

HONDA PRELUDE

BEST COUPE

A coupe that reflects the wisdom of the Honda Way.

by Michael Jordan

A lot of coupes have recently arrived on the market, but we've discovered that most of them are just two-door sedans in disguise, big cars with thick-witted personalities.

It's no wonder we celebrate the compact, lightweight, and responsive Honda Prelude.

These virtues reflect the teachings of Mr. Honda himself, and they underlay all the formulas and calculations of Honda engineering.

And so the Prelude is a showcase of Honda design and technology, but on a scale that suits personal expression rather than corporate statement.

The Prelude's proportions are reminiscent of the enormously successful Preludes of the Eighties, and the crisp lines help give this car dignity and purpose.

It's too bad the two-tone cabin that complemented the exterior imagery so well has gone out of production, leaving only a generic monotone treatment in its place.

Nevertheless, the Prelude continues to be Honda's best styling effort in recent years.

The Prelude also rewards you when you look beneath its skin.

The 2.2-liter four-cylinder engine spins easily while you're driving around town, as if the laws of friction had been summarily suspended.

Once you push beyond 5000 rpm, this engine gets serious, and variable-valve-timing technology helps put at your command some 200bhp at 7000 rpm, which is pretty breathtaking performance from any kind of engine.

You can also put this power to good use because Honda's ATTS (Active Torque Transfer System) sends more torque to the outside wheel during cornering, improving traction.

You can actually feel the added cornering grip on dry pavement when you're driving the Prelude SH (the only model equipped with ATTS), and there's a dramatic improvement in stability on wet pavement as well.

Meanwhile, the Prelude's suspension offers upper and lower wishbone-type control arms front and rear, a configuration that helps explain this car's impeccable manners at speed.

The suspension is a little short on wheel travel when it comes to rough roads, but we're willing to sacrifice a plush ride for the deft way this 3,042-pound, front-wheel-drive car changes direction on smooth pavement.

The Honda Prelude has a lot in common with the recent crop of sport roadsters.

It shows us its heritage in the way it looks, and its simplified technology is designed to serve the driver instead of the engineer.

It's fast, and it's really meant only for two people.

The truth is, we love the Prelude coupe because it's a roadster with a lid on it, not just another two-door sedan with a spoiler on the trunk.

HONDA PRELUDE SH

Base price: \$25,950

Engine: 16-valve DOHC 4-in-line,

132cu in(2157cc)

Power SAE net 200 bhp @ 7000 rpm

Torque SAE net156 lb-ft @ 5250 rpm