

Shifting Gears

[Style, Snow and the Honda Accord](#)

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By Roger Witherspoon

There was more than a foot of snow on the ground and the stuff was still falling fast.

It was a fine, light, white powder, the kind my SkiDoc sister flies to Colorado and Montreal to zip through for a week. But skiing isn't my passion, I had errands to run, the street was a compacted, white blanket and the pending car trip looked less and less inviting. The two foot tall barrier mound of dirty snow left by the town's snow plows did not make things any better.

So what would your average Honda Accord, with 18-inch wheels, standard Michelin all-season radial tires, make of this mess?

The Honda's V-6 engine had been running, and while its 271 horsepower were just in reserve at the moment, the heaters under the front seats, the front and back windshields, and the side mirrors meant I could easily see where I wanted to go or where the ice slid me. This was a two-door, six-speed manual coupe, the sporty model of the popular Honda sedan, and it was designed more for drag racing than snow plodding.

But errands could not wait. I slid the chrome and leather gear shift into first, popped Sly Stone's *Hot Fun in the Summertime* into the six-disc CD player and eased down the unshoveled driveway to the snow hurdle at the curb. There was a slight wiggle in the rear of the car as the Honda's traction control figured out the parameters to the snowy surface. Then it treated the snow as any other pavement, and the Honda went straight down the driveway and over the snow mound as if

it were just another traffic speed bump.

Over the next few miles there were more than a few occasions for the front-wheel drive Accord to swerve around stalled or sliding cars. But none of these conditions seemed to trouble the car's traction and stability controls. While part of that was due to the tread pattern on the Michelin radials, a good portion of the credit goes to Honda. With many vehicles, it is necessary to disconnect the traction control in ice or snow conditions because the skidding crashes their computer system. With Honda, you might as well pop in and enjoy your favorite half dozen CDs, or run through 1,000 or so jams from your iPod or USB because the car will treat the worst snow day as, well, just another day on the road.

The 2011 Honda Accord is an updated version of one of the most popular cars on the road and packs a lot into a \$33,000 package. On the minus side, the car is missing a backup camera, which is a safety item you expect to find in well made cars priced over \$25,000. In addition, the driver's seat is power driven but the front passenger seat is only manually operated.

But as far as complaints go, that's it.



The Honda Accord has stayed a top selling car because it is thoughtfully designed, reliable, appealing outside and comfortable inside. All things considered, the 2011 Coupe doesn't stray from that formula. It can't afford to. Ford never forgave Honda from stealing the title of best selling sedan from its stylish Taurus two decades ago. The new, revitalized Ford Motor Company is roaring back and is tied in JD Power's 2010 assessment for the highest quality among mass market brands with its Ford Fusion.

Outside, the new two-door Accord Coupe has a wide, sloping hood and a more aggressive grill holding its trademark, lopsided H. The company has never made a gas-guzzling V-8 engine, though its V-6 power plant gets only moderate fuel economy with an EPA rating of 17 miles per gallon in city driving and 26 MPG on the highway. The test car averaged 19 miles per gallon in mixed driving, though some of that fuel was burned while warming up the car on frigid mornings. The six-speed manual transmission takes some getting used to because the transition between gears can be abrupt and, if unprepared, you can find the car jerking to a halt. But once you have adapted to the rhythm of the car, it is both smooth, aggressive, and has more in common with a BMW 335 diesel than with the Ford Fusion or its Japanese competitors, the Toyota Camry or Nissan Altima.



Inside, the Accord has surprising room for a coupe. The seats are soft, supple leather, and passengers who live north of six feet can ride comfortably in the rear seats. The rear seats also fold flat to enlarge the already ample trunk. The front seats can be heated which is appreciated in snow country.

In terms of gadgets, the Accord comes with a navigation system tied to its XM radio, providing traffic and weather updates if they affect a planned route. For entertainment, the coupe does have a 270-watt premium sound system with seven speakers, to amplify jams from your iPod, MP3 player, or USB drive. Its Bluetooth system is easy to use and, once set, automatically reconnects with the cell phone whenever it is in range.

Honda is in the automotive equivalent of a dogfight these days, but has stayed competitive with style and performance at a reasonable price. The company is not likely to lose ground with the new Accord Coupe.



2011 Honda Accord Coupe EX-L

MSRP: **\$32,480**

EPA Mileage: **17 MPG City** **26 MPG Highway**

As Tested Mileage: **19 MPG Mixed**

Performance / Safety:

3.5-Liter, aluminum alloy, SOHC V-6 engine producing 271 horsepower and 254 pound/feet of torque; 6-speed manual transmission; 4-wheel disc brakes; front wheel drive; rack and pinion steering; double wishbone front suspension; 18-inch, aluminum wheels; fog lights; heated side

mirrors; stability and traction control; driver's and front passenger's front and side airbags; side curtain airbags.

Interior / Comfort:

AM/FM/XM satellite radio; 270-watt audio system with 7 speakers; MP3, iPod, and USB connections; navigation system with traffic and weather updates; Bluetooth; leather wrapped, tilt and telescoping steering wheel with audio controls; leather seats, heated in front, fold flat in rear; power sunroof..