

HONDA 1300 COUPE- FIRST DRIVE



Last month we gave you an exclusive world premier showing of the sensational Honda 1300 Coupe in color on our cover. This month, it's the full driving test of the car we'll see in Australia before 1970 is out.

WORLD SCOOP from Jack Yamaguchi in Tokyo!

IT HAS been a love and hate game.

Exactly one year ago, on the wind-blown test track of Honda's Research and Development Centre on a cold February afternoon, I met the 1300 sedan — and immediately fell in love with it.

For a 1300 cc four-door sedan meant for Mr Average Family Motorist, it was indecently fast on the

two kilometre stretch.

Two months later, I saw the car on two different occasions. I did two laps on the wet Suzuka race track with a hand-built prototype, and my love grew stronger. Then I witnessed Paul Frere, my good friend and undoubtedly one of the fastest motoring journalists (ex-Le Mans winner, no less) in the world,

Looking fast standing still, the Honda 1300 "Nine" Coupe is good for 110 mph and low 17 second standing quarter mile times.

in the 1300 on the R&D track.

The sight clinched it and I signed a very early contract to buy a 1300. It still took a few strings, including one by Executive Vice-President of Honda Motor Company, to prise one of the first 1000 batch from the distributors.

My Honda 1300 "77" De Luxe sedan, chassis No 608, was delivered in mid June, 1969. The 608 must have been born under a mischievous star. It was delivered with the wrong registration number, which

could not be removed immediately as it was affixed with an official seal. I had to wait almost three months before retrieving my right number.

Then a jealous onlooker broke a wing mirror, and a few days later another vandal walked away with all four wheel caps. He even took time to leave his initials on the bonnet, with a screwdriver! (Yes, in Japanese characters too—Ed).

The car was on Japanese Dunlop

GS-1 6.20S-13 cross-ply, but I soon found this tyre was totally unsuitable for the 1300. It screamed loudly at slightest provocation, and applying too much power (you have 100 horses under your leash) on slower corners would take you straight to the outside. And wear rate of the rubber was simply appalling, you are lucky to see 6000 miles on the front pair and I know a chap who finished his in 3000. I understand the latest GS-1 6.20H-13 is a much

better proposition.

It wasn't only the tyres that wore; in the first 6000 miles, I had clutch and front brake pads replaced as well. The 1300 also had a healthy thirst for gas, and there were the usual new-car gremlins: the throttle cable snapped off, and then the alternator packed up.

With winter the 1300 got worse. The clever Duo-Dyna-Aircooling was apparently overcooling the engine. It grumbled for several miles after a cold start, and fuel consumption skyrocketed. In the coldest January week, it recorded a disastrous 17 mpg.

But the Honda engineers were acutely aware of this overcooling problem, and they came up with a new intake system, which led warmer air from around the exhaust manifold into the aircleaner. This was promptly installed in my car, and supplemented by plastic grille shields to cut off freezing air completely. They seemed to do the trick, and my motor sounds much happier now.

* * *

That is pure background. You may readily gather I am not the same innocent young man who fell in love at the first twist of the ignition switch of the original 1300 sedan. I have seen the 1300 world. I still like it very much, but can appraise it more calmly and objectively.

At the time of writing I officially know only (1) how the car looks from outside, and (2) that it will be known as the Honda 1300 Coupe "Nine" series. Other vital information, such as mechanical details, price, marketing date and produc-



A neat 115 bhp, and four speed gearbox boot the car to 32, 50 and 80 mph in the intermediates. Car will rev over 8000 rpm.

Style shows distinct departure from conventional Japanese coupes with their predominantly squarish lines. Car has through-flow ventilation.



tion plans will be released soon.

So when the honorable WHEELS Editor requested me to get hold of one for a spin, I had to give him a very reluctant NO. Then I got fantastically lucky. I ran into this friendly Honda PR officer at a luncheon party thrown by a local monthly, who casually mentioned that his department had received the first 1300 coupe for "photographing". My immediate reaction was to ask if I could photograph it. I had the car in the same afternoon, and drove it for a couple of hours, too.

