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New-look CR-V Ratchets Up Honda's High Standards

CAReport



By Anne Fracassa
 Avanti NewsFeatures
ANNE FRACASSA

The 2002 Honda CR-V is all new this year - everything from the chassis, body and engine to the interior refinements that just about blew my mind -- it's all changed.

I was irritated with the new placement of the emergency brake/parking brake placement when I hopped in the CR-V. It's not mounted on the floor any longer. It's actually placed in the center instrument panel, right next to the climate controls and stereo buttons and functions.

I was irritated because the very first time I used it, it pinched my fingers. I guess I wasn't watching myself well enough. It didn't happen again, I'll tell you that. Nearly needed a Band-Aid and dermaplan to stop the pain.

But once I got used to it, I actually found it to be convenient and a much more logical place for any hand brake to be. Different, to be sure, but actually much more convenient.

Let's get back to this little sport ute's features that are new this year. There are more standard features, more luxury appointments, more power - more safety features and more opportunities for you to use this sport ute for what it's intended for.

You know what impressed me the most? It was the amount of interior room that the CR-V provides. Seating for five isn't a stretch. It's a reality. A comfortable reality.

It's also lots more quiet. You don't have to turn up the radio when you start the engine or roll down the highway. You don't have to scream above the roar of the road noise, either.

The CR-V's standard engine is a brand new 2.4 liter 16-valve dual overhead cam 4-cylinder VTEC engine that promises -- and delivers -- 160 horsepower. Excuse me. It's an i-VTEC engine. The "i" stands for intelligent. This engine provides 10 more horsepower and 22 percent more torque from last year's model. Acceleration has also been improved, along with new fuel economy numbers - 22 mpg city and 26 mpg on the highway. All CR-Vs are certified to meet the new LEV-2 emission standards.

The CR-V I drove was a five-speed manual that's mounted on the floor. When you choose the



High on comfort, gas mileage and versatility. 2002 Honda CR-V. Vehicle class: Special purpose sport-utility vehicle; Power: 2.4-liter dual overhead cam 16 valve 4-cylinder; Mileage: 22 city/26 highway; Where built: Sayama, Saitama, Japan.; Price as driven: \$22,740

automatic, you'll find the gear shifter mounted on the instrument panel. And with the parking brake located also on the center instrument panel, there's a place to put your extra cargo on the floor between the two front bucket seats.

The rear seat can fold down and allow you to haul a whopping 72 cubic feet of cargo. The 60/40 rear seat also moves independently and can travel nearly 7 inches back and forth and features a center armrest that has a couple of cupholders. Safety doesn't take a back seat, either. All three rear passengers are treated to 3-point seat belts and headrests.

Like I said before, I really enjoyed the added room up front. I'm not overly tall, but the leg, hip and shoulder room was nice to have for such a seemingly little SUV. The seats are actually larger this year, which provides added comfort for everyone.

Standard equipment list includes a moonroof, cassette and CD player and anti-lock brake system this year, too. Something pretty cool: The rear cargo floor can double as a picnic table.

I mentioned the new chassis. Well, it was re-engineered to increase torsional rigidity by 50 percent and bending rigidity by 30 percent. Safety issues are met with advanced dual-stage dual air bags and standard side air bags. And the front belts have pre-tensioners.

Want to know about other standard equipment? How about dual power mirrors, intermittent front

and rear windshield wipers and washers, air conditioning that features advanced filtration, power windows, power door locks, floor mats, anti-theft system and cruise control.

There are three distinct trim levels available with the CR-V: LX, LX 4-wheel drive and EX 4-wheel drive, all of which are well-equipped.

A little bit of trivia for you: Did you know that the CR-V was introduced into the U.S. market in 1997? It was also the first "mini-ute" introduced. Way back then, the CR-V broke new ground in the truck market and soon became the best-selling vehicle in the new segment of specialty vehicles.

I've recommended the CR-V to several people. A friend who took my advice and bought one is a very happy camper these days, tooling around the country in his CR-V. He thinks nothing of traveling to New York, Chicago or Pennsylvania with his significant other beside him -- just for the weekend.

Joe keeps telling me that it's great on mileage and really good for him. He's never had a problem with his CR-V and tells me that every time I see him. Good for him.

I'd recommend the CR-V to anyone in the market for a small sport ute that's high on comfort, higher on mileage and even higher on the versatility scale. The Honda CR-V will definitely take you where you need to go -- in style.

Anne Fracassa is editor of Avanti NewsFeatures. Send questions for Anne to: Avanti1054@aol.com



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