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Ian Lamming reveals his dark side

Fact File

Honda Civic 1.6i-DTEC Black

Engine: 1.6 litre turbo diesel

Power: 120PS

0-62mph: 10.5 secs

Top speed: 121mph

Combined miles per gallon: 74.3

Transmission: six-speed manual

Insurance: 16E

CO2 g/km: 99

THERE are some cars so black, so dark, so film noir that to drive them you should really sport a pair of pointed ears, a mask and a voluminous cape.

The new Honda Civic is such a car and it has the name to match – the Black.

What you get is light absorbing paint, jet alloys and a shadowy interior. It's a veritable stealth fighter hell bent on evading notice, capture and attention, though, ironically, it does actually look really good and catch the eye.

Black features Honda's new diesel engine, a veritable crusader of a motor and one that transforms a modest hatchback into a batmobile.

Not sure which black arts their technicians employ but somehow the Civic manages to sound and feel characterful, boast incredible levels of performance and still be easy on the wallet.

Dial in a starship dashboard and ergonomics, racetrack handling and the Civic is a better drive than is proper in decent company, it really is.

If ever there was a car designed for my lifestyle, this is the one. It is fast and frugal with tremendous poise and dynamics to die for. Cars in this price bracket should not be this good to drive.

Ride is comfortable and ably soaks up the potholes of an economy still ravaged by recession, yet responses are extremely sharp with bags of feel.

It loves the twists and turns, the gradients and dells of Yorkshire's finest roads. It molests motorways with reckless abandon, it is at home and cosy in congested towns and cities. No matter how heavy footed, the Civic still returns incredible miles per gallon figures, it's uncanny.

Driving Black requires little thought and even less skill but if you are in the mood it is involving and fun.

Inside it is tidy and attractively laid out, with a deep and well-shaped boot and the added convenience of asymmetrically split rear seats. The wrap-around seats and jet-fighter cockpit can't fail to impress and the quality of fit and fittings is exceptional adding to the overall feeling of wellbeing.

Civic has now been with us for generations and the latest incarnate is the best yet. It has made choosing the right car in this sector a black and white affair.