



We Like

- Macho looks and spruced up interiors
- Smooth CVTs
- Attempt at reducing noise of diesel
- Spacious cabin
- Large boot
- New warranty package

We Don't Like

- 'Unfinished' rear end
- Missing equipment in CVT
- Low-end torque in manual petrol
- Vibrations coming through in diesel
- Some poor quality parts
- 'Sport' mode not much of use



'Amaze'd, but not 'Dzire'd yet!

Circa 2013, when Honda launched the Amaze compact sedan (CS) in India based on the Brio hatchback platform, it was all hunky dory for the Japanese manufacturer. Not only was the Amaze specifically created for the Indian market, it was also the first Honda vehicle in India to come with an oil burner under its hood; that had a whole buzz about it. Much water has flown under the bridge since then. Despite a couple of iterations, Honda has been left far behind in the CS race. And to think that Amaze is Honda's #2 bestselling model in India after the City. Maruti Dzire is a runaway leader in this segment, and even more so with the new model. The Hyundai Xcent has also kept up an edge, and the Tata Tigor had added to the stew. Honda showcased the new Amaze at the 2018 Auto Expo and followed it up with a launch in May 2018. Since then, the Amaze has made an amazing comeback. Despite having lagged Hyundai till then, 5-month sales of the new Amaze have boosted YTD sales for CY18; Honda is at #2 in the segment. While numbers tell their own tale, this review is an attempt to see why the Amaze is such a success.

Face/Off

Much like the new Dzire, the new Amaze has undergone a complete metamorphosis. In a role reversal of sorts, the hatchbacks, which these both were derivatives of, are now derived from the new avatars of both these CSs. The new Swift was launched just after the Auto Expo, we are expecting the new Brio very soon. The new Amaze is nothing like the old one – while the old Amaze had a cutesy look thanks to the Brio inspiration, the new Amaze is more macho looking, and is closer in spirit to the new City with its style. In fact, from a certain angle, the front end of the new Amaze also reminds me of the muscled American cars of yore. It seemed a bit ugly to some, a handsome one to a few, and a pretty stable and practical car to most. The new Amaze is derived from a completely new platform, unlike the older one that was based on the diminutive Brio. The new Amaze is bigger in dimensions to the old one, and yet is lighter too.

While staying under 4-metre in length, it is longer by a tiny 5 mm to 3995 mm. It is 15 mm wider too, while the wheelbase has grown by 65 mm to 2470 mm, including 25 mm between the two rows. Headroom has improved by 10 mm, rear shoulder room by 45 mm, and boot volume has gone up by 20 litres to 420 litres. The front and rear track have increased by 23 mm and 28 mm, respectively. Hence, the stance looks more assured and well planted on the 15-inch radials (larger than before; 14-inchers on lower variants). But even though the wheels are an inch bigger than before, they seem small; the large wheel wells don't look filled. But the car looks more proportionate than before, and doesn't have the funny overhang of the earlier one – that emanated from the Brio and the boot was like an afterthought. In this case, it has evolved nicely, and looks well integrated. Despite all these changes, the petrol Amaze is now 17 kg lighter, while the oil burner is 23 kg lighter.

