civic vs impreza

FOUR MONTHS AFTER launching its ninth-generation Civic into Australia – and more than 3400 sales on – Honda has released a Series II sedan version, available in four variants: VTi, VTi-L, VTi-LN (navigation) and Sport. The latter is alone in featuring a 2.0-litre i-VTEC engine with five-speed auto.

The Thai-built Series II Sport is the same mechanically as the Japanese-sourced Series I (as tested), though it is now better equipped – but at a higher price – all of which has been taken into account in our twin test with Subaru’s new Impreza sedan.

Impreza comes in three spec models: 2.0i, 2.0i-L and 2.0i-S. A new-generation, 2.0-litre horizontally-opposed Boxer four-cylinder petrol engine is common across the range. A six-speed manual transmission is available in the 2.0i and 2.0i-L, with a CVT standard on the 2.0i-S (as tested).

In this guise, Impreza is 22 per cent more fuel efficient and emits 24 percent less emissions than the superseded Impreza automatic.

VALUE FOR MONEY

Though Civic Sport is $500 cheaper, crunch the numbers and there’s little between our duo in value for money stakes. The pair is line ball in terms of Glass’s Guide’s forecast retained value after five years/75,000 km (Honda 43.9 percent, Subaru 44 percent), though predicted running and servicing costs over the same period favour the former by just under $400.

While Impreza’s ADR combined cycle fuel economy of 6.8 litres/100 km shades Civic’s 7.5, our test produced a reverse result with the Honda returning 7.6 and the Subaru 7.7.

In terms of optimising fuel conservation, Honda has opted cause is assisted by its Eco drive system, while Subaru has turned to stop/start technology.

Both companies offer a three-year warranty, however Subaru’s stretches to unlimited kilometres compared to Honda’s 100,000 km coverage, and is about $200 cheaper to insure annually.

In addition to the items listed in the separate stats panels, Civic’s standard equipment list includes smart entry, four-speaker audio system with an MP3/WMA compatible CD player, USB and iPod connectivity, auxiliary jack, multi-information display, auto on/off headlights, satellite navigation, front fog lights, rain sensing wipers, sunroof, leather steering wheel with paddle shifters and black leather interior.

The Impreza’s ‘extras’ include USB connectivity, multi-function display, centre console box with sliding armrest, leather trim steering wheel/gear shift, rear privacy glass, upgraded speedometer, upholstery and trim; alloy pedals and side skirts. Sat nav, leather and powered sunroof are optional.
DESIGN AND FUNCTION

Thanks to an extended wheelbase which enables larger front and rear seating areas, plus a new design internal door structure for greater width, Impreza wins on interior and cargo space, though there’s little in it. In technical speak, boot capacity is 460 litres (with rear seats in place), as opposed to 440 for Civic.

Spend any time behind the wheel and it becomes apparent that the Subaru driver gets a better deal. There’s plenty of yield in the seat, but not at the expense of support, whereas the Honda’s seat is firmer and you feel as if you’re sitting on, rather than in, it.

Sport’s outer rear seats are well-shaped and comfy, though it’s a squeeze across for three adults and the centre console intrudes a little. Foot and leg room are quite good, but rear head space is limited.

Impreza has a big floor tunnel and the console intrudes upon rear seat passengers, who fare a little better for rear hip room, though not so with shoulder room. Again, it’s tight with three in the back.

Both cars have solid ergonomic qualities. Tilt and reach steering adjustment, reversing camera and steering wheel-mounted Bluetooth, audio and cruise control functions can be found in both cars.

ON THE ROAD

Despite the new Impreza’s body being some 10 kg lighter than previously, Civic Sport enjoys a 95 kg advantage overall and boasts a better power-to-weight ratio (though torque-to-weight is just about even). This doesn’t translate into a vast difference in straight-line performance, though, with just 0.1 second difference either way from 0-60, 0-80 and 0-100 km/h and over the standing 400 metres. But the Honda has the upper hand in our roll-on tests: a second quicker from 50-80 km/h and nearly two seconds faster from 60-100.

Civic’s auto is a smooth shifter and with Sport mode is well-matched to the powertrain, though with just five speeds it feels a little ‘yesterday’ compared with the six, seven and eight-speed transmissions now on the market.

We’re finding that a CVT is something of an acquired taste, being more about fuel economy and lower emissions than driving experience, but Impreza’s intuitive example is one of the better, in either manual or auto modes.

Ride quality is a Subaru trait and here Impreza doesn’t disappoint, being more compliant and supple compared to Civic’s firmer offering.

The lighter Civic feels lithe on its feet. The steering is quick and sharp, a point that won approval from colleague John Ewing, though I found it a little too artificial and lacking feedback.

Not surprisingly, given its symmetrical all-wheel-drive, Impreza is more planted and covers ground without fuss or theatrics. While its steering is slower paced and nowhere as sharp, there’s plenty of feel and reassurance of grip being sensed through the wheel.

The Subaru took the honours in our emergency brake testing, pulling up in an average of 23.9 m from 80 km/h, 1.2 m shorter than the Honda. Civic proved quietest at idle, though Impreza sounded more restrained at a constant 80 km/h, with nothing between them under acceleration from 50-80 km/h.

CONCLUSION

A week of varied testing and number crunching failed to produce a standout winner.

Civic Sport holds a slender advantage in value for money by way of a small difference in price and projected running costs, while Impreza has the edge in the design and function areas of comfort and space.

On the road, it’s again tight, with the Honda being the quicker when you need to put the foot down and the Subaru more proficient at pulling up.

Though not class leaders, both cars are at the sharp end of the small car segment and present as a good buy.

CIVIC STATS

MLP: $30,990 (5-spdr auto)
WARRANTY: 3 year/100,000 km.
SERVICE INTERVALS: 1 year/10,000 km.
SAFETY: Dual front/side/curtain (DF/S/ C) airbags, anti-lock brakes (ABS), electronic brakeforce distribution (EBD), brake assist (BA), electronic stability control (ESC), traction control (TC).
KEY FEATURES: Immobiliser, alarm, auto climate-control airconditioning, cruise control, 17” alloys.
ENGINE: 2.0-litre, inline SOHC, petrol 4-cyl.
MAX. POWER: 114 kW @ 6500 rpm.
MAX. TORQUE: 190 Nm @ 4300 rpm.
FUEL: 7.5 litres/100 km (ULP).
ANCAP CRASH RATING: *****
GVG EMISSIONS RATING: ****
FOR: Price, equipment, agility.
AGAINST: Firm driver’s seat, lacks Impreza’s AWD composure.

IMPREZA STATS

MLP: $31,490 (CVT)
WARRANTY: 3 year/unlimited.
SERVICE INTERVALS: 1 year/12,500 km.
SAFETY: DF/S/C and driver’s knee airbags, ABS, EBD, BA, ESC, TC.
KEY FEATURES: Auto stop/start, 17” alloys, front fog lights, side spoiler, dual-zone climate-control airconditioning.
ENGINE: 2.0-litre, DOHC horizontally-opposed, petrol 4-cyl.
MAX. POWER: 110 kW @ 6200 rpm.
MAX. TORQUE: 196 Nm @ 4200 rpm.
FUEL: 6.8-litres/100 km (ULP).
ANCAP CRASH RATING: *****
GVG EMISSIONS RATING: *****
FOR: Rides quality, improved fuel economy, braking ability.
AGAINST: Conservative interior, higher price.