

GORDON CHITTENDEN PHOTOS

# HONDA 600

*Honda enters the U.S. market with a 600-cc minicar*



IT HAS TAKEN Honda a long time to decide what they wanted to do about their entry into the U.S. automobile market. Over five years ago they had their interesting sports car in this country for evaluation and in the intervening years have produced a number of other machines that have done well in the highly competitive Japanese market. In their home market they produce three basic models—the mini-sedan with the 360, 400 and 600-cc engines, their 800-cc sports car and two versions of their 1300—plus a line of commercial vehicles. What they have finally decided to export to the U.S. is an Americanized version of the N600 which is known here as, simply, the Honda 600.

There are several versions of this basic sedan, including one with an automatic transmission, but what we're getting at present is the 4-speed manual gearbox. It is an interesting machine. Front engine, front wheel drive, with an aircooled

vertical twin displacing 598 cc and developing 36 bhp at 6000 rpm. Overall, it is very small, with a 78.7-in. wheelbase and an overall length of just under 10.5 ft.

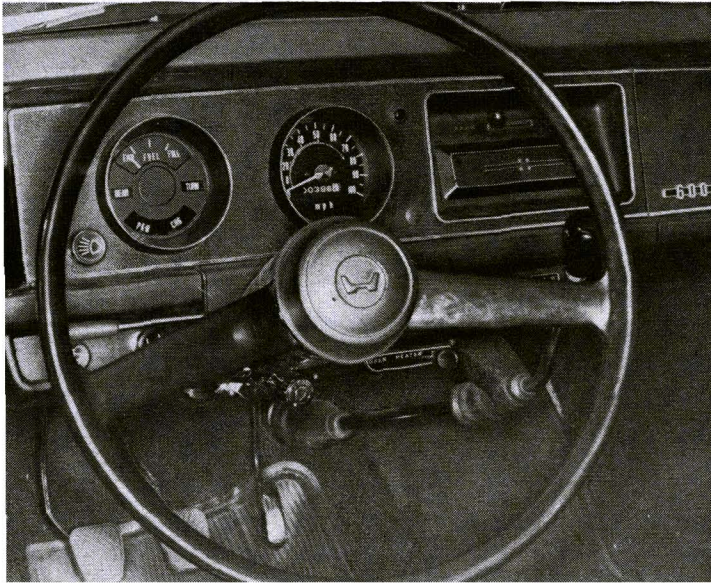
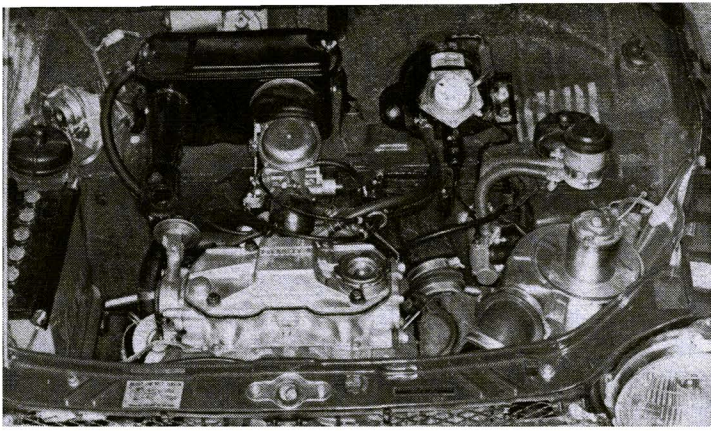
In appearance, it bears an unmistakable resemblance to the BMC Mini and has the same pert, aggressive shape. It has the same size wheels, 10-in., and these are set well out to the corners of the body to make the most efficient use of space. But at this point, the similarities pretty much cease. The Mini uses a transversely mounted inline 4, the Honda a transversely mounted vertical 2, the Mini has interconnected water/rubber suspension, the Honda has MacPherson struts with coil springs at the front and beam axle on semi-elliptics in the rear.

The controls of the Honda are offset a bit to the right and the shift lever sprouts through the firewall rather than up from the floorboard. In front of the driver there are the absolute minimum of dials and lights and there is neither





# HONDA 600



an engine temperature gauge or light, nor an oil pressure indicator. This last is not needed since roller bearings are used on the crankshaft and oil pressure, in the conventional sense, is not present.

