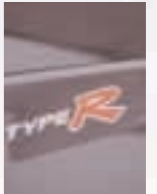


THE R-T CROWD

We've recently taken delivery of two long-term hot hatches: a Honda Civic Type-R and a Toyota Corolla T Sport. And as their manufacturers have such close ties with grand prix racing, we thought we'd kick off our own season of sport by pitting them against each other on the road



● **Honda Civic Type-R**
● **£15,995**
The benchmark which all other hot hatches have to beat if they're to wear the infamous Hot Hatch Headwear



● **Toyota Corolla T Sport**
● **£15,495**
Absent from the previous Corolla range, Toyota has reintroduced a GTi with fantastic on-paper credentials

PHOTOGRAPHY **JIM FORREST**





The Civic Type-R continues the great Honda VTEC tradition. But there's not such a noticeable change from Jekyll to Hyde on reaching the higher echelons of the rev range as in the Toyota



BACK IN THE SIXTIES there was the Mini Cooper, the Seventies saw the Talbot Sunbeam Lotus, followed by the Lotus Carlton in the Eighties. Then in the Nineties it was the Renault Clio Williams, and now for the Noughties we have a new duo of road racers with close ties to grand prix racing.

The Honda Civic Type-R and the Toyota Corolla T Sport are two of the hottest hatchbacks that money can buy. Between them they can muscle up as much power as a Ferrari 360 Modena, yet together they're less than a third of the price.

OK, so a Toyota Corolla and a Honda Civic are hardly credible rivals for a Ferrari on the road, but the two Japanese companies are both squaring up to take on the all-conquering Italians on the track this season. Honda's R engines power BAR and Jordan cars and this year sees the debut of Toyota's T-Sport entry into Formula One racing.

And just as it will take more than one race to tell which of these two can take grand prix glory, it may take more than a few days testing to discover who makes the best road racer. Fortunately we'll have a whole season with the Type-R and T Sport as they're both new additions to our long-term test fleet. Over the next 12 months we'll keep you closely posted on these two rivals' progress.

In the meantime, it's off to Wales for round one of the championship. The Welsh may not have a GP circuit, but they do have some of the best roads for putting hot hatches through their paces.

● **STYLING**

There's no denying that the new Corolla is a giant leap from its blobby predecessor. Yet the three-door body style shows the Corolla at its most derivative. In profile it's quite similar to the 307 and there are angles and

corners that could have come from Ford. Nonetheless, it's a pleasant looking thing and the race-ready add-ons only improve matters.

The T Sport wears a heavy front bumper with built-in spoiler and fog lamps, more subtle side skirts and a fairly hefty rear spoiler. Oddly, the multi-spoke alloy wheels look smaller than their 16 inches, perhaps because they wear relatively tall tyres and don't truly fill the wheel arches. T-Sport badges adorn the front grille and the hatch, yet despite the trimmings – and the gunmetal paintwork – the Corolla comes off as a little too passive.

The Type-R is the aggressor here. The air scoop in the front spoiler is huge, the sill extensions are more exaggerated and the 17-inch wheels barely leave a breathing space under the wheelarches. The Type-R badging is more prolific and the rear wing more pronounced. Its almost monobox shape is sleeker than the Toyota's and looks as if it was finely



T Sport Toyota uses electronics to keep it on the straight and narrow. Its VSC system uses the ABS sensors to detect wheelslip then decreases engine power and/or applies selective braking to each wheel as required to reduce the likelihood of a slide
Type-R As part of its efforts to keep the drive as pure as possible, the Type-R doesn't have any form of traction control other than the driver's sensibilities. Neither does it boast the viscous coupling limited-slip diff seen on the Type-R Accord and Integra. So let's be careful out there

honed in a wind tunnel. In black it is all the more menacing – as if it were designed for the racers of Tokyo's Midnight Club.

