


Special  
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# Honda delivers a knockout in Accord coupe

Looks good, sounds good, and it takes off like a rocket

## Test Drive



Photos by Honda

### What stands out

- ▶ **Big.** Not huge, but more spacious than its midsize designation suggests.
- ▶ **Deluxe.** Plenty of standard features, even on the cheap.
- ▶ **Sporty.** Tight feel behind the wheel.

By James R Healey  
USA TODAY

Honda has marketed a coupe version of the Accord long enough to know a couple of key things.

Having a coupe in the line jazzes up the image of all Accords, making buyers of the four-door sedan feel less like they're settling for a family car and more like they're getting something sporty on the sly.

Having a coupe boosts sales just about enough to keep one in the lineup.

So Honda included a coupe model when

it gave the Accord a clean-sheet makeover for the 2008 model year.

Hewing to the definition of a coupe, it is a two-door and, following the custom for coupes, is sleeker, shorter and sportier overall than the sedan.

In fact, it's a knockout, filling the promise of the sweet-looking concept car that Honda exhibited at auto shows much better than the sedan does.

The test car was a well-equipped model with V-6 engine, manual transmission and leather upholstery. It could stand tire-to-tire with some luxury models.

Immediately apparent: It's a rocket. Nail the throttle in first or second gear, and the engine revs to its 6,800 rpm redline on the tachometer almost before you're ready to

shift up to the next cog. The vehicle shoots forward with verve matching the engine's liveliness.

It sounds good, too.

It's big. The sedan on which it's based has moved up from midsize to — barely — full size. Though the coupe, typically, is shorter and smaller inside than the sedan, and remains a midsize car, it still benefits from the upsizing.

The rear seat, for those nimble enough to get there, is roomy enough for two adults or three kids. Rare. And the front seats are expansive.

Compared with the Nissan Altima coupe (Test Drive, Sept. 7), the Accord is bigger, more luxurious and not quite as crisp-feeling.

It's tough to drive smoothly. The interplay between the clutch and the throttle

## 2008 Honda Accord coupe

► **What is it?** Coupe version of redesigned 2008 Accord. Midsize, front-wheel drive; smaller, sleeker than the sedan and has only two doors.

► **How much?** Prices for four-cylinder models range from \$22,495 to \$26,595, including \$635 destination charge. V-6 is \$28,945. Navigation system, available on top models, adds \$2,200. Too new for deep discounts.

► **How many?** 50,000 a year, Honda forecasts.

► **What's the drivetrain?** Base engine is 2.4-liter four-cylinder rated 190 horsepower at 7,000 rpm, 162 pounds-feet of torque at 4,400 rpm; five-speed manual transmission (five-speed automatic optional).

Optional: 3.5-liter V-6 rated 268 hp at 6,200, 248 lbs.-ft. at 5,000; five-speed automatic or six-speed manual is standard, depending on model.

Traction control is standard on all models.

► **What's the safety gear?** Front and side-impact air bags

for front occupants, head-curtain air bags front and rear; anti-lock brakes; stability control.

► **What's the rest?** Standard on all models: air conditioning; power steering, brakes, locks, windows, mirrors, driver's seat; cruise control; tilt-adjustable and telescoping steering column; AM/FM/CD/MP3-compatible stereo with auxiliary jack.

► **How big?** Longer, taller, wider, heavier than Nissan Altima coupe (Test Drive, Sept. 7). Accord coupe is 190.9 inches long, 72.7 inches wide, 56.4 inches tall on 107.9-inch wheelbase.

► **How thirsty?** Four-cylinder is rated 21 mpg in town, 30 on the highway, 24 in combined driving with automatic transmission, 22/31/25 with manual. V-6 is 19/28/22 with manual, 17/25/20 with automatic. V-6 manual test car recorded 17 mpg in suburban driving.

► **Overall:** Highly appealing blend of style, comfort, performance.

makes it hard to avoid at least a slightly jerky engagement when shifting up or down. Mitigating: The V-6 has enough low-speed torque to drive smoothly if you're a heathen and refuse to shift into a lower gear when you oughta.

Of course, opting for the automatic transmission (\$800) eliminates the issue.

A four-cylinder coupe wasn't available to test, but the four-cylinder sedans are pretty accommodating, as long as you don't demand too much from the smaller engine's more modest power output.

Keeping with the coupe's sporty intent, the only four-cylinder available is the 190-horsepower version. The 177-hp engine in the base sedan isn't available in the coupe.

The coupe's V-6 lacks the cylinder cutoff feature of the same engine in the sedan. Honda calls it variable cylinder management (VCM) and says it saves fuel, using only as many cylinders as needed for the circumstances. Curiously, it makes scant difference in the cars' fuel-economy ratings, giving the VCM sedan merely one more mpg on the highway but otherwise no advantage.

The tested coupe's suspension delivered a remarkable blend of smooth, luxurious ride and agile, responsive handling.

You could enjoy the excitement of snapping around a turn and immediately chase that with the sublime delight of burbling along as if you were out for a Sunday drive in your vintage Cadillac. A dual-duty buggy that could match your mood.

Packing that pair of attributes into a single machine is difficult, and it broadens the Accord coupe's appeal beyond the simply sporty types generally attracted to sleek, two-door cars.

Steering felt right. Point the car straight, and that's where it went, without lots of nibbling steering corrections you still find in plenty of



otherwise good machines.

The instrument panel is a refreshing change. Instead of trying to control myriad functions via a joystick combined with a knob, as in Mercedes-Benz, BMW and Audi, Honda slaps big, bold buttons

and controls right out in plain sight and easy reach. There are enough to overwhelm the eye, but it takes little time to learn them and become grateful for the straightforward presentation.

And, of course, it gives any easily impressed friends and relatives a powerful message: Look at all the stuff in my car.

Joy-knobs can get enough to suit them with the optional navigation system (\$2,200).

Hard-core sporty folks, those who think a car can't handle well unless it has a stiff-enough suspension to whack you around on even small bumps, probably aren't Accord coupe types.

Those who want a satisfying blend of ride comfort and handling precision, as well as sharp looks, plenty of standard features and unexpected room inside, could have trouble finding a candidate as strong as the Accord coupe.

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