

All that Jazz

The new City caught on like a popular music track. Can Honda's 'hatch'ed symphony - the Jazz - do the same?

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If the phenomenal success of the new Honda City is anything to go by, then the Jazz is sure to enter the Indian premium hatchback market from a position of strength. It's because the City and Jazz are spun off the same platform and even though the new Honda hatchback saloon bears only a passing resemblance to its well-established saloon sibling, a lot of the architecture and bits and pieces are common to both. In fact, many of the City's clever ideas have their roots in the first-generation Jazz that was launched globally in 2001 but never made it to India. The ultra-efficient engines and

mind-boggling interior space, achieved by shoving the fuel tank under the front seats, made the Jazz a revolution that saw it sell over two million units worldwide. We've had to wait for the second-generation Jazz which, after the original model, is more of an evolution than a revolution. But Indian customers experiencing the Jazz for the first time, when it goes on sale this June, will still find it just as path-breaking as the City was.

MINI-MPV ON THE OUTSIDE...

Take one look at the Jazz and you can see it's not from the same mould as a →

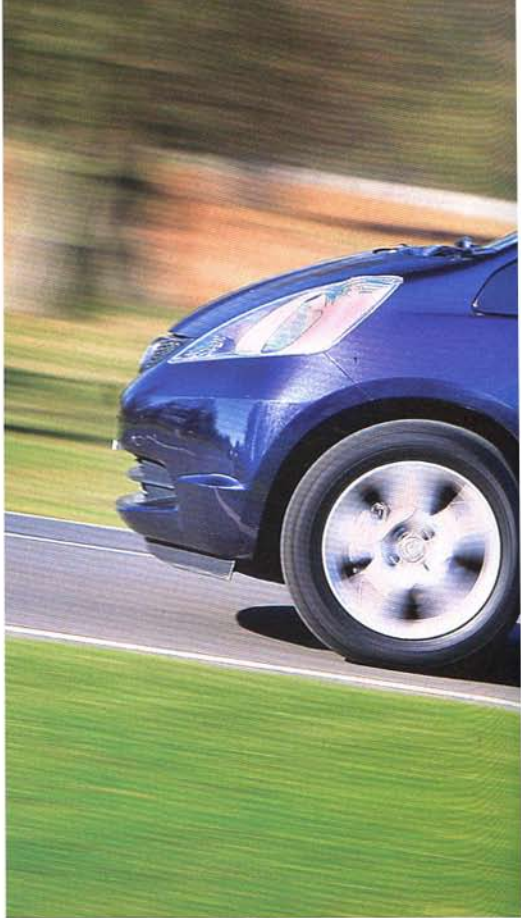




Rear seats which fold upwards are unique and add to Jazz's versatility.



1.2-litre petrol motor will be the only engine option initially.



WHAT THE JAZZ MUST BEAT



SKODA FABIA

The first premium hatchback in the Indian market, the Fabia brings a luxury feel to small cars. The ride is exceptional as is the comfort and build quality. The 1.2 diesel is frugal but noisy and the base 1.2 petrol is best for city use. A hotter 1.9 diesel is in the pipeline.

Price	Rs 5.58-7.86 lakh
Power	70/85bhp
Length	3992mm
Width	1642mm
Height	1513mm
Wheelbase	2462mm
Weight	1125kg



VOLKSWAGEN POLO

The Polo is VW's big assault on the Indian market and the car will be competitively priced when it goes on sale in January 2010. A wide range of engines including a 1.2 TSI turbo-petrol is being developed for India. Driving dynamics and build quality are expected to be exceptional.

Price (est)	Rs 5-7 lakh
Power	68/83/102bhp
Length	3952mm
Width	1682mm
Height	1454mm
Wheelbase	2470mm
Weight	1067-1157kg



FIAT GRANDE PUNTO

The Grande Punto is hoping to build on the success of the Linea. Using the same formula of providing a frugal and powerful diesel engine at a fantastic price, the Grande Punto could be the dark horse in this race. The Italian styling and spacious interiors are sure to find many takers.

