

HONDA 600 COUPE

If shopping carts were supposed to do 78 mph, they'd be built with 600-cc, 32-bhp engines



YOU DON'T TAKE yourself too seriously, do you? Sure, everybody has a basic self-regard, nothing wrong with that. But if you have an image to maintain, or think you do, in short if you are the sort of person who objects to being laughed at, better you read about the Honda 600 Coupe for entertainment and information only.

Because what happens mostly to people riding around in Honda 600 Coupes is, they get laughed at. Some of the laughs are warmly sympathetic and friendly, a few are finger-pointing, knee-slapping, malicious barks, but everybody laughs.

Why this should be so is as clear as the pictures. Honda has done several things that other car manufacturers have done. The 600 Coupe is based on sedan components, for example, fitted into a new body in which function has been sacrificed in behalf of form. And the Coupe body has a rear window that opens and a rear seat that folds forward, making a Coupe with some of the characteristics and conveniences of a station wagon. Finally, the 600 Coupe is an engine swap, with the biggest-possible engine stuffed into a shell originally planned for a lesser power plant.

The catch—or the punchline—is that all these contemporary things are done in miniature. The result is a Boston Bull Terrier of a car. The strength of line is there, but the lack of bulk makes the shape harmless.

This is not entirely fair. For one thing, Honda has done a fine job on the engineering of the Coupe (and of its source, the 600 Sedan).

As the test figures show, performance in all phases is at least adequate and in several cases better than that. To say that acceleration is leisurely would be to risk a play on words: The rate at which speed is gained is slow, while the rate at which the engine picks up speed and the driver shoves the gear lever back and forth is busy indeed. With care and planning, however, the Honda Coupe will keep up with traffic, move from stop-lights, merge onto freeways, etc., with enough alacrity to make daily use possible. Cornering power is respectably high, the brakes are capable of more stopping than the car's speed can possibly require, and the fuel economy is of course extremely good.

The price for this is not measured in money. Honda must have the world's largest stockpile of experience with high-revving engines, so the Honda car engine is likely not overstressed

at its normal freeway cruising speeds of 5000-6000 rpm. Nonetheless, that is a lot of engine speed, and while the 600 engine is smooth for a twin, still, it is a twin. So it makes noise and it vibrates.

The vibration is in fact nearly constant. When the engine is running the car vibrates from lumpy idle to semi-electrical buzz at speed. The noise level is much the same. While there isn't too much more noise than in a conventional economy sedan, it's always there and it's tiring after an hour or two.

The ride is rough. Two main reasons: the wheelbase is very short, causing the car to pitch and hop, and the Coupe has a load capacity close to half the car's curb weight, resulting in a 1300-lb car on 2000-lb springs. Even a poorly-paved freeway will bounce the occupants about and a dip provides a sensation akin to being a tether ball on a short rope.

Cruising at 70 mph on the level can be accomplished, provided that the road is truly level. At 70 the Coupe is close to its maximum and only a slight grade will pull the speed down.

Simply as another oddity, the Coupe's 32 lb-ft of torque are enough to cause torque steer, just like a big front-drive car. It only occurs in the lower gears but it's interesting proof that everything is relative.

What performance there is must be worked for. The engine produces very little power below 3000 rpm and it's all too willing to exceed the maker's limit of 6000 rpm. The driver finds himself constantly at work with the gearlever, simultaneously keeping the engine between these two extremes.

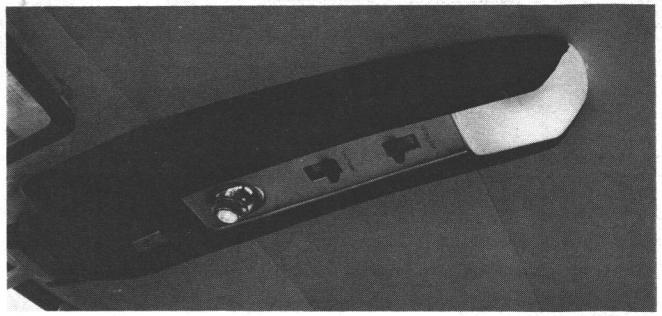
The 600 Coupe isn't as small on the inside as it is on the outside, but not by much. The driver and front seat passenger are surprisingly well accommodated. Foot, shoulder and head room are not markedly less than in, for example, the Fiat 128 Coupe. There are full—and comfortable—3-point belts, and stalk controls for high beam and wiping/washing of the windshield.

