

EXHILARATION GUARANTEED

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU MIX THE
COMPELLING NEW HONDA CITY
AND ONE OF INDIA'S BEST DRIVING
ROADS? TONS OF NON-STOP
FUN, THAT'S WHAT.

PHOTOS BY **SACHIN KHOT**



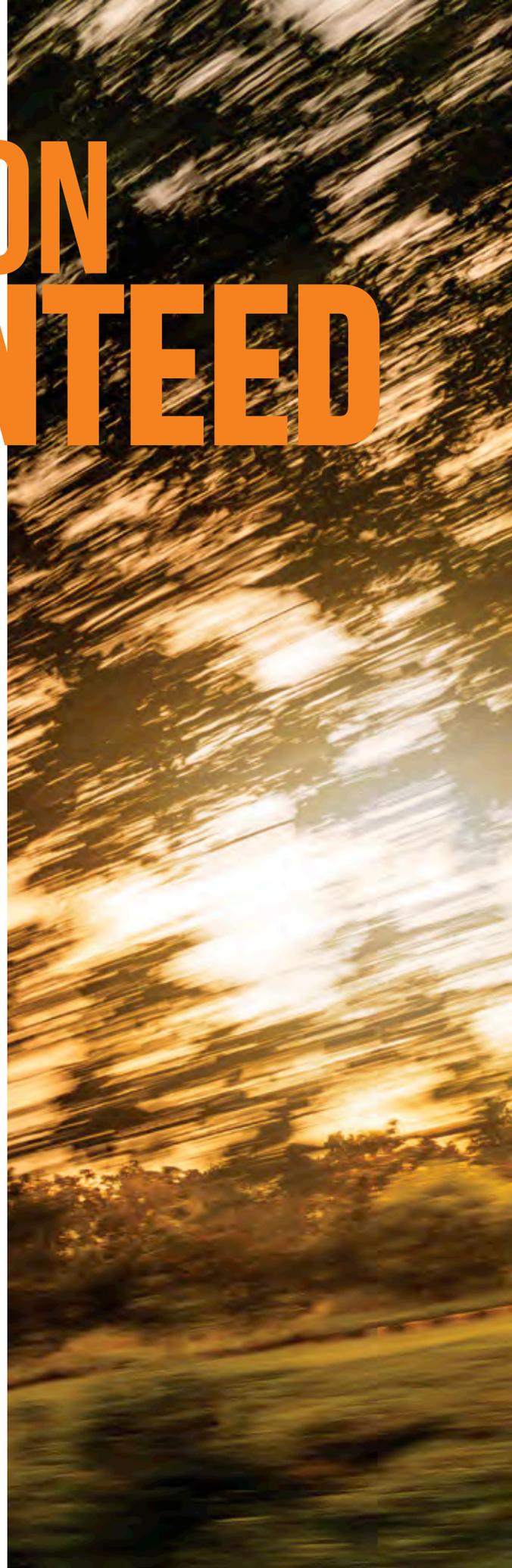
**IF YOU ARE A
GOOD DRIVER
AT THE WHEEL
OF AN EAGER
AUTOMOBILE
SUCH AS THE NEW
HONDA CITY, THE
REWARDS ARE
NOT JUST VISUAL**

There is one thing people always ask me when they meet me, and that is about my favourite stretch of road. Now I've driven across the world, and in some stunning locales, but the road that I keep wanting to return to is right here in India. It's called Chorla Ghat, and at times I think I drive to Goa so very often just so I can savour this winding ribbon of tarmac. And right at this moment, I'm on my way there in a Honda City, a car that has come to signify the quintessential driver-focussed premium sedan, and it has grown better and better at its job over five generations.

Chorla Ghat rises, twists, and plunges through Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka, and features, especially in the monsoon, innumerable shades of green and brown. If you are a good driver at the wheel of an eager automobile such as the fifth-generation Honda City, the rewards this road offers are not just visual.

I have always been a fan of the Honda City from the first generation to the fifth-generation car. But the current iteration, which has just completed a successful year in India, keeps knocking my socks off.

The new City is impressive on several different fronts. Honda has used more high-tensile-strength steel in its body shell and there's a stiffer roof section as well,





The Honda City's 120hp, 1.5-litre engine is tractable and performs at either end of the rev range.



The City is the
antidote to SUVs.