Price	Rs 5-6 lakh
Power	65bhp
Length	4030mm
Width	1687mm
Height	1490mm
Wheelbase	2510mm
Weight	1040-1105kg



HYUNDAI i20

Meant essentially for the export markets, the i20 has proved to be very popular in India thanks to its attractive styling, superb interior space and strong 1.2 Kappa engine. The i20 may not be exciting as its rivals but the peace-of-mind provided by the Hyundai badge is reason enough to buy one.

Price	Rs 5.57-6.74 lakh
Power	80bhp
Length	3940mm
Width	1710mm
Height	1505mm
Wheelbase	2525mm
Weight	1065kg



← conventional hatch. While immediate rivals, the Hyundai i20 and Skoda Fabia have typically two-box proportions, the Jazz looks more like a mini-MPV with its generous glass area and distinctly cab-forward stance. Unlike the Honda City, which was designed to primarily make a style statement, a key consideration for a saloon car buyer, the Jazz has been designed keeping practicality in mind. But despite the 'form follows function' approach which gives the Jazz tall proportions, it still manages to look pretty sleek, thanks to a tapering roof and rising window line.

The huge lights, the short, stubby bonnet with its raised V-shape central section and the honeycomb grille, which references the design of the European Civic, give the Jazz the visual drama it needs to stand out from the crowd. Even the flanks of the car are interesting with convex and concave shapes that give definition to the rear wheel arches. The rear hatch section also has its set of tricks with black gloss trim above the numberplate, which gives the impression that the window line has been extended down. The tailgate opens right down to

bumper level, one of the pointers to the Jazz's unmatched functionality.

... SALOON ON THE INSIDE

It's only when you step inside that you realise the functional brilliance of the Jazz. The interiors set a new standard for space efficiency and usability that other hatchbacks can't hope to match. The sense of space inside is incredible, thanks to generous dimensions and glass area that can rival a fish tank. Outside visibility is pretty good and there are no serious blind spots. With the windscreen moved so far forward the A-pillar becomes an obstruction, just like in the previous generation City and the current Civic as well. However, in the Jazz, it's not such a problem thanks to slimmer A-pillars and usefully wide quarter-windows.

The number of storage areas Honda has carved out of the Jazz's interiors is amazing. There are more slots and cubbyholes than you can count and the twin glovebox is particularly useful. But taking the game to a different level is the massive boot – by far the biggest on any hatchback we have seen. The clever bit is the 'double trunk' which features

an underfloor storage area concealed by a double-hinged panel. This lower compartment is ideal for stashing smaller items that don't get in the way of other luggage. However, in this configuration, the spare tyre (which would normally sit in the lower part of the boot) is done away with and replaced with a tyre repair kit. Given our road conditions, it's likely that Honda will choose the safe option of giving us a spare instead of more luggage space.

Moving back to the driver's seat, you are greeted by a stylish dash that has become the hallmark of most Hondas. The steering wheel is lifted from the City but the rest of the design is quite unique and laced with user-friendly touches. The instrument cluster is uncluttered and, as in the City, the dials have large and bold typefaces that are easy to read. The big, chunky knobs move with a solid feel and couldn't really be any easier to operate. The only criticism is the brittle feel of some of the plastics and the dull interior trim of the UK-spec car I drove. However, it's likely that the Indian model will come with lighter, beige interiors which have become standard fare for us. →

Massive glass area and cab-forward design gives Jazz a mini-MPV look.



← Passenger space and comfort is where the Jazz truly excels. Up front the seats are extremely generous although legroom is about average for a premium hatchback. Jump into the rear and it's a different world. Legroom, headroom and width are terrific and comparable to cars a class higher. In fact, the rear seats are more comfortable than the new City's, thanks largely to the high seating position which in fact is reminiscent of the previous-generation City. However, the piece de resistance is the 'magic' operation of the rear seats made possible by moving the fuel tank forward (it's normally positioned under the boot and rear passenger floor) to beneath the front seats. This has liberated enough space for the rear seats to perform some really clever tricks. Not only can the seats fold completely flat with the pull of a lever, but they also fold upwards like a cinema seat and easily lock to create a unique storage area that's perfect for carrying tall plants or even a small bicycle.