Outwardly, the production 1300 coupe is little changed from the prototype shown at the 1969 Tokyo Motor Show. As far as I could tell, the only interchangeable panel with the sedan is the bonnet. The coupe is longer, wider and lower than the sedan, measuring 4140 mm (13 ft 9 in.) long, 1495 mm (4 ft 11.5 in.) wide and 1320 mm (4 ft 4 in.) tall. The type "99" four-door sedan measures 3885 mm (12 ft 10 in.), 1465 mm (4 ft 11.2 in.) and 1345 mm (4 ft 5 in.) respectively.

Prominent styling features are the sharply pointed nose with quad

headlights, more accentuated kick-up of the rear wing and gently sloping fastback tail.

The 1300 styling may not be as sophisticated as the works of Italian maestros, but one must concede that it looks quite purposeful, even aggressive.

The Motor Vehicle Registration Card left in the car did not mention the wheelbase and tracks, but I suspected both were increased, the former for certain.

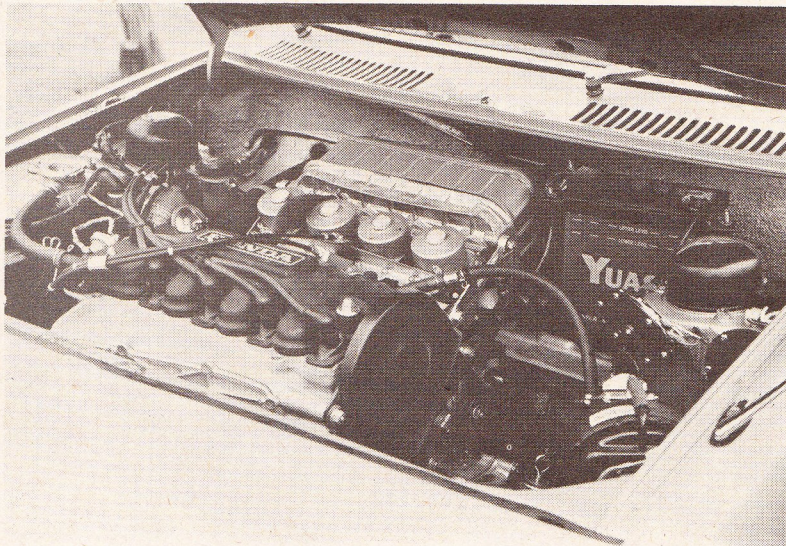
For the front seat occupants, motoring life is definitely more pleasant. The cabin width benefited considerably by the increase of the overall width as well as by more prominently curved glass.

Apparently the front seats have been moved rearward, giving more foot space. The pedals are still offset to the centre, but I felt it wasn't as extreme as in the sedan.

In typical Honda tradition, the brake and gas pedals are ideally positioned for heel and toe work. And the seat itself is better contoured and slightly softer. The rear bench is more of a plus two variety for the westerners — it could take three pint-sized Japanese in reasonable comfort, but I wouldn't want you to live there. The front seat slides forward at a touch of the lever that folds the squab, to make egress/ingress easier to the rear compartment.

The fascia has been completely redesigned. The Tokyo Show prototype shared the same dashboard as the sedan, but the production coupe has a far sexier setup.

The car entrusted to me was a
(Continued on page 98)



Four cylinders, four carbs and air cooling. Cubic capacity is rated at 1298 cc, belts out 115 bhp at 7500 rpm in optimum form. Space has been provided for airconditioning.

Interior is well-equipped without being outlandish — but it is still intended as an economy-coupe. Note driver "viewing console" for instruments, switchgear.



sign, and again shows its intent as a speed vehicle rather than a road-going machine. Floorpan and pedals are pure sports/racing in style and only luxury concession is a set of impressive high-backed contoured buckets. Interior trim is spartan and functional and shows distinct signs of weight-saving. Instrumentation is collected quite unimpressively in a centre V-console. There are full-harness seat belts, the lid lifts up hydraulically, the windscreen is swept by a single wiper, and the glass itself is split on both sides to accept permanent sideglasses. Switchgear is out of the reach of the driver on the passenger's side.