Honda Amaze – competition comparables

	Honda Amaze	Maruti Dzire	Hyundai Xcent	Tata Tigor	VW Ameo	Ford Figo Aspire
Average Monthly Sales – YTD CY18	5,400#	23,510@	3,751^	2,549 + 1,100~	833	1,185
Dimensions						
Length (mm)	3995	3995	3995	3992	3995	3995
Width (mm)	1695	1735	1660	1677	1682	1695
Height (mm)	1501	1515	1520	1537	1483	1525
Wheelbase (mm)	2470	2450	2425	2450	2470	2491
Turning Radius (mtr)	4.7/4.9	4.8	4.7	5.1	5.0	4.9
Boot Space (ltr)	420	378	407	419	330	359
Fuel Tank (ltr)	35	37	43	35	45	42/40
Kerb Weight - Petrol (kg)	905, 942	860	958	1035	1027	995, 1038
Kerb Weight - Diesel (kg)	993, 1031	955	1048	1100	1138, 1174	1023
Tyres	R14, R15	R14, R16	R14, R15	R13, R14, R15	R14, R15, R16	R14
Engine						
Size (ltr)	1.2/1.5	1.2/1.3	1.2/1.2	1.2/1.05	1.0/1.5	1.2, 1.5/1.5
Fuel	P/D	P/D	P/D	P/D	P/D	P/D
Transmission	MT, AT/MT, AT	MT, AT/MT, AT	MT, AT/MT	MT, AT/MT	MT/MT, AT	MT, AT/MT
Power (bhp)	89, 89/99, 79	82, 82/74, 74	82, 82/74, 74	84, 84/69	75/95, 92	87, 110/99
Torque (Nm)	110, 110/200, 160	113, 113/190, 190	114, 114/190	114, 114/140	95/250, 250	112, 136/215
Fuel Efficiency (kmpl)*	19.5, 19.0/27.4, 23.8	22.0, 22.0/28.4, 28.4	20.2, 17.4/25.4	20.3, 20.3/24.7	19.4/21.7, 21.7	18.2, 16.5/25.8
Price (Rs. Lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi) – MT Petrol						
Base	5.60	5.56	5.50	4.84	5.62	5.82
Mid	6.50-7.10	6.44-7.06	5.61-6.50	5.20-5.56	6.16	5.61-6.50
Top	7.58	7.96	6.88-7.65	6.00-6.31	7.58	6.88-7.65
Price (Rs. Lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi) – MT Diesel						
Base	6.70	6.56	6.42	5.73	6.65	6.93
Mid	7.60-8.20	7.44-8.06	6.97-7.42	6.05-6.45	7.60-7.90	7.54
Top	8.68	8.96	7.81-8.58	6.88-7.19	8.51-8.82	7.85-8.56
Price (Rs. Lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi) – AT/AMT Petrol						
Base	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mid	7.40-8.00	6.91	7.20	5.99	-	-
Top	-	7.53-8.43	-	6.48	-	8.79
Price (Rs. Lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi) – AT/AMT Diesel						
Base	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mid	8.40-9.00	7.91	-	-	9.21	-
Top	-	8.53-9.43	-	-	10.00	-

Source: IIFL Research

*claimed

@includes Dzire Tour

^includes Xcent Prime

~Tata Zest

#new Amaze was launched in May 2018, and since then it has racked up 10k units per month as a run-rate



The focus of the design element is the thick chrome slat front grille, much like in the City. It also polarises opinion – some liked it (me included), while many felt that the nose ended abruptly; almost like a boxer who walked into a haymaker and had his nose flattened. So for those in that camp, the nose job is ugly. Overall design is very different from the older car. Besides the grille and the nose job, the bonnet is no longer sloping; the jaw looks determined, and not weak. The smart headlamp unit with the turn indicators nestling in one corner (no projectors though), and a slim LED daytime running light (DRL) strip accentuating it looks neat. The DRLs could have been brighter – you really can't spot them in the day. Foglamps are placed at the lower part of the front grille.



Unlike the distinctive two slashes on the older car, the waist line now is subtle. Even then, there is a distinctive line connecting the headlamp cluster to the tail-lamp unit, while a couple of sharp creases at the bottom evoke a hint of muscle and character. At the rear, the new tail-lamp unit looks good, although the overall rear is so-so. Surprisingly, there is no usage of chrome at the rear. Even though they have tried to evoke some of the new Civic's rear, it feels as if the designer got bored and stopped trying. Maybe Honda could have looked at continuing with the earlier Amaze's rear-end – but buyers seem to be liking this.

Improved interiors



In the old Amaze, it was the interiors that were a let-down, more than the looks – that has changed. The Amaze is offered in four variants – “E/S/V/VX”, and equipment levels vary. The doors open wide, and ingress/egress is very good. Honda has definitely taken cognisance of feedback and competition, and upped its interiors. The cabin feels airy, spacious, and fresh due to the the beige-black two-tone colour treatment, and also the large glass area all around. Quality of plastics has improved, the switchgear seems better put, a new chunky steering with revised audio controls is in place, and there is cruise control on offer (not on CVTs). The piano black treatment makes the simple dashboard look more modern, and the instrument console is also neat. There are enough cubby holes and storage places strewn around the cabin. There are charging points at the front and rear, while there is an indent above the adequate glovebox, which is attractive. The CVT variants (sadly “V” and not “VX”) get paddle shifters (but no cruise control), while both the top variants come with a start/stop button.



Slide behind the steering wheel into the comfortably bolstered seat (unlike the painfully thin seats in the earlier Amaze), and ergonomically, everything is perfect. They are well-contoured and provide healthy support. Side bolstering gets sufficient padding; the adjustable headrests are cool. The top of the line “VX” features Digipad V2, a 7-inch touchscreen equipped infotainment system. It is a newer version of the screen seen on WR-V, City, and BR-V; visibility is pretty good, is extremely intuitive, and easy to operate – reversing camera offers good resolution. It comes equipped with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, automatic climate control, as also Navigation on the “VX” variant. But the “V” variant is bereft of these features, which means that if you end up buying the CVT, none of these features will be available to you. What you get is a very basic music system with white illumination – you don't even get an indication of distance from object while reversing.



