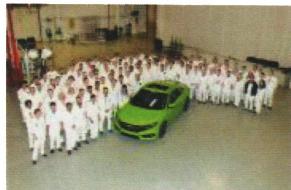


Feature Article

Leading a Global Development - The 2016 Civic Team

by Arvin Donner



The debut of the 2016 Civic marks the first time HRA has led the development of a global Honda automobile.



Members of the 2016 Honda Civic project team

The debut of the 2016 Civic marks the first time HRA has led the development of a global Honda automobile. In order to be successful in this role, the talents of many uniquely qualified associates came together to create not only a world class team, but also foster a team dynamic that could successfully tackle this great challenge. With initial design originating from HGW and final design maturation by HRA's Honda Studio in LA, powertrain development by HGT and overall frame development by HRA engineers in Ohio, R&D associates from around the globe worked together like never before to create the all-new 2016 Civic.

"When working on a global project like the 2016 Civic you have to create as much commonality as possible so as to reduce costs," said Civic Exterior Test and Design PL Dave Pietenpol. "There were different models like the two-door, the four-door and five-door in different parts of the world, with different factories and different suppliers. We could have a part designed in the U.S., but have two different suppliers based in China and Thailand. If we change the part here we have to coordinate with those other suppliers so they change it too."

"Small problems could become big problems very quickly," added 4D and 2D Interior PL Mike

Narazaki. "Little things could affect so many factories and suppliers. They could snowball and become a big deal."

Because of the nature of the project's demands, the team had to evolve quickly. When questions arose in meetings between HRA and HGT about a solution or a direction to go with an issue, the HRA team had a lot of responsibility to show that what they were doing worked.

"You have to approach these projects with more communication while also keeping the continuous flow of information going so we could make the best design possible," said Pietenpol. "The Civic team members might have differing opinions on how to solve a problem. Then, we would have to find some agreement – or at least get as close as possible."



A rear bumper fascia is installed at Honda of Canada Mfg.

With the different test groups, designers, suppliers and problem-solving styles between HRA and HGT, the HRA Civic team learned that having the same high development targets for the entire global team helped because everyone was striving toward the same goals. It would have been easy to compromise these targets throughout development, but the team held tremendous resolve to meet these very high global benchmarks.

"When we would start considering that a compromise might be necessary, our Global LPL Mitsuru Kariya would say, 'No. We're doing this and we're not giving up on these targets. You set this target. You told me you were going to meet it. Now meet it and do it with the lightest and most cost-effective way possible,'" said Civic Safety PL Brad Klein. "Everyone on the team started buying into the idea of setting high targets without compromising, and making it a reality."

As important as targets were to keeping the Civic team on task, what fostered the team's productivity the most was the sense that they were all in this together and were focused on making a great product. The Civic PLs and ALPLs set the example by how they interacted with their team.

"Since I was a new PL, the more experienced PLs and ALPLs would look out for me and show me how to do things more efficiently," noted Civic Chassis Design PL Jeff Platt. "Sometimes just the questions they would ask in meetings taught me what I needed to be doing or what questions I needed to be asking myself and my team members."

How the 2016 Civic's management showed support for their team set the tone for how the rest of the team supported each other.

"Honda is a very demanding place to work, but we all really gelled together as a group. Someone might take a vacation or take a break in the evening and go to the gym and then come back to work late and we'd be happy for them that they got to do it," said Civic Suspension PL Bridget Hamblin. "We would support each other in doing those sorts of things even though we were all tired and under a lot of pressure."



Project leaders Jarad Hall and Guy Mellville-Brown matured the sedan and coupe exterior designs, respectively, and then debuted each to media at two exclusive, new-style reveal events.

With multiple vehicles being developed on one project scheduled to be completed in a shorter development cycle, as well as product events happening all over the world simultaneously, the pressure the team experienced was palpable. There was always an evaluation or something else critical to the completion of the project taking place.

"You are always hearing about setbacks and technical issues when working on a project of this magnitude," said Klein. "We just had to learn how to keep our eye on the ball and know whatever problem arose; everything was going to get solved."

The pressure the team experienced kept them focused on working hard to meet the design, safety, dynamic, weight and cost targets set forth for the platform. Though, in order to meet these multiple targets, the team had to develop effective communication between HRA and their HGT counter parts. There were daily joint-concern meetings by video conference either first thing in the morning or later at night to discuss issues that came up for the team. The open and frequent communication that took place between HRA and HGT set the example to the HRA teams in how to work together.

"The collaboration between the test side and design side of the chassis teams was just phenomenal. Design side did a great job of keeping communication open between all the different chassis groups," said Hamblin. "We created a group dynamic where everyone became invested in making a great product."

That open and focused team dynamic between the global teams and the HRA design and test groups fueled the exchange of ideas amongst all the Civic team members. This allowed the entire global production team to achieve the Civic's design and engineering targets that were set for the 2016 Civic based on the best C-segment vehicles in the world. The new platform was designed not just to compete with direct US market competitors, but to jump past them with benchmarks based on entry European luxury vehicles. These targets were the template the team used to fill the proverbial "clean slate" they were given at the beginning of the project for designing and engineering of the car.



Frame of the Civic Sedan

"We redesigned the Civic completely. The 2016 Civic has a new powertrain, rigid body and chassis," said Platt.

In order to compete with the Honda's European competitors, the team had to offer a technology and feature-dense vehicle.



Dashboard view of Adaptive Cruise Control and Lane Keeping Assist System

Platt added, "The 2016 Civic also has premium technology like Lane Keeping Assist System (LKAS), Adaptive Cruise Control (ACC) with Low-Speed Follow (LSF) and higher quality interior materials."

The redesign and premium technology incorporated into 2016 Civic left a lasting impression on the automotive press and is looking to become another addition to Honda's automotive pantheon. Being able to contribute to the redesign of one of the products that has made Honda what it is today and lead a global development project doesn't just involve talented people or a good product design, it also requires being able to make the team work, together.



2016 Honda Civic Sedan with Honda Genuine Accessories

"A lot of the early press reviews were saying that Honda had 'rediscovered its DNA and it was fun to drive a Civic again,'" said Hamblin. "I hope our customers appreciate the 2016 Civic because the development team spent a lot of time and effort in making it."

Recently, the Civic was announced as a finalist for the *North American Car of the Year* which will be awarded at the 2016 North American International Auto Show in January. From the reception the press and the public have given the new Civic, it's undeniable that the 2016 Civic development team's successful collaboration and hard work are reflected in the 10th generation Civic and its success.