The plush, spacious interiors of the new City are studded with first-in-segment tech goodies.

contributing to a 20 percent increase in torsional rigidity. The City is a big car now and the kind of space it offers, both up front and at the rear, is liberating. The manufacturer has also ensured that 'connectedness' is an intrinsic part of its sterling automobile. What's on the menu? Well, our Honda City ZX MT features the Honda Connect app with Telematics Control Unit that boasts of 32 handy features! You can geofence your City, check its position and door lock status remotely, activate vehicle diagnostics and more. The icing on this cake is that the telematics services are offered free of charge to customers for five years.

Honda has also made the City as safe as a tank. Besides de rigueur kit such as six airbags, ABS with EBD, a multi-angle rear-view camera and a Tyre Pressure Monitoring System, the City also boasts of the Lane Watch Camera – a segment-first. And I especially love the supplementary camera system mounted on the rear view mirror; it takes blind spots out of the equation. Simply put, Honda

believes that more visibility – in any kind of situation – equals more safety, and, as someone who spends hours on the road every month, I can totally vouch for that.

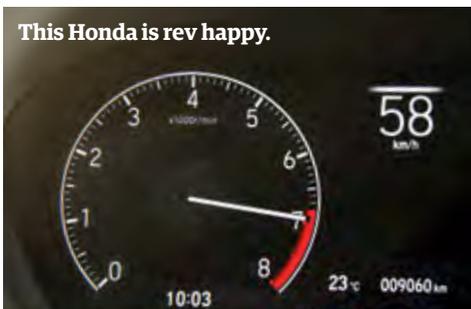
The City is not just about space and technology – its interiors are top-notch. If I were not driving, I'd have alternated between watching the Western Ghats loom large through the City's windscreen and windows, and appreciating the tasteful cabin. Everything, from the leather on the seats to the dash and centre console is brilliantly styled, and comfort at the rear is best in class. As a package, the new City is sumptuous and way classier than SUVs can ever hope to be.

Honda is justifiably proud of its new City and so are, I'd suppose, the thousands of customers who've picked up one in the past year. And one source of pride is the sedan's solid ride. The stiffer body has helped Honda equip the City with a soft-ish suspension and that results in the City swallowing potholes, gashes and ruts on the road without any undue problems. The monsoon-lashed highway that snakes its way from Mumbai to Goa hardly affected its composure, even at triple-digit speeds, and its fairly high ground clearance comes into play here. But the thing with real enthusiasts is that while they might appreciate being wrapped in luxury, advanced tech goodies and a pliant ride, what matters for them really is a winding road, and I'm about to encounter the best of them.

Chorla Ghat is among the jewels of the Western Ghats. It is especially spectacular in the monsoon when it is covered in clouds. And the windows of your car don't just frame forests; there are numerous waterfalls along the way too. Like most sinuous roads that seemingly go all the way



Chorla Ghat calls for clean downshifts.



This Honda is rev happy.

THE MOST STRIKING THING ABOUT HONDA'S ENGINES IS THAT THEY FEEL ALIVE



Lane-Watch camera a boon in a variety of situations.

up until heaven, the road to Chorla Ghat rises to an elevation of about 2,400 feet, and there's fun to be had around every bend for responsible drivers like you and me. It's early morning and traffic is sparse, and so I let my enthusiastic right foot do its thing and the City responds in a way only a Honda can. A lot of that responsiveness is thanks to the new 1.5-litre, DOHC petrol engine. I've always felt that the difference between a Honda engine and any other is that a Honda engine feels alive, and the City's engine is compelling proof. It's brawny and yet tractable, and performs at either end of the rev range. And that translates into fewer gear shifts.

The road up to the highest point of Chorla Ghat has more than its fair share of gentle sweepers and tight corners, and I go hard on the gas, letting the Honda City's 120 thoroughbred horses out. I brake hard and turn hard and control the sedan on the throttle, and the City's exhaust note reverberates all around. It's one apex after another, and the City never lets me down. That's because its handling abilities match the capabilities of its engine, and when you have great braking performance and a telepathic steering, you get a sedan that is as raring to hit the twisties as you are.

The journey from the bottom of the ghat to the top takes about 50 minutes in the Honda City, and it is an intense and immensely pleasurable experience. I park the Honda City by the side of the narrow road and take in the view. It's mostly quiet, apart from the welcome flutter of birds' wings and the murmur of the wind. All around me, the forest unfurls itself in all its green splendour. Up ahead is Goa, which I'll reach in the next couple of hours, and where I'll spend the next couple of days. After that, it's back into the Honda City and back to Mumbai. No prizes for guessing which road I'll be taking on the return journey.



Chorla Ghat is situated at the intersection of Maharashtra, Goa, and Karnataka.