● **PERFORMANCE**

When Honda introduced the first VTEC engines a decade ago, they were quite a revelation. Up to a certain amount of revs they'd behave like any other motor, docile and happy to pull without a fuss. But then, suddenly, they'd change behaviour dramatically. The induction and exhaust notes would be ramped up, the revs would rise even more rapidly and the screaming power of a race engine would be on tap.

Today it is the Toyota that behaves this way, whilst the Honda offers a more even-handed approach to its power delivery. Toyota's VVTL-I (Variable Valve Timing and Lift – Intelligent) system is exactly like the early Honda VTECs. Up to 6,200rpm all

is normal, then all of a sudden the volume and the performance are cranked right up until the 8,000rpm red line is reached. There's 189bhp at 6,800rpm to be had and 133lbft of torque at a heady 6,400rpm. This is an engine that really thrives on revs and although it will pull cleanly from low down, the more you beast it the better it gets.

The drive is through a six-speed gearbox, with carefully chosen ratios that keep the engine in its peak performance zone when you're driving hard. The change itself is perfectly good in isolation, but compared to the Honda's it is neither as precise or fast acting.

The T Sport has traction control and an electronic Vehicle Stability Control system to help put its power down. It works effectively and wouldn't be too obtrusive in its actions if it wasn't for the electronic beeping that accompanies its working. For the unaware it serves as a better warning than a flashing light

which could be missed, but for a keen driver, pushing the car hard, it gets irritating.

Switching the traction control off at the test track we managed an impressive 0-62mph time of just 7.8 seconds. This is all the more amazing as Toyota claims 8.4 seconds and our test was hampered by a wet track. In the dry the Corolla would be quicker still. We measured a top speed of 133mph which is a tad down on the company's claims.

The saturated test track was no place to find out how fast the Honda could get off the line. It simply couldn't put its power down in the wet. A best 0-62mph time of 8.3 is a long way short of what this car can achieve in the dry. Honda claims 0-62mph in 6.8 seconds and a 146mph top speed.

The Honda's VTEC engine definitely gets into its stride the harder it's revved, but there's not such a noticeable step in performance. Its 200 horses are handed over at



The Type-R is the car for the hardcore type who loves track days or just looning. The gearlever sprouting from the dash may look weird and stumpy but it's well snicky

● STYLING	
HONDA	●●●●
TOYOTA	●●●●
● PERFORMANCE	
HONDA	●●●●●
TOYOTA	●●●●●



Toyota's answer to Honda's VTEC is its VVTL-I system. From 6,200rpm to the red line it turns into a howling banshee. Most invigorating. Its engine just loves a damn good caning



7,400rpm and its 145lbft of torque at 5,900 revs. There's more of a rorty blow from the Civic's twin tailpipes than the Corolla's big-bore number, but the Toyota offers the best soundtrack overall. The Type-R's six-speed gearchange is way ahead of the T-Sport's, though. The Honda shifter is mounted mid-dash and has one of the shortest, sharpest shifts you'll find anywhere.

The Honda also wins the braking battle, with a much better feel to its pedal and fantastic stopping power thanks to 330mm vented front discs and 260mm solid rears. It has ABS and EBD, whilst the Corolla also adds Emergency Brake Assist to its arsenal, yet still doesn't feel as stable braking at high speed.

Refinement isn't exactly high on the agenda in either of these two cars, but the Corolla is generally quieter, suffering much less from road noise than the Honda. However, both engines are a bit boomy at cruising speeds.

● **RIDE/HANDLING**

Similar though these two may be in terms of straight-line performance, they are markedly different in character when it comes to negotiating a few twists and turns.

The Toyota is softer than most hot hatches, which pays dividends in ride comfort, but leaves the driver wanting. Through corners the Corolla is a bit of a roller and the steering isn't as direct or feelsome as we'd like. The initial turn-in to corners isn't as immediate as it could be and it wears skinnier tyres than the Honda, so it understandably runs out of grip sooner. However, its Vehicle Stability Control system is well sorted (beeping aside) and should keep most people out of trouble. In extreme circumstances the T Sport can be provoked into lift-off oversteer.

