

# CUTTING THE MUSTARD IN A WHITE HOT SCREAMER

*Honda lets loose  
a classic of the  
future*



*Even at rest it looks like it's moving*

Every so often the more creative of the mainstream car manufacturers wheel out a short-run production model to fill a particular niche or to create a new one. Sometimes these niche models prove so popular that the production run is extended and they continue far longer than originally intended. Such a car was the Cooper version of the biscuit box-like Mini all those years ago. Or, more recently, the Williams Renault Clio. Others

go further and produce a whole new car for a specific market segment. Such a car is the **Honda Integra R**. Although it's been built as a 'limited edition', the reaction in every country in which it has been introduced has been so positive that, logically it should continue to be produced for some time.

The Honda Integra R is not for everyone, that's for sure. It's an aggressive looking and noisy piece of machinery. But if you're a car buff, that noise is sweet music and the machine is a masterpiece of engineering. A clue to its

character is that the engineers who developed it have Formula 1 backgrounds, so roadholding, driveability and engine performance are at an elevated level. It covered thousands of miles on the demanding Japanese Suzuka circuit, the tortuous Nürburgring track in Germany's Eifel mountains and at Honda's Takasu test-track as part of its development.

Enthusiasts will be wowed by its looks, but it's the engine, the beautifully designed cockpit and, most of all, the driving experience that puts it into a special league and transports you, if you love race-bred machinery, into a kind of seventh heaven. Its heart is a 1.8 litre 16 valve double overhead camshaft VTEC engine, the variable valve unit developing 190 bhp. Coupled with a close-ratio, slick 5-speed gearbox, it can take you from 0-100 km/h in a shattering 6.7 secs. On a race-track or German autobahn it will take you to 234 km/h (146.25 mph) before running out of steam. And it has brakes which are fully up to the task of stopping it in super quick time, too.

Although its engine capacity is under 2-litres and it's neither turbo- nor supercharged, it achieves this kind of performance partly because every-





# Motoring

thing that could be lightened has been, including a special lightened wind-screen. Carbon fibre is used in the cockpit while the beautifully positioned gear lever is in titanium. The pedals are straight in front of you - not slightly offset as in some sporty cars - and with the adjustable, small leather covered steering wheel and the ultra comfortable, body hugging, supportive, lightweight Recaro competition seats which you sit in, rather than on, you have the perfect driving position.

One of the problems with many powerful front wheel drive cars is that they suffer from torque steer - when the car seems to want to head in a direction different from that which you are trying to guide it as you put your foot down hard coming out of a bend. But this Honda doesn't suffer from it; yet another facet of its innovative engineering. A specially designed differential terminates torque steer, making it one of the best handling cars in the world.

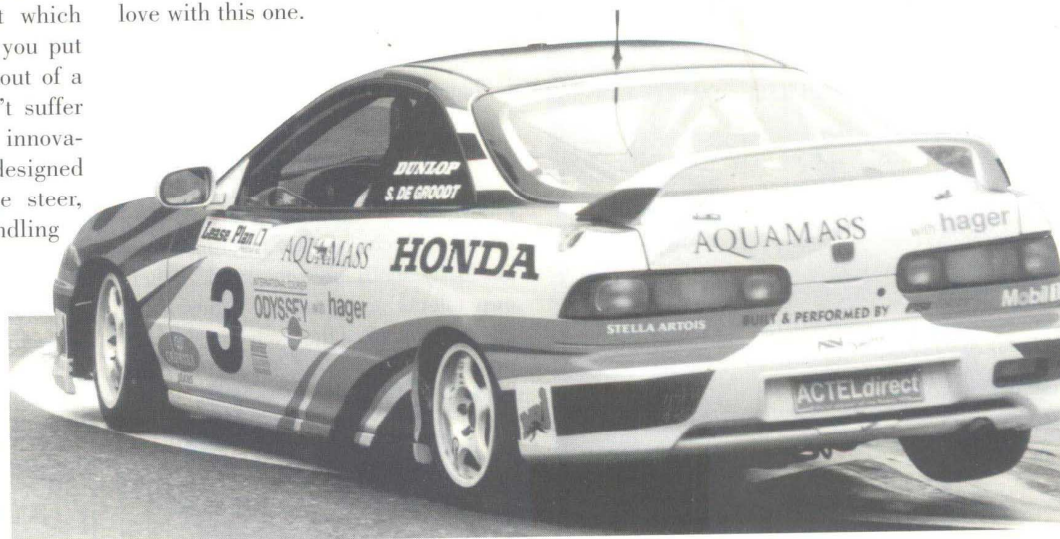
When the revs reach 6000, the engine note changes dramatically from a powerful purr to a high-pitched scream as the engine races upwards and onwards to its 9000 rpm limit. At those engine speeds, you might think you're in a

race car and you would not be entirely wrong, for many of those bought are, and will continue to be, used for racing. At the time of writing, the Honda Integra is the joint leader of the Belgian Touring Car Championship after 10 of the 14 rounds. Although the car was equipped with a perfectly capable hifi radio/cassette player, the music from the engine often proved the greater attraction. Like so many great GT cars, it's fine on motorways but it's even better on B-class, twisty roads where its fabulous and confidence inspiring roadholding capability is something to be reckoned with. It's a no-holds-barred kind of car: you love it or hate it. Believe me, there's much to love with this one.

Although it is a genuine 4-seater, rear seat space is limited and for those over 1m 80, that can be cramped. The boot space is larger than you might imagine for a car of this type and for a couple, or two adults with two youngsters, this has got to be a sports saloon to be considered. One of the biggest surprises about the Integra R is its price, which is a snip at BEF 949,000 (VAT included). It's available in a choice of just three colours - championship white, Milano red or starlight black.

Try one and you'll see why it's a revelation. That's probably what that 'R' stands for.....

**Dick Suter**



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