

## DRIVES

2008 HONDA  
ACCORD



## A MAJOR ACCORD

HONDA'S EIGHTH-GENERATION MIDSIZER  
AIMS FOR SEGMENT DOMINATION

BY BOB GRITZINGER



AFTER 32 YEARS OF SUCCESS with the Accord, Honda folks could be forgiven if, in a moment of weakness, they took their eyes off the ball and let the all-new 2008 model slide by with minimal changes.

Not a chance.

Honda sells about 400,000 Accords in the United States every year, representing about one-third of the company's U.S. volume. So when it came time to remake the Accord, everyone from the lowliest carpet installer to Gary Robinson, product planning head for the eighth-generation

Accord, knew what was on the line.

"Our goal was to surpass everyone and become the new benchmark," said Robinson.



It would be easy to say "Mission accomplished" just by scanning the stats on the 2008 Accord. Everything about the new model is larger or better.

Overall, the 2008 Accord sedan is 3.0 inches longer than the car it replaces and rides on a wheelbase that is 2.3 inches longer with a track more than an inch wider. Height grows by nearly an inch. The net effect: For the first time, the five-passenger Accord sedan jumps into the EPA large-sedan segment, with an interior volume up 3.3 cubic feet, to 106.0 cubic feet. To get an idea of how much the Accord has grown over the generations, here's a factoid: The first-generation Accord sat on a 93.0-inch wheelbase, shorter than that of the current Honda Fit.

For 2008, Honda further differentiates the sporty coupe model, which is 2.3 inches shorter in wheelbase

compared with the sedan and shares only its door mirrors and handles with the sedan.

Under the hood, the flagship Accord gets the largest and most powerful engine ever offered in a Honda car, a 3.5-liter V6 producing 268 hp at 6200 rpm and 248 lb-ft of torque at 5000 rpm, up 24 hp from the 2007 model's 3.0-liter V6. In all but the coupe with the V6 and six-speed manual transmission, V6 Accords feature an i-VTEC system with cylinder deactivation—but for 2008, there's an extra twist. Unlike the previous V6 that saved fuel by shifting from six- to three-cylinder operation in low-load driving conditions, the new engine chooses from three-, four- and six-cylinder modes, depending on power demand. Honda estimates that despite an increase in displacement, the new V6 still will be more fuel-efficient than its predecessor, with an estimated 19 mpg city and 29 mpg highway.

Other engine choices include a non-cylinder-deactivation V6 in the coupe equipped with a six-speed manual transmission and two 2.4-liter four-cylinder options. The base 2.4-liter produces 177 hp and 161 lb-ft of torque, while the more powerful 2.4-liter makes 190 hp and 162 lb-ft of torque.

One powertrain option you won't find for 2008 is the gasoline-electric hybrid. Dan Bonawitz, Honda vice president of corporate planning, said Honda will focus on putting hybrid powertrains in Civic-sized vehicles.

## SPECS

**ON SALE:** September

**BASE PRICE:** \$20,000 (est)

**DRIVETRAIN:** 2.4-liter, 177-hp, 161-lb-ft I4; fwd, five-speed manual

**CURB WEIGHT:** 3213 lb

**0 TO 60 MPH:** N/A

**FUEL ECONOMY (EPA CITY/HIGHWAY):** 25/34 mpg (mfr est)

Larger cars and Honda's trucks and sport/utility vehicles are good candidates for diesel power, he said.

All Accords for 2008 come equipped with four-wheel antilock disc brakes and a new multilink rear suspension system. A simple yet effective variable-gear-ratio steering system maintains a solid on-center feel and responsiveness while providing low effort and rapid response in low-speed, sharp-turning situations.

In our sampling of the full range of 2008 Accords, we found the cars stable, solid and quiet on the road, especially in models equipped with Active Noise Control sound cancellation. Steering and brakes are highly responsive, and the car feels well planted on the road. We haven't track-tested the car yet, but it was hard to find a condition on public roads that induced either under- or oversteer. The new rear suspension did a great job of keeping the rubber in solid contact with the road.

When driving the multi-cylinder-deactivation V6, we did detect a

hybridlike torque-on/torque-off feel when cruising at 60 or 70 mph under slight throttle (at about 2000 to 2500 rpm). Because the green "ECO" indicator was illuminated, showing that the engine was running in fuel-saving economy mode, we were no doubt picking up the engine cycling between four- and three-cylinder modes.

The best of the crop—for enthusiasts, at least—is the V6 coupe with six-speed manual gearbox. The coupe has a strong engine-and-transmission combination, with a slick short shifter that never missed a gear and a VTEC-induced engine scream that's enough to make any driver smile.

The 190-hp, 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine wasn't as noisy as its 177-hp counterpart, but both felt plenty powerful. The base model's interior materials seemed inferior, but if that's all your pocketbook will allow, there's nothing about the base Accord that you can't live with.

All Accord interiors are greatly improved, with a center stack that spreads out across more real estate, allowing for buttons that are larger and easier to read and punch, as well as logical controls for the ventilation and audio systems. A new single controller for the navigation system replaces the touch screen and allowed Honda to move the nav screen into the driver's line of sight.

The 2008 Accord goes on sale in September (Sept. 12 for sedan, Sept. 20 for coupe), priced between \$20,000 and \$30,000.