The Corolla can certainly be hustled along at a fine pace and over bumpy roads it remains unruffled, but the experience just

isn't as exciting as the engine's nature leads one to expect. In fairness, Toyota has never claimed to have created a car to outhandle the Type-R and they haven't.

The Civic Type-R remains the king of hot hatch handling. It has the most superb steering, with a wealth of feedback and a keen turn-in – all helped by a highly rigid bodyshell. It grips extremely hard and then, just as the power-induced understeer kicks in, it seems to grip again with a tug from the steering. There's no electronic explanation and not even a limited-slip differential, yet somehow the Type-R gives you another stab at the bend before letting go.

Of course, physics is physics and hooning into a corner too fast will still cause the front end to wash away. Likewise, a mid-corner lift of the throttle can see the tail step smartly out of line. Lucky, then, that the quick steering makes catching and holding such slides a joy.



The penalty for this razor-sharp handling is a ride that's jittery over bumpy roads and a car that can feel nervous in the wet.

Consequently, out in the real world a Corolla T Sport driver would seldom be far behind and, should the weather turn, he might even edge ahead. However, it's the Type-R pilot who'll be the one grinning insanely from ear to ear.

● **ACCOMMODATION**

As different as the Type-R and T Sport are through a few bends, so too are their cabins. The Toyota is comfort-oriented, whereas the Honda is stripped bare and ready to rumble.

If you like your toys, then it's Toyota all the way. Safety stuff extends to four airbags alongside all the electronic driver aids, ISOFIX seat mounts and five-point belts for all. As standard there's electric windows and mirrors, electronic air-conditioning, remote

locking, trip computer and single-CD stereo. Toyota has also kindly added a DVD-based satnav system to our test car, which can link to real-time traffic information.

The Corolla's cabin is rather too grey for our tastes, but the seats are comfortable and there's plenty of head and leg room all round. The driving position, though, is set too high to give a truly sporting feel, although the payoff is good all-round visibility.

The Honda is an altogether different proposition. Yes, it's as roomy as the Corolla, but the equipment list is pared down to the minimum that's acceptable these days. So you get power windows and mirrors and double airbags plus a remote alarm as standard. Manual air-conditioning is a cost option, although a single CD is fitted at the factory.

The emphasis is firmly on the driving, so the race-style seats with their winged shoulder bolsters are brilliantly supportive and the

driver's seat can be cranked right down to the floor. Grip the chunky leather rimmed steering wheel and you really do feel ready to race.

As for more practical issues, the monobox body provides loads of room inside and, rear seats folded, it becomes a proper little van.

On the basis of its comfort and equipment benefits we'll give the nod to Toyota in this section. That may be a bit harsh on Honda, as they've kept the Type-R free from frills in favour of thrills, but we suspect that many buyers would expect more kit for their cash.

● **COSTS**

And that brings us to the subject of money. You'll save £500 buying the better-equipped Corolla, but are there other cost benefits to the Toyota? In a word, yes. There are savings all the way down the line. The Corolla is less thirsty, produces less CO₂ and is also cheaper to insure than the Honda.



We got these quotations for fully comprehensive cover on a sole driver policy (including commuting), based on a male manager, 32 years old living in Oxfordshire, with five years no claims bonus: the car to be garaged overnight
Honda £873.60
Toyota £656.25

● **RIDE & HANDLING**

HONDA ●●●●●
 TOYOTA ●●●●●

● **ACCOMMODATION**

HONDA ●●●●●
 TOYOTA ●●●●●



Four airbags and a full compliment of driver aids makes the T Sport the one for the sensible hooligan. It's comfy and roomy but the driving position could be sportier



So, T Sport stats first. The government says it will turn in 34mpg on its combined economy scale and we recorded 29.2mpg. It's in group D for road tax and kicks out 198 grammes/km of CO₂. Insurance is group 14.