We believe CAMS has already inspected the vehicle with a view to approving its specification for a local record attempt. However, the most up-to-date information suggests the car will be shipped to the States for the record attempt. #

HONDA 1300

(Continued from page 78)

De Luxe version which had the simplest instrumentation. There were two large dials flanking a smaller fuel gauge in the centre. The left dial was filled with a shift point indicator plate (showing maximum points at 45, 80, 120 kph [28, 50, 75 mph] which showed this was borrowed from the series 77 sedan). Optional rev counter should go into this space.

The right one had a 220 kph (138 mph) speedometer with total and trip recorders. A row of idiot lights, oil, parking brake and charge, were grouped under the central fuel gauge. I was glad to note the absence of mock wood panelling of the fascia, which was never convincing enough in the sedan. I did, however, like the simulated wood-rim steering wheel of the coupe, which looked like the real thing and was a sensible size (15.8 in. diameter). One curious omission was a headlight flasher switch — a must item for highway driving.

Opening the bonnet revealed a familiar-looking transverse aircooled four fitted with four Keihin CV sidedraft carbies — a very impressive sight indeed. Again the Registration Card merely showed it as a 1298 cc unit. One could only assume it was in the similar tune to the "99" sedan unit, which puts out 115 bhp at 7500 rpm and a maximum torque of 12.05 kg-m (81 lb/ft) at 5500 rpm on a 9.0 to 1 compression ratio.

The "99" has a wilder valve timing, and four 45 mm Keihins. Otherwise it is quite identical to the bread-and-butter "77" single carb engine. It was rather disconcerting to find this highly tuned engine was more tractable than the cooking mill in my personal Honda.

It didn't seem to mind an incident of utter traffic chaos that reduced speed to almost crawling pace (a pile-up caused by a flipped truck that dumped wet mud all over the road), and there was no sign of plug fouling.

And acceleration was quite staggering, if you remember the displacement of 1298 cc. Again no figures are available, but I would predict a low 17's sec figure in a quarter mile trap.

A feather weight factory driver with merciless right foot might pull 16s. Even in the "77" sedan, you habitually use 5000 rpm in gears. Two thousand more revs are readily available if you feel like it. And you don't have to grit your teeth and close your ears.

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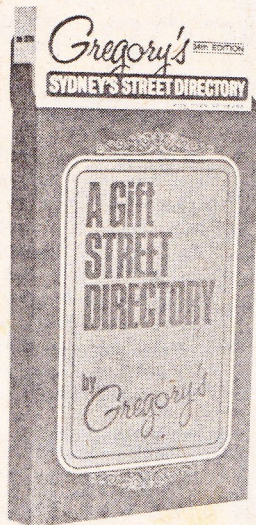
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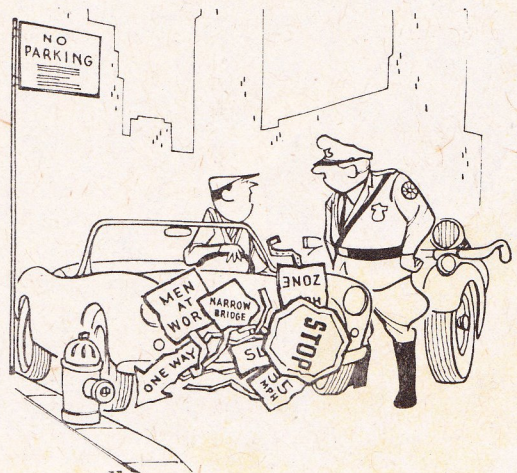


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"Yes?"

The growl of the Honda 1300 is a happy music that is usually bought at much higher prices. A maximum speed is a different matter. In the hottest "99" sedan, the factory claims a maximum of 185 kph, (115 mph) at which speed the engine must turn at 8700 rpm, well over its max power rev. The coupe's shape is certainly more efficient, but I am yet to try it for a top speed. The fact still remains that the car is sufficiently fast in a straight line.

