

Motoring focus

CR-V heads for the hills

FIRST DRIVE

HONDA CR-V
£18,827 TO £26,717

The all-new CR-V went on sale in January, ushering in a new era for Honda's successful 'soft-roader'. Like the model it replaces, it's built in Swindon, and boasts improved kit and economy. We're not so sure about the styling: the front looks OK but the designers seem to have lost interest at the back.

Prices for the CR-V start at £18,827 for the 2.0 SE petrol, which comes with air-con, stability control and 'Real Time' four-wheel drive. In normal conditions the CR-V operates in front-wheel-drive mode, but when it detects any wheel slip, it engages rear-wheel drive for extra grip.

We tried the 2.2 i-CTDi (diesel) ES version which, at £21,417, adds alloy wheels, dual-zone climate control, cruise control and parking sensors to the base SE spec. Honda claims this diesel will return 43.5mpg combined, but it managed just 39.8 in our tests. This is still respectable for such a large car, though.



We're not convinced the new CR-V is better than the old

Check you and the kids can cope with the CR-V's firm ride

The diesel can be a bit rattly when pushed but it's still the sensible choice in this sort of car. The cabin and boot are both fairly spacious, with plenty of handy storage areas. But check you and the kids can cope with the CR-V's firm ride – we found it disappointingly jiggly, causing some passengers to feel car sick.

VERDICT The new CR-V is roomy, practical and likely to be reliable. But it's not a big step on from the previous model, which is still being sold new with generous discounts.

Electric Lexus skips charge

FIRST DRIVE

LEXUS GS450H
£38,080 TO £47,200

Fed up with paying the London congestion charge but don't want a Toyota Prius? Lexus' new hybrid may be the car for you. The GS450h is a luxury saloon with a potent 3.5-litre V6 petrol engine and a 190bhp battery pack, which makes it exempt from the C-charge (although this could change under new rules in 2008).

So, can you feel virtuous driving the hybrid GS? Yes, if you do a lot of stop-start city

driving. We managed around 30mpg in town, which is significantly better than the 19.6 claim made for the standard 3.0-litre GS300.

The car is very quiet when on the move, and the handover from electric to petrol power as you accelerate is pretty seamless.

But the hybrid battery pack, which sits behind the rear seats, severely limits boot space.

VERDICT A fast, quiet and, arguably, green luxury saloon backed by Lexus' reputation for reliability and customer service. But the tiny boot is a problem.



Luxury hybrid saves fuel around town

Your say

Your views on road pricing

In March, we asked for your views on road pricing. Many thanks for all your interesting and varied replies. These sum up some key themes

'Road pricing in one form or another is the only way to deal with congestion, but the government's record on computer programming doesn't inspire confidence.'

K CAMDEN, BY EMAIL

'If the taxpayer sees the money is going to his benefit, objections would be few. But current road tax would need to be scrapped to avoid double taxation.'

JAMES MUIR, BY EMAIL

'I would find it more logical if the government put as much resource into reducing the complexity of public transport as it is into increasing the complexity of road use.'

STEVE HODGES, BY EMAIL

'If road pricing applies only to main roads, it is likely to send a lot of traffic back on to rural roads again.'

LINDA MADDOCK, BY EMAIL

'Congestion is self-regulating. We weigh up the need to make the journey against the hassle of getting there. With road pricing, congestion will be managed by ability to pay.'

LEN MARCHANT, BY EMAIL

'Industry should be offered tax breaks to remove the 9-to-5 straitjacket and encourage working from home.'

RAY POLLEY, BY EMAIL





25%

average increase in UK parking costs in the last six years

DIRECT LINE



£51bn

a year spent by British drivers to keep cars on the road

ZURICH INSURANCE

Honda's luxury saloon is safest for occupants and pedestrians

Legend is a star performer

CAR SAFETY

A raft of new models has been launched so far this year, including the new Mini Cooper and Land Rover Freelander 2. But does new mean safer?

Independent crash-test organisation Euro NCAP has been busy crashing new cars to help you choose the safest. Here's a round-up of its latest findings.

The top-scoring car of the last three months is the new Honda Legend saloon. Although not many of these £36,000 cars are likely to be sold in the UK, its safety credentials pip those of rivals such as the Audi A6 and BMW 5 Series. Its three-star rating for pedestrian protection is especially impressive.

Among more mainstream cars, it's great that two popular superminis have scored the maximum five stars for adult occupant protection. The new Mini improves on the four-star score of its predecessor and is also

Two popular superminis have scored top marks

safer for pedestrians, while the drop-top Peugeot 207CC scores similarly.

Fiat's new Bravo replaces the unloved Stilo from July, so it's encouraging that it has scored five stars for adult safety. But it just fails to score four stars for child protection.

Of the four small off-roaders tested, Land Rover's Freelander 2 is very safe for occupants, but its front end is very aggressive to pedestrians in an accident. Suzuki's Grand Vitara is more pedestrian-friendly, but it, along with the new Honda CR-V and Mitsubishi Outlander, doesn't achieve five-star safety for adults.



Above: Honda shows big cars can be pedestrian-friendly

Below: New symbols representing Euro NCAP scores

MODEL	CLASS	EURO NCAP SAFETY SCORE		
		ADULT OCCUPANT PROTECTION (OUT OF FIVE)	CHILD OCCUPANT PROTECTION (OUT OF FIVE)	PEDESTRIAN PROTECTION (OUT OF FOUR)
MINI Cooper	Supermini	★★★★★	★★★★	★★
PEUGEOT 207CC	Supermini	★★★★★	n/a	★★
FIAT Bravo	Medium car	★★★★★	★★★★	★★
HONDA Legend	Luxury car	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★
HONDA CR-V	Small off-roader	★★★★	★★★★	★★
LAND ROVER Freelander 2	Small off-roader	★★★★★	★★★★	★
MITSUBISHI Outlander	Small off-roader	★★★★	★★★★	★★
SUZUKI Grand Vitara	Small off-roader	★★★★	★★★★	★★★



Adult



Child



Pedestrian

In brief

Check hired child seats

People hiring a car abroad are significantly more likely to be provided with an unsuitable child seat than in the UK, according to our survey of 292 Which? members. So it may be best to take your own – for our latest Best Buy child seats, see p70.



Toyota claims top spot

The car in front probably is a Toyota, after the Japanese manufacturer announced it has



overtaken General Motors as the world's biggest carmaker.

According to Toyota's figures, it sold 2.35 million vehicles worldwide during the first quarter of 2007, compared with GM's 2.26 million estimate for the same period.

Parking sensors popular

Parking sensors are the favourite accessory among company-car drivers, according to Lex Vehicle Leasing. Despite making only a small difference to a car's resale value, parking sensors help avoid minor scrapes, so cars need fewer repairs. Leather seats and in-car entertainment upgrades also scored highly.



New arrivals

Skoda Fabia (supermini, now, from £7,990); Daihatsu Materia (mini MPV, July, £TBA); Fiat Bravo (medium car, July, £TBA); Ford Mondeo (below, large car, July, from £14,995); Mercedes C-class (large car, July, from £22,977); Mitsubishi iCar (city, July, from £8,999); BMW M3 (sports, Sept, from £50,625); Smart ForTwo (city, Sept, £TBA).

