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Honda gets Accord Crosstour just right

Hatchback sports an impressive blend of ride comfort, bump-taming

By James R. Healey
USA TODAY

You could make a strong case that, with the launch of the Accord Crosstour on Nov. 20, Honda's now gotten the Accord right.

Honda — playing the same future games that everybody in the business does — decided awhile back that a big chunk of buyers would be pining about now for an Accord-size vehicle that was handier than a sedan and sportier than a mainstream crossover-utility vehicle.

Those would be, Honda speculated, folks beginning a family or folks whose kids have flown. Crosstour is intended to be their new best friend.

You're forgiven if you can't quite place the type of vehicle. Is it a coupe-ish, utility-ish, what-ish ... ?

No. It's a hatchback. Period.

It sits 2 inches higher off the ground than the Accord sedan on which it's based, for foul-weather and bad-road ground clearance, and it offers very basic all-wheel drive as an option.

It is what in the European market is called a five-door — a four-door sedan with a hatch making the fifth door. You can say the same about the BMW X6 or Honda's Acura ZDX. Remarkable, really, that after years of hatch rejection, the industry's inching back toward what's always been the best, most practical way to configure a sedan.

Besides the obvious — a sharply sloping roofline — Crosstour differs from the Accord sedan several ways: beefier grille, nifty blue instrument pointer lighting, 299 to 487 more pounds than similar Accord sedans, 2 inches wider than the sedan outside (though, strangely, an inch or so less inside). And it's the only Accord to offer AWD, though a more primitive type than, say, the Subaru Legacy provides.

The sloping rear roof makes the 2010 Accord Crosstour distinctive, unlike, say, the flat-roofed Toyota Venza based on the Camry sedan. But the styling is color-dependent. A white test car looked as if it had been eating bonbons on the couch all



Honda

Higher ground clearance: The 2010 Accord Crosstour EX-L is a hatchback that Honda calls a crossover-utility vehicle.

day. A dark gray tester looked trimmer.

The hatch is handier than a trunk, and space behind Crosstour's back seat is twice that of an Accord sedan trunk.

Honda's brought its best cargo-consciousness to the stowage area. Under-floor bins ape the feature in the Honda Ridgeline pickup. A big removable and washable center bin is flanked by two smaller ones. The covers of all three tubs can be reversed, offering carpet or a durable hard-plastic surface.

But there's no stash site for the covers if you overfill the bins. You have to leave them loose in the car or in your garage.

The all-wheel drive, which Honda calls Real Time, is like that on its Element and CR-V small SUVs. Mainly a front-drive system, it transfers some power to the back wheels when, and only when, the fronts slip, Honda says.

Yes, the Honda setup responds quickly. But AWD almost always provides better stability and security if it anticipates and can power all the wheels a moment before



What stands out

- ▶ **Hefty.** Two tons hurts mpg, acceleration.
- ▶ **Happy.** How you'll feel behind the wheel.
- ▶ **Quirky.** Hatchback roofline has to grow on you.

they lose traction, rather than a moment after. The system is lighter and cheaper than smarter AWD setups, so it's easy to see why Honda chose it. And it worked fine in very wet weather. No winter roads were available for severe weather testing.



Photos by Honda

2010 Accord Crosstour EX-L: Grille differs from the Accord sedan. Some trim differs, too. Cargo space is generous.

2010 Honda Accord Crosstour

► **What?** A high-riding hatchback version of the Accord sedan for those who want a hint of SUV and a bushel of utility in their sedans. Available with front-wheel drive (FWD) or all-wheel drive (AWD).

► **When?** On sale since Nov. 20.

► **Where?** Made at East Liberty, Ohio.

► **Why?** Fill a gap that Honda perceived between Accord sedan and Pilot SUV.

► **How much?** Pricy. EX FWD starts at \$30,380 including \$710 shipping. EX-L (leather), the lowest-price AWD, is \$34,710. Loaded test car, AWD EX-L with navigation, was \$36,930.

► **How powerful?** 3.5-liter V-6 rated 271 horsepower at 6,200 rpm, 254 pounds-feet of torque at 5,000; five-speed automat-

ic transmission.

*► **How big?** Inches its way into full size: 196.8 inches long, 65.7 in. tall (including 4-in. antenna), 74.7 in. wide on a 110.1-in. wheelbase. Weighs 3,852 to 4,070 lbs. Turning circle diameter: 40.2 ft.

Passenger space: 101.4 cubic feet (100.8 cu. ft., AWD). Cargo: 25.7 cu. ft. behind rear seat, 51.3 cu. ft. when seat's folded.

Tows 1,500 lbs.

► **How thirsty?** Rated 18 mpg in town, 27 mpg on the highway, 21 in combined driving (FWD), 17/25/20 (AWD). Trip computer in AWD tester showed 17.1 mpg (5.75 gallons per 100 miles) in suburban



use, FWD tester showed 18.7 mpg (5.35 gal./100) in mostly city use.

Burns regular, holds 18.5 gallons.

► **Overall:** Feels just right.

But how's the darn thing drive? That's the point, isn't it?

Yes, it is. And it drives great. But there's literally a price for the package. Crosstour's a premium model, ranging from about \$30,000 to \$37,000, which is \$2,865 to \$3,665 more than similar Accord sedans. And the fuel economy is mediocre.

Still:

► It had one of the best blends of ride comfort and bump-taming found in any test car for years. It was quite at home on a tight S corner that's part of the Test Drive routine, taken as fast as traffic and bravery will allow. That was surprising. Extra weight usually degrades handling.

Crosstour swallowed almost without acknowledgment hefty drainage channels, also taken briskly, that populate other parts of the Test Drive route.

Steering was a commendable combo of straight-ahead finesse and quick-turning response. Brakes felt above average.

► Seats were unusually comfortable for a Honda, allowing good retraction of the lumbar support and, in the testers, providing inviting leather surfaces.

In back, the tape measure says head and legroom are about even with the sedan, but it nevertheless felt tight for a leggy adult back there.

► Optional navigation system was aggravatingly slow to load and signal its readiness, but a peach otherwise. It could be used while underway (always and only by a passenger, you understand, for safety). Spelling the names of streets or points of interest was fast because of how the dial and the alphabet display are set up.

► The 3.5-liter V-6, same as available in the Accord sedan and the only engine offered for the Crosstour, ran like a champ, making nice noises doing so. Crosstour's extra weight dampened the yee-haw index when applying wide-open throttle.

The five-speed automatic shifted briskly and smoothly.

► Details were a mix. Old-school parking brake sat right there against the center tunnel. No monkeying with an electronic faux brake device to save console space. But Crosstour didn't want for cubbies and bins on the console.

Fuel-filler door latch down by the floor is gone. Now you just push the fuel door and it pops open, as on most vehicles. If fuel goes back to \$4 a gallon and siphonistas are on the prowl, you'll wish the latch were back inside, secure when you lock the car.

No blind-spot warning blinkers in the outside mirrors — and that was good. Kept the driver more attentive to surrounding traffic. Rearview camera provided a crisp image in the navi screen when backing.

By whatever alchemy, Honda's made the Crosstour such a delight that other Accords, and rival sedans, seem pale.