2006 Honda Element: Unique Freak?

by Hiteshbhoi

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I admit it. When I saw my first Honda Element a few years back I thought it was one of the most hideous looking vehicles on the planet. Then I saw the Scion xA and Scion xB, so I quickly relegated the Element to third place. I confess that my earlier feelings about the Element have changed, possibly because I see so many of them on the road these days and perhaps because I see its usefulness. No matter, the Honda Element is a unique looking vehicle and it is a lot less freakish than what you or I may think.

Freedom from convention. That is the saying on Hondaâ€™s web site when it comes to labeling the Element. In many ways, this marketing slogan is true. Who says that any vehicle has to conform to what you expect? True, past radical models failed miserably. The Ford Edsel and VW Thing are two that come to mind. Yet, the times are different and a truly â€œradâ€• look is in. Real in, if you know what I mean.

The Element does have a practical side to it. Although it is shaped like a breadbox and equipped with two large doors as well as two smaller doors [reminds me of the Saturn ION], the 4WD LX Element has just about what any driver needs for just under USD$20K: ABS; theft deterrent; air conditioning; cruise control; power windows, doors, mirrors, and locks; and a AM/FM/CD audio system with 4 speakers and a clock. Standard powertrain include a feisty 2354cc I4 mated to a 5 speed manual transmission; a four speed automatic is optional but considering that this car is geared toward young people you can pretty much count on the manny tranny winning drivers out over the automatic.

Many of the components for the Element are borrowed from the Civic to give it more of a car like ride, while keeping its truck like appearance. Open all four doors at the same time and the Element evokes a strong resemblance to â€œsuicide doorsâ€• that were standard on the 1960s era Lincoln Continentals as well as the Rolls-Royce Phantom. Honda was likely thinking that this design would make it easier for passengers to retrieve all of their gear without popping up the rear hatch and crawling in. Indeed, everything in the Element is easily accessible and the vehicle was designed for the outdoorsman.

Prices start at around $17,500 for the base 2wd model and climb to just over $21,500 for the fully equipped 4wd version. Compared to the average SUV, the Element is priced very competitively and opens up a niche of buyers that Honda hopes to exploit.

Whatever you think of the Elementâ€™s looks the vehicle is an attention getter. Judging by the sales, it is a hit with the young crowd.

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