

ELECTRONICALLY REPRINTED
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Driven



2013 Honda Fit EV

MOTEGI, JAPAN

in the world of alternative-fuel vehicles, where, despite automakers' best efforts and billions of dollars, sales of electric vehicles just will not ignite. That hasn't deterred new entries, though. The pioneering Nissan Leaf is being pursued by the Mitsubishi i, the Ford Focus Electric, and—coming this summer—Honda's own Fit EV.

The familiar Fit subcompact trades its 1.5-liter four-cylinder gasoline engine for a 123-hp electric motor and its fuel tank for a large, lithium-ion battery. The EPA estimates an 82¹ combined mile range rating, and thanks to an onboard charger with twice the capacity of the Leaf's, a full recharge takes about three hours² from a 240-volt supply. The Fit's contribution to electrified driving is far more significant than a short charging time, though. It sets a high-water mark in driving dynamics for any EV not wearing a Tesla badge. Rather than rest on the merits of an electric drivetrain, Honda backed this green machine with exceptional road manners that make it surprisingly fun to drive.

Characteristic of EVs, the Fit squirts off the line with the graceful pull of low-end, electric-motor torque, but whereas the Leaf's oomph quickly

falls off as velocity builds, the Fit maintains its punch above city speeds. Rolling onto the accelerator from 30 mph brings a strong surge that effortlessly propels the Fit to highway speeds. A three-mode drive system like the one in the CR-Z hybrid coupe

recalibrates the right pedal with noticeable effect. Normal mode proves to be the most agreeable, bracketed by the hyperjumpy Sport mode and the lethargic Econ mode.

The pinky-finger steering effort of the Leaf is put to shame by the Fit's beautifully weighted wheel. The driver doesn't receive much feel from the Michelin Energy Saver A/S tires, but there's enough effort required to get the impression that the steering wheel is actually attached to something. The Michelins also find more grip than the Leaf's Bridgestone Ecopia rubber, making the Fit less susceptible to squealing the front tires on quick starts with the wheels turned.

The packaging of the lithium-ion battery led Honda engineers to replace the Fit's torsion-beam rear suspension with a more sophisticated multilink setup. That change pays off in comfort more than performance, with a ride that is much more supple than that of the gasoline-powered Fit. Handling is quite good, too. Compared with the Leaf, the Fit EV feels like a Mazda Miata, with quicker turn-in and crisper body control.

Honda employees are enthusiastic about turning waste into something useful...⁴



Conversion from gasoline to electric propulsion comes with only minor changes to the Fit's styling. Inside, the large battery pack eats into rear-seat space, diminishing some of the car's versatility.

The Specs // ON SALE:

Mid-2012 (lease only)

PRICE: \$36,625³

MOTOR: AC synchronous, 123 hp, 189 lb-ft

DRIVE: Front-wheel

EST. RANGE: 82 miles combined range rating (adjusted)

The Fit EV creates electricity just by slowing down. Honda claims to have made the regenerative-braking process more efficient by fitting fully electrically controlled brakes to this production car. Sounds like a disaster, right? Wrong. Giving the computers more control allows for more precision in blending friction and regenerative braking and makes the pedal response more linear. Honda hasn't eliminated the hydraulics, either. Brake fluid still pushes the pads into the discs and serves as a fail-safe if the electronics flake out.

To accommodate the 20-kWh battery

pack that spans the space between the wheels and raises the floor pan, the gas-powered Fit's versatile "magic" folding back seat has done a disappearing act. It can no longer moonlight as a cavernous cargo van, but with the seatbacks folded, the Fit boasts an almost-level floor that is far more useful than what you get in the Leaf. The electric Fit also preserves a remarkably spacious and airy feel whether you're sitting in the front or the rear. The rest of the interior is familiar save for the addition of automatic climate control and a handful of new gauges in the instrument cluster.

Honda's conservative rollout plan calls for just 1100 electric Fits to be leased (for \$389³ a month for well-qualified lessees; total due at lease signing \$389, plus tax and title) over the next three years in California, Oregon, and six East Coast markets. With the Fit EV, Honda has elevated our expectations for electric cars, introducing a level of driving fun that is missing from the Leaf. The retrofitted Fit is an EV that's worth driving for reasons other than its electric drivetrain. Honda has started the fire. Now it just needs to fan the flames.

— Eric Tingwall

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1 - 132/105/118 city/highway/combined miles per gallon of gasoline-equivalent (MPGe) rating; 82 mile combined (city/highway) driving range rating (adjusted). Ratings determined by EPA. Your MPGe and range will vary depending on driving conditions, how you drive and maintain your vehicle, battery age/condition, and other factors. For additional information about EPA ratings, visit <http://www.fueleconomy.gov/feg/label/learn-more-electric-label.shtml>.

2 - The Fit EV battery can be recharged in less than 3 hours from a low charge indicator illumination point when connected to a 240-volt circuit.

3 - Pricing edited since initial publication to reflect current pricing. Subject to limited availability through October 2014 in designated market regions on approved credit through American Honda Finance Corp. Closed end lease for 2013 Honda Fit EV for well-qualified lessees meeting specific use and operation requirements. Not all applicants will qualify. No purchase option at lease end. MSRP \$37,415 (includes destination). Excludes tax, title, license, registration, options and insurance. Zero capitalized cost reduction due from Lessee; electric vehicle federal tax credit applied as capitalized cost reduction. Lessee responsible for tax on capitalized cost reduction where applicable. Total monthly payments \$14,004.00. Lessee responsible for non-routine maintenance, excessive wear/tear and up to \$0.20/mi. over 12,000 mi./yr. Lease includes collision coverage, routine maintenance, roadside assistance and navigation system updates. Please see your authorized Fit EV dealer for complete details.

4 - Excerpted from the original article.