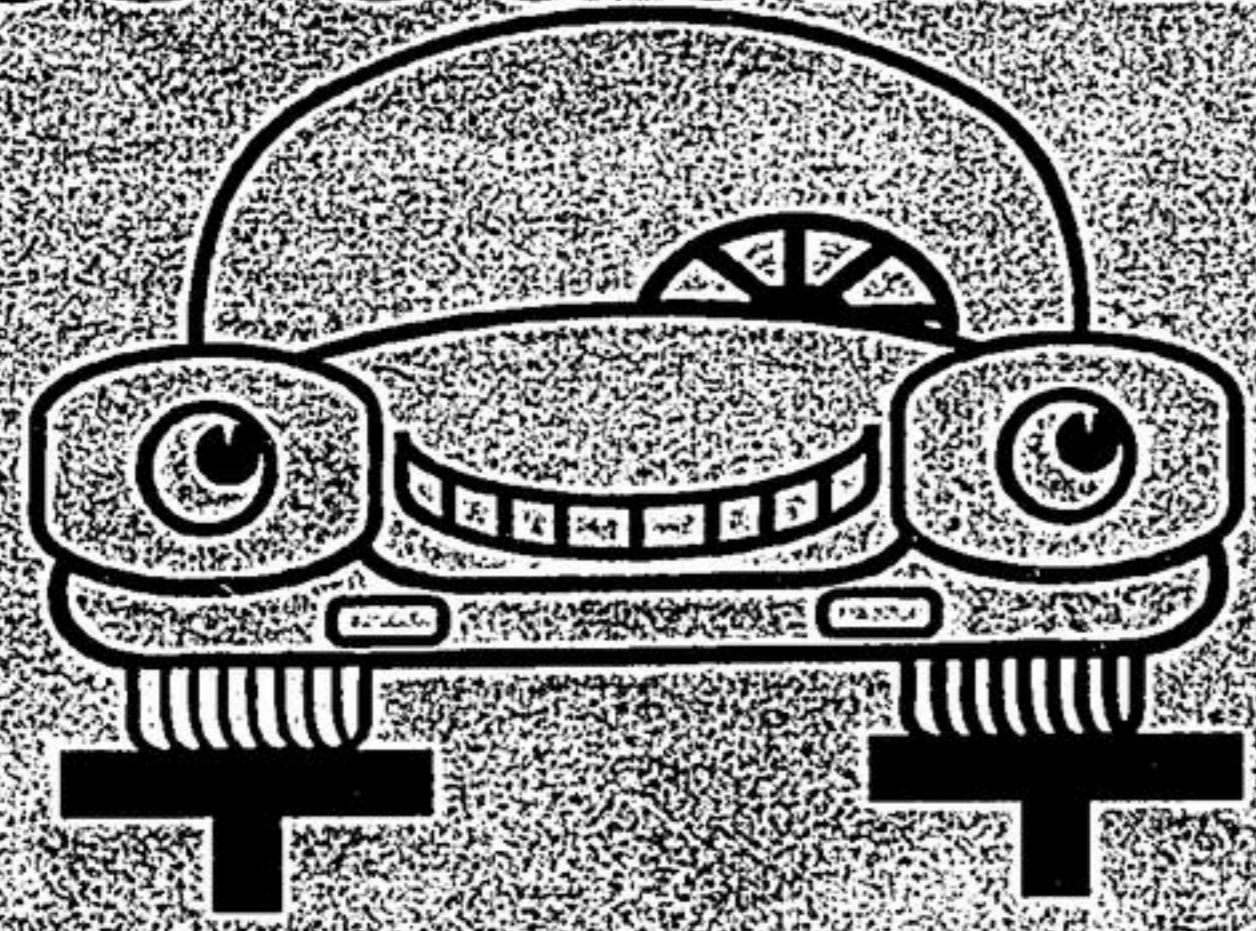
rpm and 60 kph in an extra-fast heartbeat. Second verse, same as the first. Shift up, watch the tach climb and boom - you're up to 100 kph. Third gear and the banshee wail begins anew, pushing you up past 130 kph. Fourth gear, and the temptation to keeping pushing further is enough to make you grind your teeth, but, sorry, it's time to chicken out.

I never had quite enough straightaway on the track to reach the 225+ kph top end and I'd probably be making the acquaintance of the local constabulary with guns drawn if I tried something that stupid on a public road.

But every time you pull up at a red light, you get to restart the sequence. A sequence I never seemed to get tired of. A combination of engine, transmission, performance and handling that kept me coming back for more.

It reminded me again of that first weekend at the track. I kept coming back to the same pegboard. I'd stand there with a guilty look on my face - like a kid who's been caught stealing from the candy store. I'd stare at the keys for a while. Then I'd ask, "Umm ... I'd mumble. "Is the S2000 available?"

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