# 2009 Honda Civic Takes Top Spot in kbb.com Compact Sedan Comparison Test

**Editors Test, Compare Seven New Vehicles in Popular CompactSedan Segment, Declare Civic Winner**

IRVINE, Calif., March 30 /PRNewswire/ -- Kelley Blue Bookwww.kbb.com, the leading provider of new car and used car information, today announces the results of the kbb.com expert editorial staff's highly comprehensive compact sedan comparison test between seven of the top new cars in the class, and declares the 2009 Honda Civic the winner. The editors recently tested the newest versions of the top-selling compact sedans - Honda Civic, MAZDA3, Toyota Corolla, Hyundai Elantra, Nissan Sentra, Ford Focus and Chevy Cobalt - and detailed their observations and opinions on each vehicle, ultimately declaring the Civic the overall winner in the segment. In the spirit of the times, each of the cars tested in the kbb.com 2009 compact sedan comparison test featured an automatic transmission (the way consumers purchase them most often) matched with a four-cylinder engine, and highway fuel economy of at least 30 miles per gallon as estimated by the EPA. The results of the 2009 kbb.com compact sedan comparison test can be viewed in an all-new video recently posted to the Latest News section of kbb.com, as well as the company's Facebook page and YouTube channel.

The comprehensive compact sedan comparison tests conducted by the kbb.com editorial staff included scoring multiple points of consideration, both subjective and instrumented, for each vehicle in each of the following categories: exterior, interior, driving dynamics, safety (both active and passive safety), crash test ratings, value (examining both New Car Blue Book® Values, which are the actual transaction values of what each vehicle is currently selling for, as well as projected future resale values), on-ramp acceleration, passing acceleration, braking from 60 mph, evasive lane change, cornering limits, and interior noise at idle, 30 mph and 60 mph. In the end, six drivers had subjected seven cars to more than 1,500 miles worth of poking and prodding to determine the results of the 2009 kbb.com compact sedan comparison test.

In May 2008, the Honda Civic became the best-selling vehicle in the country. In June, the Toyota Corolla took top honors. These facts are significant because for every single month for more than 16 years prior to that, the most popular vehicle was a pickup truck. The economy might have broken down in 2008, but small cars experienced a relative boom. The beauty of the 21st-century small car is that the benefits often outweigh the compromises. Affordability always has been the main reason people buy small cars, but now more people are thinking small for the fuel economy and emissions advantages. Buyers that might otherwise choose something larger and pricier are discovering that today's small cars are comfortable, refined and amenity-laden enough that actual tradeoffs are few. Because every category has its standouts, the kbb.com editors tested a selection of the most popular compact sedans to see which would rise to the top.

"Compact sedans appeal to a wide variety of consumers, and given the economic downturn and fluctuating fuel costs over the past months, the already mammoth segment has seen a growth in interest," said Jack R. Nerad, executive editorial director and executive market analyst for Kelley Blue Book and kbb.com. "Those looking to downsize might be surprised by the amenities the new compact sedans offer. We were impressed with all of the cars we tested, but our team found that the 2009 Honda Civic, despite the improvements of its competitors, is simply the best all-around in its class."

**2009 Kbb.com Compact Sedan Comparison Test Rankings & Editorial**

**Comments**

**First Place:** 2009 Honda Civic

Strengths: Well built. Well rounded. World class.
Shortcomings: Few
Synopsis: If all the drivers of the world had to decide on one car...

We interrupt this comparison test to re-confirm some old news: TheHonda Civic is a great car. Its reputation as reliable and economical transportation is so strong that it's easy to overlook just how well it does everything else, as we realized during our most recent time behind the wheel of the freshened, fourth-year Civic. Its shape is interesting but not particularly polarizing. Its interior manages to be innovative, attractive and simple at once. The engine combines adequate power with exceptional fuel economy. The backseat and trunk both qualify as accommodating. Everything the Civic does, it does well. If you're looking for performance, you can do better. If you want the softest ride, the Civic can be beat. If you're like most shoppers in the segment, however, you're looking for balance. If you're like us, you'll have a hard time finding fault with the 2009 Honda Civic.

**Second Place:** 2009 Mazda MAZDA3

Strengths: Fun. Attractive. Fun.
Shortcomings: A small car on the small side
Synopsis: Did we mention it's fun?