Plump for the Honda and you'll get 31.7mpg according to the men in white coats, whilst we achieved a rather less impressive 26.7mpg. Road tax is also £155 for group D and the CO₂ is 212g/km. Finally, insurance is a rather more hefty group 17.

Both cars come with three-year warranties and 10,000-mile service intervals.

● VERDICT

Should these two meet on the track, there would be a very clear winner. The Civic Type-R is unbeatable when it comes to hardcore driving thrills. Its handling is sensational and its turn of speed superb.

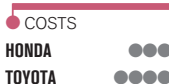
On the road it can occasionally be wearing, thanks to a harsh ride, boomy cruising and squirmy nature in the wet, but we'll forgive it all that for the thrills it provides its driver.

The T Sport is less of a laugh. It is certainly fast, but it's not as involving to drive hard. On long journeys and rough roads its comfort advantages will doubtless come to the fore. Luckily we've got plenty of time to find out over the coming months.

But this first round of our two-car grand prix goes to the Honda. It's noisy, rough and raucous, it's shorter on equipment and higher on price, but we love it. ●

The aggressive Civic snaps at the heels of the more derivatively-styled Corolla as they mount a bank. Will our verdict put them in the same order?

	Honda Civic Type-R	Toyota Corolla T Sport
PERFORMANCE		
0-30mph (secs)	3.4	3.1
0-40mph (secs)	4.7	4.3
0-50mph (secs)	6.1	5.7
0-60mph (secs)	7.9	7.3
0-62mph (0-100kph secs)	8.3	7.8
0-70mph (secs)	9.8	10
0-80mph (secs)	12	12
0-90mph (secs)	14.8	14.7
0-100mph (secs)	17.6	18.6
0-110	23.1	24
0-120	28.7	33.2
Max speed (mph)	140.2	132.7
Standing ¼ mile (secs)	16	15.8
Terminal speed (mph)	94.9	92.1
30-50mph in 3rd/4th	3.6/4.9	4.3/5.8
50-70mph in 5th/6th	6.8/9.9	8.9/10.7
30-70mph thru' gears	6.4	6.9
Braking 70-0mph (m)	45.0	n/a
COSTS		
List price	£15,995	£15,495
TG Best Price	£14,685 (eu)	n/a
TG pence per mile	46.6	n/a
Test mpg	26.7	29.2
EU combined mpg	31.7	34
Insurance group/VED rating	17/D2	14/d2
CO2 rating (grammes/km)	212	198
Service interval	10k	10k
Warranty	3yrs/60k	3yrs/60k



HOT POTATOES

	Honda Civic Type-R	Toyota Corolla T Sport
EQUIPMENT		
Engine	4cyl 16v DOHC VTEC	4cyl DOHC VVTL-I
Capacity (cc)	1998cc	1796
Max power	200bhp @ 7,400	189 @7,800
Max torque	145@5,900	133 @6,800
Transmission	6sp manual	6sp manual
Front brakes	vented discs	vented discs
Rear brakes	solid discs	solid discs
Front suspension	Toe link MacPherson strut	MacPherson strut
Rear suspension	Double wishbone	torsion beam
Wheels/tyres	17x7/205/45R17	16x/195/55VR16
Dimensions L/W (cm)	414/170	418/171
Weight	1,204	1,210
TECHNICAL		
airbags/alarm/immobiliser	2/yes	4/yes
Alloys/anti-lock brakes	yes/yes	yes/yes
Brake force distribution	yes	yes
Traction/stability control	no/yes	yes/yes
Power steering	yes	yes
Central locking/remote	yes/yes	yes/yes
Electric windows (f)	yes/yes	yes/yes
Radio: cassette/CD	no	no
Sunroof/aircon	option	yes
VERDICT		
STYLING	●●●●	●●●
PERFORMANCE	●●●●●	●●●●
RIDE & HANDLING	●●●●●	●●●●
ACCOMMODATION	●●●	●●●●
COSTS	●●●	●●●●
OVERALL	●●●●●	●●●●