The rear seats are not suited to adults, for any length of time. They are thinly padded and cramped to a degree that will persuade even a teenage girl to sit up front with her father, risking loss of status with her peers, rather than ride in back. But with rear seatback folded there is plenty of storage space, easily reached via the opening rear window. There is more than unconscious humor in the factory's description of the Coupe as "an ideal shopping cart."

Is this damning with conventional criticism? If so, it's because ➤➤➤

JOE RUSZ PHOTOS

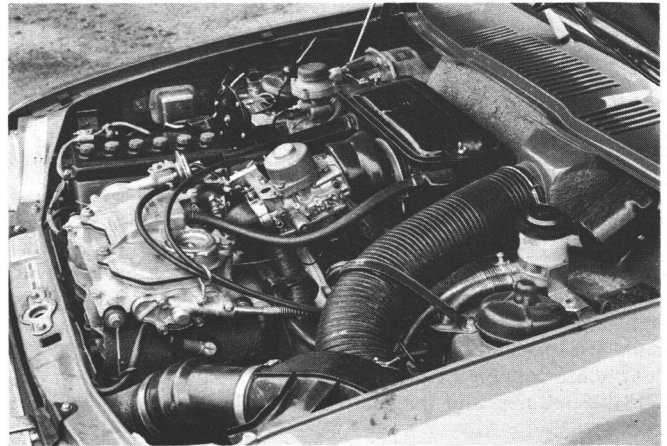
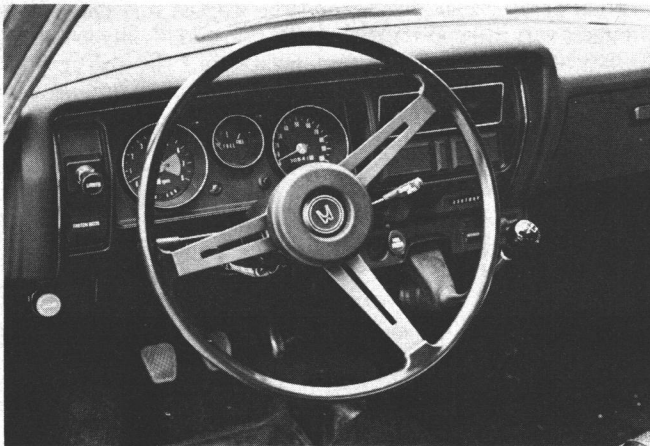




HONDA 600 COUPE

the 600 Coupe is not especially suited to conventional usage. For the low price and high mpg, you get a rough noisy ride and minimum speed for maximum effort.

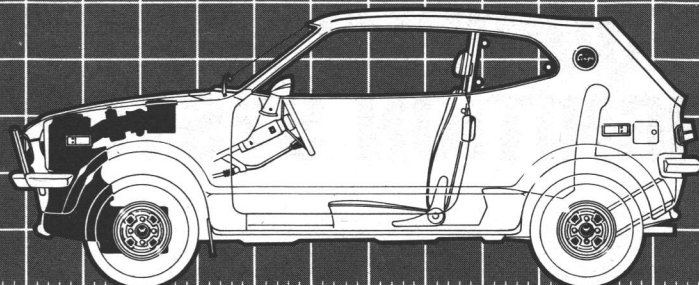
The car's virtues are subjective. Every outing is an adventure, figuratively equal to crossing the ocean in a rowboat. It is fun—a nasty word these days but no other fits as well—fun to out-drag VW vans while no onlooker suspects he's watching a contest of speed. Fun to extract everything the car will do, safe in the knowledge that the car is still within its stress limits; fun to nip smartly into parking spaces other cars can't use. This is good engineering in a tiny, cheap package. If it is best suited to an adventurer with lots of time, less money and a thick hide, blame the world, not the car.





