

Prelude's Active Torque Transfer gives driver more control in tight turns

Continued from 14B

of room in the rear. The last 'Lude was cramped, but could hold a couple of kids or packages. Adults can ride in relative comfort for a medium-length trip, depending on how adult-sized they are.

No one ever bought a Prelude for its roominess. Its best selling point has been its exceptionally balanced handling. It's gotten better. I thought the last version was the best-handling front-wheel drive car I'd ever driven. This version beats it hands down.

Why? My test car was the SH version, which has Honda's Active Torque Transfer System. It's a complicated system made up of sensors, control units, clutches, fluids and other stuff. To try to be as simple as possible, the system gives the driver more control while the vehicle is turning. The system processes the information and causes the front outside wheel to spin faster than normal, up to 15 percent faster. This creates yaw, or turning movement. I'm not exactly sure what that means, but I didn't notice anything going on. I did notice that the car turned sharper than any-

thing I'd ever driven. I flung it around tight turns and felt as if I were a race car driver. The thing stuck to the road like a tacky magnet to a refrigerator door.

The car's ride is smoother than some regular sedans. The four-wheel double wishbone suspension has been massaged to give greater comfort without sacrificing handling. In fact, it enhances, not hampers.

What's even more wonderful is the engine. A 2.2-liter 16-valve four-cylinder engine produces 195 horsepower and 156 pounds-feet of torque. It makes the Prelude feel wickedly

peppy. I'd say the Prelude can reach 60 miles per hour under 7.0 seconds, if not faster. The engine reaches its redline with a snarly growl, one befitting a sports car.

Also noteworthy is the five-speed transmission. Hondas are always buttery-smooth and this certainly is no exception. You can flick through the gears with ease. The clutch take up is nearly perfect. The steering? A touch light at high speeds but very communicative.

There's lots else to rave about. The body is stiffer, adding to the car's handling prowess. The interior noise at

70 mph is pretty low for a sports car. The standard equipment level is quite high: ABS, AM/FM stereo with CD and acoustic feedback, power windows, door locks and mirrors; sunroof, air conditioning 16-inch alloy wheels, four-wheel disc brakes, rear spoiler, dual air bags, cruise control, rear window defroster with timer, leather wrapped steering wheel and shift knob. All of that comes to a price of \$25,700. Eighty-seven dollar floor mats were the only option, so, with destination, the Prelude Type SH clocked in at

\$26,182.

That's the most expensive Prelude ever, but it's also the best ever. It's impeccable road manners, championship han-

dling and great looks make this a worthy contender in a shrinking segment. This is a livable daily driver. You go Honda.

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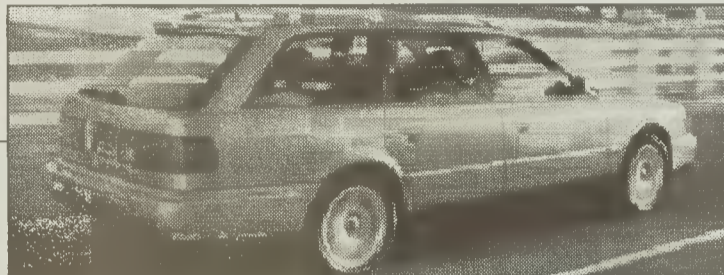
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