

Free spirited cousin By Joe Sage

Well, now, this car was a nice surprise. All we knew was that it would be a Civic. When this Si in Orange Fire Pearl pulled up, we knew it would be good. We had driven a Civic Si coupe for an intense half-hour last year. Impressive. This time we had an Si sedan for a week and were *really* impressed.

The Civic Si, one of seven Civics, is Honda's sportiest model, period. The Si has been on our shores for over 30 years now and is in its ninth generation, with a handsome refresh in 2014. Its 2.4-liter engine feeds through a tight and smooth 6-speed manual (only) to a limited-slip differential and the front wheels. A little bit of torque steer quickly becomes just part of the car's sporty character. Suspension is enhanced by substantial sway bars front and rear, while the whole thing is a slim 3002 pounds.

The wheels, modest Si badges and trim are just right, conveying style, authority, a little restraint and a touch of madness (in a good way), especially in orange. Those little red badges play well against the orange, and the

red/black interior really adds some juice.

Inside, the Civic Si has the fit and finish of a premium European sedan. Our example, the top of three sub-models, with nav, was ridiculously well outfitted for \$24,590, no options. Controls are simple and complete, though we'd love a knob for quick no-eyes radio basics.

The Si's rear deck spoiler is toned way down from prior years, with a far more balanced daily driver personality. Our car's orange paint is just perfect for its look and feel. If you have a sporty bone in your body, you're going to want to hop in and give this a good drive.

The Si Sedan has a wheelbase about two inches longer than the Si Coupe, though it's less than an inch longer overall, delivering minimal overhangs and a strong stance. Weight and fuel mileage are identical. Both 5-seaters, they have near-identical interior room up front, with a couple of inches more headroom and almost six inches more legroom in back. Overall interior volume is 9.5 cu.ft. greater in the sedan.

We drove this to well north of Flagstaff and



back, from Phoenix (see sidebar). Climbing thousands of feet at cruising speeds on I-17, we had all the power we needed at 3500 rpm in 6th gear, while others began jockeying to eke out power and position. (At times we used 5th, also, but maintained plenty of torque.)

We were going to have its cousin the Acura ILX next and had thought we'd compare them. No comparison. This one is so much more fun.

Someone blew past us on a city street in Flagstaff at track speeds, in a WRX STI. We contemplated the Si's competitors, and each comparison was different. On price, horsepower, fuel mileage, even long distance comfort, each brings something to the equation. This Honda Civic Si adds up very well indeed. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE.....2.4L DOHC 16-valve i-VTEC 4-cylinder
 TRANSMISSION.....close-ratio 6-speed manual
 POWER/TORQUE.....205 hp / 174 lb-ft
 COMPRESSION / REDLINE.....11.0 : 1 / 7000 rpm
 DETAILS: Multi-point fuel injection, drive-by-wire throttle, direct ignition w theft immobilizer, electric power rack-and-pinion steering, limited-slip differential, stainless steel exhaust manifold, 100k miles no scheduled mtnce.
 SUSPENSION: MacPherson strut front, multi-link rear, 21mm front 20mm rear stabilizer bars.
 BRAKES ...11.8" vented front, 10.2" solid rear disc
 TIRES225/40R18 92H ContiProContact
225/40R18 92H ContiSportContact5
 DRIVING TECH: Stability assist, traction control, cruise, ABS, EBD, brake assist, lane watch.
 BODY/CABIN: Advanced body structure, 3-point belts all seats, rear camera w dynamic guidelines (multi-angle available), one-touch power moonroof/tilt, integrated rear window antenna, security, remote entry/trunk, keyless entry/start, halogen headlights, filtered air A/C, 5" LCD instrument screen, SMS text, auto up/down driver's window, leather wheel, aluminum/leather shifter, aluminum pedals, rear seat heat vents, rear defroster, body-colored wing spoiler, chrome exhaust tip.
 INFOTAINMENT: 360w 7-speaker/sub, 7" customizable touchscreen, HondaLink, Bluetooth, USB, MP3, speed-sensitive volume.
 WEIGHT/DISTRIBUTION .3002 lb / 61/39 front/rear
 MPG22/31/25 (city/hwy/comb), ULEV-2 rating

BASE PRICE.....**\$24,590**
 DESTINATION CHARGE:820
 TOTAL.....**\$25,410**



With a nod from Honda for the miles, we pointed the Civic Si north with a half-baked plan to dash to Northwest Colorado. We had a late start, two days' worth, but off we went.

The route is a winner, through Monument Valley and Utah canyon country. From Phoenix to Flagstaff, north to Cameron and east to Kayenta, you pass the San Francisco Peaks and other wonders.

With a couple of irresistible off-the-route forays, and more inevitable, the math was getting iffy. By Cameron, we

had blown five or six hours on the first leg. Two hours yet to the border north of Kayenta, then nine more to our destination, plus an overnight? We took a deep breath, gassed up at the Trading Post and headed south. It was a beautiful night drive, chilly temps by Valley standards—a chance to enjoy the heated seats and audio. A quick bite in Flag, and we were back home after about nine hours.

That in itself is a great road trip—about three hours with no detours, ideal to clear your jets—with the Cameron Trading Post and Little Colorado River Canyon at the turnaround. ■

Honda has long had a reputation for being basically flawless and bulletproof, which we have taken with a grain of salt. With the Civic Si, they earned it. Tastefully tricked out, the Si is sort of an inverse halo car, shining from the affordable range of the spectrum. Our bottom line after a week with our bright orange buddy here was a great big smile and a reluctant farewell.