ROAD TEST

HONDA 600 COUPE



SCALE: 10" DIVISIONS

PRICE

List price, west coast \$1735
 List price, east coast \$1775
 Price as tested, west coast \$1735
 Price as tested includes standard equipment (front disc brakes, radial tires, dealer prep)

IMPORTER

American Honda Motor Co.
 100 W. Alondra Blvd.
 Gardena, Calif. 90247

ENGINE

Type.....aircooled sohc vertical 2
 Bore x stroke, mm 74.0 x 69.6
 Equivalent in 2.91 x 2.74
 Displacement, cc/cu in....598/36.5
 Compression ratio 8.5:1
 Bhp @ rpm, net..... 32 @ 6000
 Equivalent mph 72
 Torque @ rpm, lb-ft...32 @ 4000
 Equivalent mph 48
 Carburetion 1 Keihin
 Fuel requirement..... regular, 91 oct
 Emission Controls...sealed crankcase

DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission 4-speed manual
 Gear ratios: 4th (0.68) 4.46:1
 3rd (0.97) 6.36:1
 2nd (1.50) 9.84:1
 1st (2.47) 16.20:1
 Final drive ratio..... 6.56:1

CHASSIS & BODY

Layout front engine/front drive
 Body/frame unit steel
 Brake system 7.2-in. disc front,
 7.1 x 1.35-in. drum rear, vacuum assisted
 Swept area, sq in 163
 Wheels steel disc 10 x 3.5
 Tires Dunlop 145SR-10
 Steering type rack and pinion
 Overall ratio 17.8
 Turns, lock-to-lock 3.1
 Turning circle, ft 31.5
 Front suspension MacPherson struts, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar
 Rear suspension beam axle, leaf springs, tube shocks

ACCOMMODATION

Seating capacity, persons 4
 Seat width, front/rear .2 x 18.5/35.0
 Head room, front/rear 37.0/34.0
 Seat back adjustment, degrees 0

INSTRUMENTATION

Instruments: 100-mph speedometer, 8000-rpm tachometer, 99,999.9 odometer, fuel gauge
 Warning lights: brake system, alternator, parking brake, seat belts, high beams, directionals

GENERAL

Curb weight, lb 1375
 Test weight 1700
 Weight distribution (with driver), front/rear, % 64/36
 Wheelbase, in 78.7
 Track, front/rear 45.9/44.3
 Length 122.8
 Width 51.0
 Height 50.4
 Ground clearance..... 6.1
 Overhang, front/rear 23.6/20.5
 Usable trunk space, cu ft 2.6
 Fuel capacity, U.S. gal 6.9

MAINTENANCE

Service intervals, mi:
 Oil change 3000
 Filter change 6000
 Chassis lube none
 Tuneup 6000
 Warranty, mo/mi 12/12,000

CALCULATED DATA

Lb/bhp (test weigh.) 53.2
 Mph/1000 rpm (4th gear) 12.0
 Engine revs/mi (60 mph) 5000
 Piston travel, ft/mi 2282
 R&T steering index 0.98
 Brake swept area, sq in/ton...192

ROAD TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION

Time to distance, sec:
 0-100 ft 4.5
 0-500 ft 12.8
 0-1320 ft (¼ mi) 23.9
 Speed at end of ¼-mi, mph...60.4
 Time to speed, sec:
 0-30 mph 5.8
 0-40 mph 10.0
 0-50 mph 15.3
 0-60 mph 23.6
 0-70 mph 37.5

FUEL ECONOMY

Normal driving, mpg 43.0
 Cruising range, mi (1-gal res.)...254

SPEEDS IN GEARS

4th gear (6500 rpm) 78
 3rd (6500) 54
 2nd (6500) 35
 1st (6500) 21

HANDLING

Speed on 100-ft radius, mph 30.7
 Lateral acceleration, g 0.630

BRAKES

Minimum stopping distances, ft:
 From 60 mph 175
 Control in panic stop...very good
 Pedal effort for 0.5g stop,lb...30
 Fade: percent increase in pedal effort to maintain 0.5g deceleration in 6 stops from 60 mph 33
 Parking: hold 30% grade?.....yes
 Overall brake rating very good

INTERIOR NOISE

All noise readings in dBA:
 Idle in neutral 63
 Maximum, 1st gear 82
 Constant 30 mph 72
 50 mph 77
 70 mph 82

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph indicated is actually 30
 50 mph 48
 60 mph 57
 70^a mph 66
 Odometer, 10.0 mi 10.3

ACCELERATION

