

# EXCLUSIVE! FIRST TEST HONDA 600

*Out from under  
the wraps after  
a long wait*



**T**he Honda 600 is now being sold in the United States. The only state as of this writing with distribution and sales, however, is Hawaii. For this reason, it was necessary to conduct this test where the cars are. The year 'round temperature in Hawaii is so mild that most cars are not equipped with heaters. In fact, prior to picking up the Honda 600, we rented a 1970 Ford Maverick and noted that it had no heater. Certainly even in mid-winter, none was needed, with the daytime temperature in the low 80s.

By the time this issue of ROAD TEST sees print, the 600 should be on sale in many additional states throughout the U.S. We also expect that Honda will be greatly expanding its automotive pro-

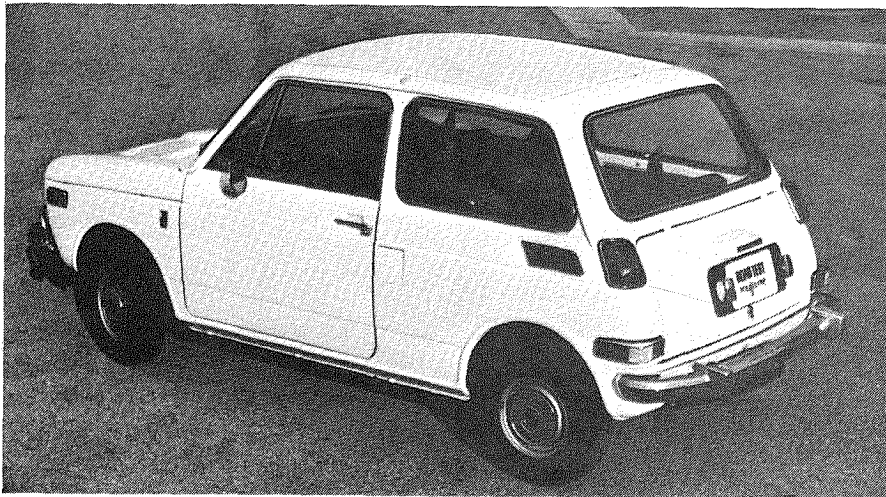
duction facilities. This will enable the company to meet the home market demand for the larger 1300 car. With this accomplished, the 1300 will then be exported to the U.S.A. In all probability, Honda will not bring the 1300 to these shores until adequate production is assured, feeling there have been too many unfortunate past examples of manufactureres releasing cars for showing before sufficient stocks were on hand to assure delivery to customers.

We first drove the Honda 600 in 1967 in Japan. (See ROAD TEST February 1968.) Honda has taken a full two years to meet all Federal requirements and standards and to work out for the U.S. all possible bugs on the 600, which will be sold on the Japanese market.

The first and most lasting impression of the Honda 600 is that the performance is surprisingly good. With only 37 cubic inches (598cc), the 2-cylinder, 4-stroke engine gives excellent performance. In Japan the small Honda has a 360cc engine. There the 600cc would be considered a big engine for this size and weight car.

The front engine, front drive unit makes for an extremely compact power plant and drive train configuration. The transmission is an integral part of the engine and oil supplied to the engine also provides lubrication for both the transmission and differential. This, of course, eliminates the need for three separate oil supplies.

The Honda picks up well even at slow



*Based on overall length of 125.0 in. there is surprisingly ample luggage room arranged for easy loading. Fuel tank is forward of rear axle line.*

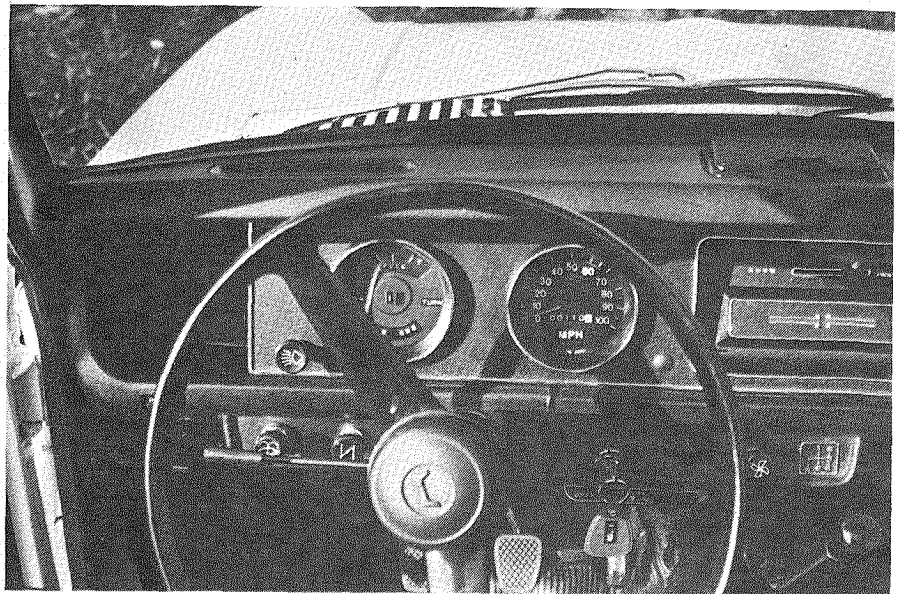
*Instrumentation is spartan. There is a speedometer in a right hand pod and a so-called 'combination meter' on the left. The combination meter contains fuel gauge and warning lights for all other possible malfunctions.*

speeds in fourth gear, and there is little need to make excessive use of the 4-speed all-synchro gear box. The engine starts instantly, and only on the first early morning start is it necessary to make use of the choke. Once started, the choke could be pushed in almost immediately.