On being fired up there's the unmistakable note of the 2-cyl engine and those who have experienced it may be reminded of the distinctive what-what sound of the old Panhard twin. The engine revs very freely and by using plenty of these it is possible to move off with a chirp of the tires and something approximating alacrity. The transmission is housed in the engine sump and is more closely related to a motorcycle gearbox than to the traditional automotive type as it is of the constant-mesh type with dog clutches. A light hand and a bit of hesitation in neutral is needed to avoid crunching but you soon develop the proper rhythm.

The body is taut and rattle-free and the ride is surprisingly good. It handles both small and large irregularities with equanimity, making the usual thrum of Bott's dots almost inaudible, and over dips it recovers quickly.

The steering is light and while we personally prefer the more-nearly horizontal wheel of the Mini—the bus-driver stance seeming more appropriate to a small front-wheel-drive car—there's little to complain about. There's plenty of friendly understeer and power-on cornering is a delightful way of life even if at the limit the Honda isn't up to Mini standards, either for pure speed or accuracy. If you let off the power in a corner, the nose will tuck in but this is easily controlled and all part of the fwd fun.

The seats and interior fittings are better than minimal and except that the pedals are small, close together and leaving no place for the driver to rest his left foot, we have no complaints about driver comfort.

In overall performance, the 600 will get out of its own way. It has a standing quarter-mile time of 22.0 sec and while this won't win you anything at the drag strip, it is as quick as normal traffic will move away from a stop light. The acceleration curve becomes pretty flat at around 70 mph but until that speed it pulls surprisingly well. On the highway, it will sing along at 70 mph and be perfectly happy and while it isn't exactly silent, the noise level is still tolerable.

It will carry four people in a pinch—though nobody has a lot of room when that is done—and there is a minimal trunk (with a fiberglass door) whose capacity can be extended by folding or removing the back of the rear seat.

Ventilation is quite respectable with little doors beside the outside knee (that could give you a rap on the kneebone in a collision) and the flow-through rate can be increased by opening the rear windows, which pivot at the top. The fuel tank filler is ingeniously located behind a flap whose catch is concealed by the door but the tank capacity, 6.9 gal, is rather small and the cruising range (based on our average overall consumption of 31.6 mpg) is only 215 miles.

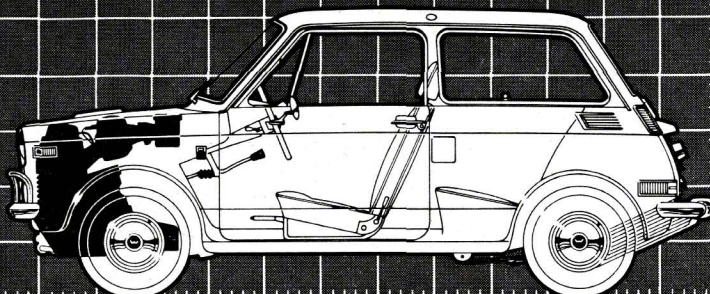
Compared to the Subaru 360, the only other minicar now being sold in the U.S., the Honda is superior in every way—comfort, handling, brakes and performance—and doesn't cost all that much more either.

Whether the Honda 600 will find a place in the American motorist's scheme of things is difficult to predict. The price is moderate, so it should have considerable appeal as around-town transport that can also do occasional double-duty for longer trips. We like its size—though there is always the need for caution to avoid not being seen in a larger car's blind spot—and we like its handiness. It also has an endearing characteristic that is not often encountered these days—it can be driven with your foot flat on the floor almost all the time—and that's fun.





