

The 2020 Honda CR-V Hybrid gets highly disappointing gas mileage

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- This is the 2020 Honda CR-V Hybrid.
Jonathan Gitlin
- One way to tell if you're looking at a hybrid CR-V is by the grille—it's black and shiny, and it has some electric motors inside.
Jonathan Gitlin
- You can see definite Honda styling cues here, with lines that resemble those on the front of a Civic.
Jonathan Gitlin
- I quite like Honda's interiors, and that's true for the CR-V.
Jonathan Gitlin
- The rear bumper is also slightly different for the hybrid version.
Jonathan Gitlin
- Cargo volume is slightly reduced by having the 1.2kWh battery and some control electronics under there, but not by much.
Jonathan Gitlin
- Qi wireless charging is rather convenient.
Jonathan Gitlin
- Call me nuts, but I like these little bits of wood trim.
Jonathan Gitlin
- This dash will be familiar if you've driven a Civic.

Jonathan Gitlin

- I don't love the infotainment UI at all.

Jonathan Gitlin

A hybrid SUV should be the best of both worlds—a big, spacious vehicle with good fuel efficiency. That was certainly the hope for the latest version of Honda's CR-V. One of the country's best-selling crossovers, this year the CR-V got the addition of a hybrid powertrain for the first time. It's Honda's third hybrid for the US market, joining the Accord hybrid and the Insight, which we rather liked when we tested it a few weeks ago. But does the addition of some lithium-ion and electric motors work as well for this crossover?

I've seen this powertrain before

If you're familiar with the Accord Hybrid, you'll be familiar with the CR-V Hybrid's powertrain. Instead of the 1.5L engine in 'normal' CR-Vs, the hybrid version combines a 2.0L four-cylinder, 143hp (107kW), 129lb-ft (175Nm) Atkinson-cycle engine with two electric motors. One of these works as the starter motor and as a generator driven by the internal combustion engine to charge the 1.2kWh lithium-ion battery that lives above the rear axle. The other electric motor is the one that usually drives the wheels; in this case, it's 181hp (135kW), 232lb-ft (315Nm).

Like the other Honda hybrids, there's no conventional transmission here. Most of the time, the internal combustion engine won't directly contribute to forward motion, although it can do so under some conditions via a clutch that connects it to the output of the electric drive motor. Unlike the other Honda hybrids, the CR-V is capable of all-wheel drive via front-mounted transfer case. So the rear wheels will do their share of the work when you move off from a stop, going up a steep grade, or if the CR-V's digital brain starts to detect the front wheels beginning to slip. But for most day-to-day

driving, only the front wheels will be powered, because let's be honest—almost no one is going to be crossing the Darien Gap in any crossover, and just being FWD is more efficient. More on that later.

It looks like a crossover

Visually, there's little to distinguish the hybrid CR-V from the not-hybrid version. The front fascia is a little different around the fog lights, there's a shiny black plastic grille, and the rear bumper is slightly different, too. It's not the most attractive crossover out there, but it's probably not the ugliest one, either.

I rather like the CR-V's interior, which has an array of useful storage bins and cubbies, including some clever sliding bits in the center console that allow you to store your stuff without it being on view to anyone peeking in the window. I also like the bits of wood trim on the dash and center console, although I may well be in a minority there. Visibility from the driver's seat is good, with no massive blind spots out the front. And speaking of blind spots, the CR-V offers traditional blind-spot monitors rather than the camera mounted in the passenger-side mirror like some other models in Honda's range.

The main instrument display will look familiar to anyone who's been in a current Honda Civic. There are no analogue dials here as there are in the Accord or Insight; instead, you get a purely digital speed readout in big clear numbers, with a bar up top that shows you the amount of power you are deploying or regenerating. The P/D/R/D buttons are the same as in many other Hondas and Acuras—as I mentioned in the Insight review, using them quickly becomes second nature.

The interior is capacious, with plenty of leg room (40.4 inches/1.03m) for backseat passengers and 33.2 cubic feet (940L) of cargo volume (that expands to 68.7 cubic feet/1,945L

with the rear seats folded down).

Next, an apology. In the Insight review a couple of weeks ago, I said I found Honda's infotainment UI to be unobjectionable. That was probably because I spent all my time using Apple CarPlay. I made more of an effort to use the native infotainment system this time, and I am not a fan. The UI is slow to respond to inputs, and it's a good thing that Android Auto and Apple CarPlay are included.

With regard to driver-assist technology, all trim levels of the CR-V Hybrid—from the \$27,750 LX to the \$35,950 Touring (which was the version we tested)—get the Honda Sensing suite. This includes forward collision warning (which is remarkably sensitive and gave me quite a few false positive warnings), lane-departure warning, lane-keeping assist, adaptive cruise control, and automatic headlights. The cheapest LX model does have to do without blind-spot monitoring and rear cross-traffic alerts. But that's enough to earn the CR-V a top safety rating with the IIHS and five stars from NHTSA.

Real-world efficiency ain't great

The CR-V Hybrid's on-road manners are unremarkable. It's not particularly exciting to drive, but the low rolling resistance tires will limit your cornering speed well before any center-of-gravity issues come into play. What's not unremarkable is the fuel economy. The EPA rates the hybrid CR-V at 38/40/35mpg combined/city/highway (6.19/6.72/5.88l/100km). In practice, I got nowhere near those numbers, averaging just over 30mpg (7.84l/100km) over a week, even though most of my driving was on DC city streets at 25mph or below.

Enlarge / As you can see, I'm not the only driver to fail to reach the claimed fuel efficiency.

Jonathan Gitlin

It would be tempting to blame my driving style, but the CR-V's trip computer tells a more complete story—over almost 2,000 miles (3,200km), the crossover never bettered 34.6mpg (6.8l/100km), and during the more than 1,000 miles before I got into it, the car never even reached 30mpg. That's still more than you could expect from a non-hybrid CR-V, but it's far short of Honda or the EPA's claims. With plug-in hybrid-crossover competition arriving in the form of a PHEV Toyota RAV4 and a PHEV Ford Escape, crossover drivers looking to minimize their carbon outputs may do well to look beyond the Honda.

Listing image by Jonathan Gitlin

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