



# Honey, I shrunk the Honda

30 YEAR OLD HONDA AZ600 INFLUENCES TODAY'S SUPER HATCH

by **KEN SOTA**

On roadways crowded with gargantuan Suburbans, Excursions and Grand Wagoneers, Jose Avila's diminutive Honda AZ600 looks like a refugee from the set of the Disney movie about an absent-minded scientist who accidentally shrinks his kids to ant size.

The micro-coupe debuted in Japan in 1970 as the Z Coupe. A 354cc OHC air-cooled twin mounted up front and driving the front wheels powered the coupe. When Honda honchos decided to bring the teeny tiny car to the United States in 1972, the displacement was bumped up to 598cc. Lampooned as a powered "high-top tennis shoe," the American-badged AZ600 was lost in a sea of Chevys, Fords and Chryslers.

Recently, Tampa Honda Land invited Jose Avila to display his '72 AZ600 next to a '02 Civic Si. "Even though three decades separate these two cars, both share the common Honda attributes of being well-engineered and fuel-efficient," said Todd Earwood, Tampa Honda Land sales representative.

Jose Avila purchased his 30-year-old Caroline Yellow Honda on December 29, 2001. "I've always wanted to own an AZ600. My father used to own one. I had a lot of fun memories, such as my father taking me on driving trips across the state," said the 36-year-old Tampa resident.

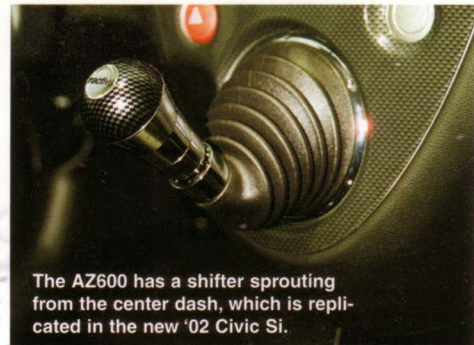
Over the years, Jose never forgot the thrill of riding in his father's AZ600, and vowed someday to own one. Jose recount-

ed, "In 2001, I did a search on the Internet and came across a few Honda 600s for sale. There was one in Texas, one in Illinois, and a couple in North Carolina. I contacted Mike O'Connor of Statesville, North Carolina, who had two for sale. In early

December 2001, I flew up to Statesville to see the cars. He was rebuilding the engine on one and the other one had nothing done to it. He recommended that I wait until he was finished with the one he was rebuilding. So when I got home from the trip, I



Fuel sipper: 598cc twin held the record of achieving 36mpg at a constant 30 mph.

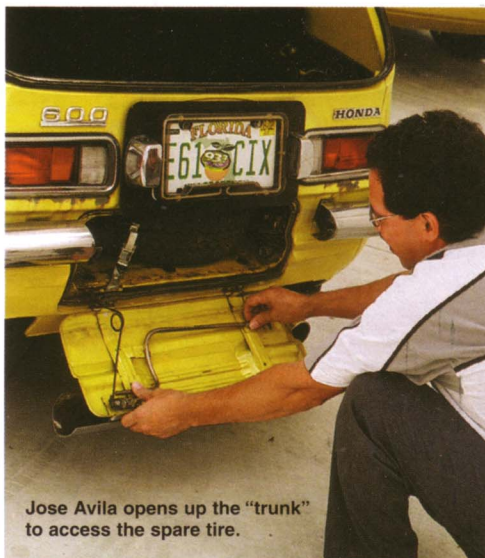


The AZ600 has a shifter sprouting from the center dash, which is replicated in the new '02 Civic Si.

made plans to fly up back to North Carolina when the car was finished. On December 29, 2001, I returned to Statesville to purchase the Honda from Mike."

Driving his newly purchased 600 down to Florida, Jose, along with his girlfriend Debbie Garrett, encountered quizzical glances from passing drivers and law enforcement. "I was stopped by a police offi-

cer in Georgia. He walked up to my car and told me I had a head light out. The police officer gave me a warning and then started asking me all kinds of questions about the car," said the proud AZ600 owner. "When I'm driving my Honda, I get a lot of thumbs up from other motorists." While driving off the Tampa Honda Land lot, Jose added, "I really love this little car."...



Jose Avila opens up the "trunk" to access the spare tire.



## Honda AZ600 Specs

**Engine:** Type: Air cooled, two cylinder, SOHC, 4 main bearings

**Cylinder arrangement:** Vertical, parallel and transversely mounted

**Bore & Stroke:** 2.91 x 2.74"

**Displacement:** 36.4cu.in. (598cc)

**Compression ratio:** 8.5:1

**Horsepower:** 45hp @ 7,000rpm

**Torque:** 32lb-ft @ 4,000rpm

**Carburetor:** Keihin-Seiki side-draft variable venturi w/accelerator pump.

**Valve train:** SOHC

**Cooling system:** Forced air cooling by high efficiency axial flow fan located behind engine, supplemented by ram air.

**Transmission:** Four speed all synchromesh.

**Suspension:** Front: MacPherson Strut, coil springs, lower wishbone; Rear: Rigid axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs.

**Steering:** Rack and pinion

**Brakes:** Independent dual hydraulic system with vacuum power assist. Front disc and rear drum.

**Performance:** Max. speed 75 mph

**Fuel consumption:** 31.6mpg.

**Tires:** 145SR-10

**Dimensions and capacities:**

**Wheelbase:** 78.7"

**Track(f):** 45.9" **Track(r):** 44.3"

**Length:** 122.8" **Height:** 50.4"

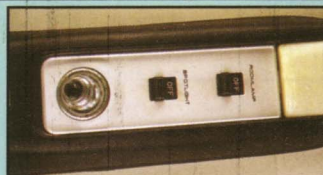
**Width:** 51"

**Curb weight:** 1312 pounds

**Battery:** 12V, 45 AH

**Fuel capacity:** 6.9 gallons

**Acceleration:** 0-60 mph 20.8 sec., 1/4 mile 58.78mph in 22.59 sec.



A novel feature is the aircraft-style overhead console.

### Standard Equipment

0.6 liter, 45hp four valve engine, four-speed manual transmission, front bucket seats, flow-through ventilation, hinged rear side windows, front bumper overriders, driver's side mirror, tachometer, overhead console with map and dome light, hatchback, fold-down rear seat.

**New AZ600 in 1972 cost \$1735.**