The four-speed all-synco gearbox is apparently unchanged from the sedan, as far as I could tell. Using 7500 rpm, lower gears can take you to approximately 52, 87 and 130 kph (32, 49, 82 mph). You could use 500 more revs for short bursts. The third gear is particularly sweet for overtaking.

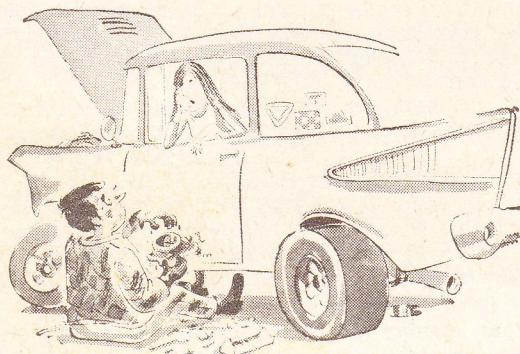
The biggest improvement was seen in the roadholding and handling of the 1300 coupe. This was the area the sedan scored rather poorly. You had a smallish sedan that was ingeniously but quite softly sprung, and had narrow tracks. You threw in a 100 bhp engine, but couldn't come up with the right tyres. The end result was a treacherous car at speed on curves. It was an obstinate understeerer, that called for a lot of lock, and still tended to go straight.

The coupe was a different proposition all together. Obviously its suspension had been considerably stiffened, with some rubber removed from suspension joints. Roll was less noticeable, and tyre squeaks were almost gone, thanks to Bridgestone Skyway 6.20H-13 rubber (to defend Dunlop's honor, I might add they too make equally good high speed tyres for Honda). And I suspected the track might have been widened slightly.

Incidentally, the 1300 could not enjoy the benefit of the latest tyre development — radials. Weight transfer between left and right wheels is so great with so much power and narrowish tracks, the car needs cross-ply with high sidewall stiffness.

The steering of my personal "77" has a very vague feeling about it, strange for a rack and pinion system. And it is quite heavy for tight manoeuvring (a Japanese monthly reported otherwise with its own staff car which came from the same batch as mine, but agreed about the vagueness). By contrast, the steering of the new coupe was quite light, yet reasonably positive. It might also have a quicker steering ratio — the 17.5 to 1 of the "99" S sedan.

The suspension and steering improvement has made the 1300 coupe a quite pleasant car to fling about. A road-tester expressed the opinion that the suspension could have been a bit stiffer for optimum roadholding and handling, which may be realised in the "S" coupe,



"No, Ralph BO is not like a GTO or an AMX or a VW . . . oh, forget it!"

as was the case with the "S" sedan.

The front disc and rear drum brake combination worked quite well, with powerful servo assistance and pressure limiting valve to prevent rear wheel locking. Stopping power of the 1300 is well in keeping with the car's "Go".

As with any new car, especially with revolutionary new ones, the Honda 1300 has had some irritating problems. Having tried this sleeker offering from the dynamic factory, I believe those enthusiastic engineers who once built Grand Prix winners have ironed out the early bugs.

I now am looking forward to a forthcoming endurance test of the 1300 coupe — a jaunt across the American continent. #

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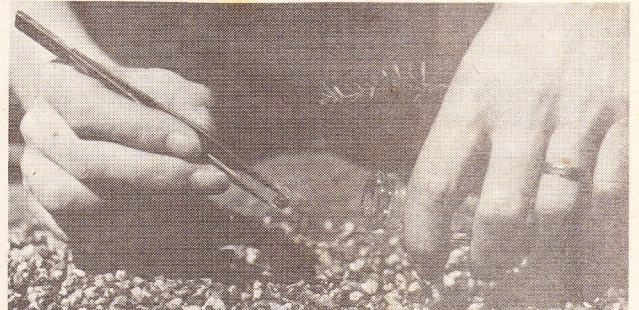
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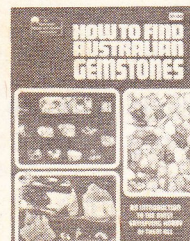
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