The MAZDA3 might have come up number two on our score sheets, but it's the small sedan most of the kbb.com editors would buy for themselves. Compared with the rest of the cars in this test -- and the entire segment -- the MAZDA3's fun factor is off the charts. That it looks so good inside and out is, by comparison, just icing on the cake. Our lesser-powered 'i' model was only fourth-fastest in our zero-to-60 mph tests, but it finished a decisive first in cornering and braking. Where were the weak spots? The trunk and rear seating area were among the tightest in the test, and its crash test ratings weren't at the top of the chart. So maybe the MAZDA3 isn't the first choice for families. For fun-seekers, though, it's the obvious choice.

**Third Place:** 2009 Toyota Corolla

Strengths: Roomy and refined
Shortcomings: Nothing to get excited about
Synopsis: Feels like a small Camry

Behold the electroluminescent gauge cluster and attractive faux wood trim from the Corolla's comfortable driver's seat and it'd be easy to believe you were sitting in a pricier, larger mid-size sedan. By foregoing look-at-me styling or progressive interior design, the latest Corolla maintains its reputation as the confidently conservative grown-up of the group. As such, it did prove a more willing and capable driving partner than most of us expected. So how did one of the category's gold standards finish third? By playing it safe. The Corolla finished tops in value, but middle-of-the-pack in categories like performance, styling and even safety. Playing it safe, however, is exactly how the Corolla became -- and continues to be -- one of the best-selling vehicles in the country

**Fourth Place:** 2008 Hyundai Elantra

Strengths: Attractive interior, high feature-per-dollar ratio
Shortcomings: Driving dynamics, resale value
Synopsis: Better than its resale values would indicate

Anyone who thinks Hyundai still competes on price alone would be enlightened by a drive in the Elantra. Highlights include an attractive, roomy interior, excellent crash test scores and a long list of standard safety features. In our instrumented testing the Elantra excelled in braking and highway noise levels, but proved slowest to 60 miles per hour and demonstrated the least cornering grip. Sticker price is another Elantra strong suit, although lagging resale values mostly offset that advantage. As marketplace perception slowly (but surely) catches up with product reality, the Elantra will continue to become increasingly attractive.

**Fifth Place:** 2009 Nissan Sentra

Strengths: Responsive transmission, eager handling
Shortcomings: Uninspired interior, so-so value
Synopsis: Needs stronger strong points

The Nissan Sentra is supposed to be one of the sportiest small cars out there. And while its instrumented test numbers weren't great -- aside from the second-fastest run to 60 miles per hour -- several editors did indeed praise the Sentra's overall handling and the smoothness of its continuously variable transmission. Inside, front and rear seat roominess and comfort were highlights of an interior that was otherwise regarded as middling overall. The Sentra's crash test ratings are strong, but it lost points for not offering, at any price, electronic stability or traction control (we like the idea of avoiding the accident in the first place). Overall value was another weak point, relegating the Sentra to a more disappointing finish than some testers expected going into it.

**Sixth Place:** 2009 Ford Focus

Strengths: Euro driving feel, comfortable front seats, SYNC
Shortcomings: Exterior styling
Synopsis: There's beauty beneath that ski

If we had a category for the most surprising vehicle in the test, the 2009 Ford Focus would have won it going away. None of the testers wrote home about the car's exterior styling, but the SYNC infotainment system is the best bit of high-tech in the category, its front seats are comfortable, and the controls and instruments are straightforward. Similarly, the Focus was among the slowest in our acceleration tests, but its handling characteristics and overall feel were refreshingly European-like. The Focus also finished above average in the value category. The fact that a car we found so pleasantly surprising finished sixth of seven demonstrates just how strong the category has become. Shoppers in the category now have the luxury of choosing the right small car amongst many good small cars.

**Seventh Place:** 2009 Chevy Cobalt

Strengths: Eager engine, good fuel economy
Shortcomings: Second-rate accommodations
Synopsis: A solid car hidden beneath outmoded styling and appointments

The Chevy Cobalt is the most competitive small car General Motors has ever built. In a sign of just how far GM's four-cylinder engines have come, some testers felt the Cobalt's engine was the best of the bunch. Indeed, the Cobalt was the fastest in both our on-ramp and highway passing acceleration tests. Most found the sheetmetal inoffensive but unexciting, but the interior was generally regarded as having been surpassed by the competition (the Cobalt is one of the oldest vehicles in the comparison). Rear-seat and cargo accommodations were unremarkable, and the Cobalt's lone safety highlight is its exclusive availability of OnStar. On the value front, the Cobalt's low purchase price is mitigated by its below-par resale value.

For complete test scores for each vehicle and more information, visit the Fuel-Sipper Faceoff: 2009 Compact Sedan Comparison Test story in the KBB® Green section on Kelley Blue Book's kbb.com.

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