SCALE: 10" DIVISIONS


**PRICE**

List price, west coast ..... \$1395  
List price, east coast... not available  
Price as tested, west coast... \$1495  
Price as tested includes estimated  
local transportation and dealer  
preparation

**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..... 8.6:1  
Bhp @ rpm..... 36 @ 6000  
Equivalent mph..... 76  
Torque @ rpm..... 32 @ 4000  
Equivalent mph..... 51  
Carburetion ..... 1 Keihin  
Type fuel required..... regular  
Emission control..... not required

**DRIVE TRAIN**

Transmission: unsynchronized 4-sp  
manual; dog clutches, constant  
mesh  
Gear ratios: 4th (0.714)..... 4.45:1  
3rd (1.00)..... 6.23:1  
2nd (1.57)..... 9.74:1  
1st (2.53)..... 15.75:1  
Final drive ratio..... 6.23:1

**CHASSIS & BODY**

Layout: front engine, front-wheel  
drive  
Body/frame..... unit steel  
Brake type: 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..... Bridgestone 5.20-10  
Steering type..... rack & pinion  
Overall ratio..... 17.4:1  
Turns, lock-to-lock..... 3.0  
Turning circle, ft..... 32.2  
Front suspension: MacPherson  
struts, coil springs, tube shocks  
Rear suspension: beam axle, leaf  
springs, tube shocks

**ACCOMMODATION**

Seating capacity, persons..... 4  
Seat width, front/rear.... 18.5/45.0  
Head room, front/rear.... 41.0/39.0  
Seat back adjustment, degrees... 60  
Driver comfort rating (scale of 100):  
Driver 69 in. tall..... 85  
Driver 72 in. tall..... 80  
Driver 75 in. tall..... 75

**INSTRUMENTATION**

Instruments: 100-mph speedo,  
99,999.9 odo, fuel level  
Warning lights: alternator, parking  
brake, high beam, directionals,  
brake system

**GENERAL**

Curb weight, lb..... 1355  
Test weight..... 1780  
Weight distribution (with  
driver), front/rear, %.... 64/36  
Wheelbase, in..... 78.7  
Track, front/rear..... 46.1/44.3  
Overall length..... 125.0  
Width..... 52.5  
Height..... 52.4  
Ground clearance..... 5.3  
Overhang, front/rear.... 22.3/24.0  
Usable trunk space, cu ft..... 3.0  
Fuel tank capacity, U.S. gal.... 6.9

**CALCULATED DATA**

Lb/bhp (test weight)..... 49.5  
Mph/1000 rpm (4th gear)..... 12.7  
Engine revs/mi (60 mph)..... 4740  
Engine speed @ 70 mph..... 5510  
Piston travel, ft/mi..... 2165  
Cu ft/ton mi..... 56.2  
R&T wear index..... 102  
R&T steering index..... 0.96  
Brake swept area sq in/ton.... 183

**ROAD TEST RESULTS**
**ACCELERATION**

Time to distance, sec:  
0-100 ft..... 4.4  
0-250 ft..... 7.6  
0-500 ft..... 11.9  
0-750 ft..... 15.2  
0-1000 ft..... 18.4  
0-1320 ft. (¼ mi)..... 22.0  
Speed at end of ¼ mi, mph... 59  
Time to speed, sec:  
0-30 mph..... 5.8  
0-40 mph..... 9.6  
0-50 mph..... 15.3  
0-60 mph..... 23.4  
0-70 mph..... 41.2  
Passing exposure time, sec:  
To pass car going 50 mph.... 8.4

**FUEL CONSUMPTION**

Normal driving, mpg..... 31.6  
Cruising range, mi..... 215

**SPEED IN GEARS**

4th gear (5850 rpm)..... 73  
3rd (6000)..... 54  
2nd (6000)..... 35  
1st (6000)..... 22

**BRAKES**

Panic stop from 70 mph:  
Max. deceleration rate, % g... 81  
Stopping distance, ft..... 220  
Control..... good  
Pedal effort for 50%-g stop, lb. 32  
Fade test: percent increase in pedal  
effort to maintain 50%-g deceler-  
ation rate in 6 stops from 60  
mph..... 72  
Parking: Hold 30% grade?..... yes  
Overall brake rating..... good

**SPEEDOMETER ERROR**

30 mph indicated is actually... 27.5  
40 mph..... 37.5  
50 mph..... 47.5  
60 mph..... 57.0  
70 mph..... 67.3  
Odometer, 10.0 mi..... 9.55

**ACCELERATION & COASTING**