Elapsed time on the drag strip was a fairly respectable 19.02 sec. with a speed through the traps of 66.84 mph. Very strong torque gets the 600 moving quickly.

We managed a top speed on a fairly tight engine of 76 mph. With a few hundred more miles, the car should top out at close to 80 mph. The factory figure of 75 should thus be considered fairly conservative. At a comfortable cruising speed of 65 mph, the engine is turning approximately 5200 rpm. Maximum horsepower is 38 at 6000 rpm. Maximum torque is 36.2 lb./ft. at 4500 rpm.

As mileage accumulated, we found the car to be more and more fun to drive. Outstanding handling more than made up for the modest power output. High speed cruising, while producing quite a bit of engine noise, never gave the feeling that the car was being overstressed. We have every reason to believe that the car will stand up well even under the most adverse driving and climatic conditions the U.S. has to offer. We have known for some time that scores of these cars have been undergoing tests in the U.S. actually, for the past two years now. They have been subjected to extensive high speed driving in Death Valley, California, with no problems. This should assure prospective buyers that no overheating condition should occur. An interesting fact is that Honda has built more air-cooled engines than any other automotive or motorcycle company in the world. Volkswagen is only second in this category. Most of these engines, of course, are for the world famous Honda Motorcycle, and as of this writing, more than 11,000,000 motorcycles have been



built by Honda, the U.S. alone having taken over 1,000,000 of this production.

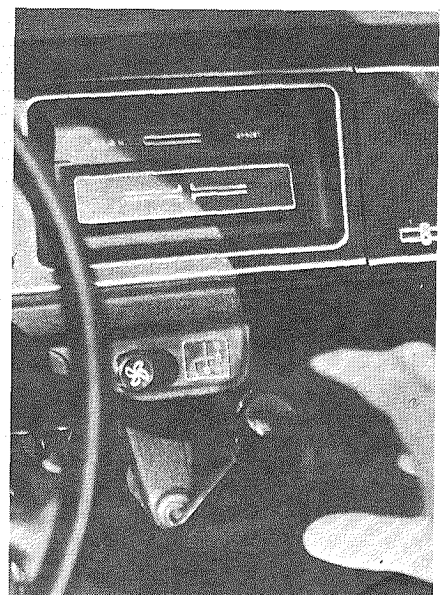
To return to the 600's handling, it has the characteristic excellent cornering power that goes with most front wheel drive cars. With the surprising amount of urge available we were reminded of the Mini-Cooper 'S' which has more than double the displacement and almost double the horsepower. We could imagine ourselves cornering on one wheel at a future SCCA sedan race.

The steering, which is unassisted, has a very positive feel but still manages to be quite light. No small trick with front wheel drive.

The Honda 600 meets all U.S. safety requirements as, of course, every car now imported or sold must.

As previously mentioned, the 600cc engine is larger than the engine used on the Japan home market. For this reason, front disc brakes are standard, while in Japan drum brakes are standard, front and rear on the less powerful car.

The 600 is equipped with the U.S.



*Gear shift lever protrudes from under the dash. Location makes good sense with engine, transmission and differential in a self-contained unit up front.*



required dual braking system which provides for either front or rear brakes remaining operational, even with the complete failure of one master cylinder. We found the brakes to be more than adequate for the performance capability of the car. Repeated stops from 60 mph produced no fade and only slight increase in pedal pressure. There was no indication of rear wheel lock up. This was due to the combination of the disc front, drum rear configuration found to be most effective on front engine, front drive vehicles. The Honda also comes equipped with radial tires as an option and a front-rear proportioning valve. Both are factors contributing to prevention of rear wheel lock-up. The proportioning valve, under hard braking, reduces the amount of brake fluid supplied to the rear brakes, thus balancing the braking effect between front and rear wheels. All in all, we would rate the brakes as excellent. We had no decelerometer for this test, but did manage a best stop from 60 mph in a measured 145 feet, which is above average stopping ability. The radial ply tires run on 26 pounds pressure front, and 22 pounds rear. Tire size is 5.20 x 10.

The steering column is divided with two universal joints and, being offset, preclude any possibility of the steering column being displaced into the passenger compartment in the event of a front end crash. The rack and pinion system is similar to that used on the Honda Formula 1 race car and assures maximum road feel with minimum steering effort. Another safety feature is the mounting of the steering gear box on the firewall of the car. The turning circle is 31 feet. There are 3.1 turns from full lock to lock.

Honda engineers have done an outstanding job of packaging, and four persons can travel in the 600 in reasonable comfort. Even the luggage space is adequate. The explanation for the large trunk in relation to the compact size is again through maximum use of available space. The absence of a drive shaft and differential in the rear also permits more room to be utilized for the luggage compartment.

There is considerable engine and transmission noise, not unusual with air-cooled power. It is our understanding that efforts are being made to achieve a lower noise level through more effective use of insulating material.

It is only fair to mention that our test car had only three miles on the clock when we picked it up, and was necessarily quite tight. We had the opportunity to drive the 600 only about 400 miles, and at the end of our test period, the car had become noticeably quieter and performance had also improved considerably. There is surprisingly little vibration from the 2-banger, and the typical driver would probably feel that a

4-cylinder engine was under the hood.

The automatic transmission version of the 600 is to be introduced shortly. The transmission is said to be extremely efficient. We hope to obtain one of the first units for test. Basically the Honda-

***A compact economy sedan, for best utilization of space, must necessarily follow the shoe-box shape. For a small car Honda 600 is roomy.***

***Air cooled two cylinder 598cc engine delivers 38 hp at 6000 rpm and 36.2 lb./ft. of torque at 4500 rpm. There is plenty of power to accelerated the 600's 1345 lb.***