IF WISHES WERE HORSES

What seems like a comedown from the brilliant interior packaging is the sole engine that will initially power the Jazz – a 1.2-litre engine. There's no diesel option and Honda won't offer one in the foreseeable future, either. However, a

Dashboard combines style with practicality. Steering wheel similar to the City.

hotter Jazz, with the City's 1.5 motor, is expected some months after the launch. Employing a small-capacity engine to power what is easily the biggest hatchback in the market doesn't seem like a good idea but not if it's a Honda. No one knows how to make small petrol engines as well as Honda and though the Jazz's motor only displaces 1198cc, it churns out an impressive 89bhp and 11.62kgm of torque which straightaway sends it to the top of

the 1.2-litre class, pipping even Suzuki's recently unveiled K12M engine (that will power the Ritz) for power and torque.

The best bit is that fuel efficiency is likely to be class-leading as well. This 1.2 uses the same i-VTEC system that has fast earned a reputation in the City for its unbeatable blend of performance and economy. Honda's variable valve timing system does a perfect balancing act between power and economy, →



Chunky knobs for air con couldn't be easier to operate; Jazz has storage spaces sprouting from everywhere.

'The interiors set a new standard for space efficiency.'



'There's no diesel option, not even in the foreseeable future.'

← aided in no small measure by some unique friction-reducing technology that Honda has pioneered.

Fire the motor and it settles down into an imperceptible idle that can fool you into thinking the engine has stalled. It's only when you prod the accelerator that you realise the motor is alive. The sweet-shifting gearshift and the light, yet progressive clutch are a part of the Jazz's easy-going nature. The engine is quite responsive off the mark but floor the throttle and you can feel the lack of low-end grunt in this short-stroke engine. Peak power arrives at 6000rpm and torque at 4900rpm, so you need to pile on the revs to extract the most out of this motor and that means more frequent gearshifts. Keep the engine on the boil and progress is pretty brisk. The engine is quite free revving and doesn't mind regular visits to the 6700rpm redline but it does get quite vocal at max revs. With the best power-to-weight ratio in its class, the Jazz should easily outrun both the 120 and the Fabia. What remains to be seen is how fuel efficient it is but

Jazz likely to be most expensive hatch in the market. Alloys not standard for India.

given Honda's track record, it's likely to be the most frugal.

JAZZ IS A CITY

In the ride and handling department, Hondas have never been able to prove their supremacy over European rivals and the Jazz is no exception. The light steering and tight turning circle make it easy to punt around town but it simply doesn't have the fluency through corners or the ride quality of the Fabia – the benchmark in this class. The slow-geared and relatively light electric steering didn't feel as precise as I would have liked and the soft damping didn't give confidence at high speeds. Clearly, the Jazz has been tuned for an urban environment but even at low speeds it felt fidgety and the suspension crashed through some of the rare uneven patches we found on British streets.

The India-spec Jazz is sure to come with a completely different suspension set-up and perhaps even tyres that are smaller than the current 15-inch size (alloys won't be standard); so it's likely that the ride and handling characteristics will be quite different. Even so, against cars like the Fabia, Polo and Grande Punto, I would be surprised if the Jazz is dynamically superior.

WILL IT WORK?

As a practical, city car the Jazz fulfills its role with astonishing aplomb. Honda's

FACTFILE

HONDA JAZZ

VITALS		
Price (est)		Rs 6-7 lakh
Length		3900mm
Width		1695mm
Height		1525mm
Wheelbase		2500mm
Turning circle		9.8m
Kerb weight		1047kg
Engine	4 cyls in line, 1198cc, petrol	
Installation	Front, transverse, front-wheel drive	
Power	89bhp at 6000rpm	
Torque	11.62kgm at 4900rpm	
Gearbox	Five-speed, manual	
Suspension (F/R)	MacPherson struts and stabiliser bar/trailing arm with torsion beam and stabiliser bar	
Fuel tank		42 litres
Boot		399 litres
Brakes (F/R)		Ventilated discs/discs

first hatchback for the Indian market is a true packaging marvel and its unbeatable user-friendliness far outweighs any dynamic shortcomings it might have. The Jazz's innovative design features will surely make it a benchmark in this class but the lack of a diesel engine and its expensive price tag (estimated to be upwards of Rs 6.5 lakh) may limit its appeal. But since it's a Honda, I wouldn't bet on that. **A**