While the wing mirrors are sufficiently wide, the IRVM is small and doesn't cover the full rear windscreen, which is small (due to the sloping roof and higher boot line). So that compromises visibility while reversing. So, reversing aids are a must. While parking sensors are standard even on the base variant, only the top model gets a reversing camera. Now, I wonder what would it have cost Honda to provide the mid variants (and the CVT too) with a basic indicator that tells you the distance from objects while reversing? I have never been able to figure out as to why buyers willing to pay a premium are given the short shrift in this manner? It is as if they are being told that by buying a CVT, they are making fools of themselves and they need to "pay a price" in terms of lack of or lower equipment and features for having opted for the convenience of a CVT!



With a larger wheelbase, space within has improved tremendously from the earlier one. Front passengers get adequate room; the spacing of the pedals mean that the dead pedal space is very comfortable, although just like in the Yaris there is no proper dead pedal. While most things have improved in terms of quality, there are some things like the dead pedal (or lack of it), parking aids, and sunvisors that stick out like a sore thumb. The driver's sunvisor looks cheap, while passenger-side sunvisor gets a mirror without cover or illumination. These are the times when you wonder what 'cheap' really means – is it bringing down costs by value engineering to keep prices under check or is it the use of poor (read "cheap") quality material to keep down costs?



With a larger wheelbase and more space between the two rows, there is a lot of space for rear passengers too – ingress and egress for them is also a lot better now. Legroom, kneeroom, shoulder room, and headroom have improved due to the new dimensions. Two is still the best seating at the rear, but a squeeze for three is a milder punishment in the new Amaze compared to the competition – the lack of any protrusion at the rear for the AC vents also helps in the seating for the unfortunate middle passenger. But I will still seat a kid here, as the floor hump also hinders proper seating for the middle adult passenger. All variants get dual airbags, and ABS with EBD as standard.



With no AC vents for rear passengers, has Honda missed a trick? No, says Honda, and is quick to point out that they have improved upon AC efficiency and increased compressor volume (from 58cc to 83cc on petrol, from 110cc to 120cc on diesel). So not only does the cabin cool faster, it also saves on the cost of rear AC vents. This superior cooling is achieved thanks to the AC vents positioned high on the dashboard centre, which channel the air effectively rearward. Segment leading boot space at 420 litres better the older Amaze's by 20 litres and segment leader Dzire's by 42 litres! The usable luggage space is compromised a bit as the wheel wells take a bite, but it is still adequately large for the weekend luggage that the family would require.

Under the hood, drive impressions, ride comfort

While the design language, platform, interiors, and features have changed or have been improved upon, nothing has changed under the hood. The all-familiar 1199cc, four-cylinder petrol engine and the 1498cc four-cylinder diesel engine power the Amaze. Both are mated to a five-speed manual and

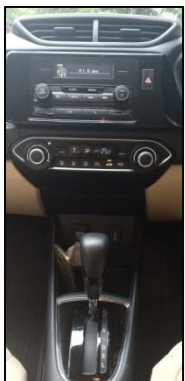


a five-speed CVT. Honda has introduced a CVT in diesel to India for the first time. The i-VTEC churns out 90 bhp of peak power @ 6000 rpm and 110 Nm of peak torque @ 4800 rpm in both manual and CVT. The i-DTEC comes in two states of tune – the manual makes 100 bhp of peak power @ 3600 rpm and 200 Nm @ 1750 rpm of peak torque; the CVT has been given lower power and torque @ 80 bhp and 160 Nm, at similar engine spins. The lower power and torque for the CVT is to ensure that the power is delivered quicker, and that there is no buffer to deal with, says Honda. But the same logic hasn't been used in the petrol unit.

First let's tackle the NVH levels, before getting the cars out to drive. The old diesel in the Amaze was one of the noisiest diesels that I have driven in any sedan or hatchback. Honda claims to have improved NVH levels in this iteration. Honda says they have improved overall sound insulation, and redesigned the engine block plus a couple other things, in an attempt at lower NVH levels in the diesel. But the attempt hasn't fructified completely. To be honest, noise levels have reduced, and the engine is noticeably quieter and more refined than before. But this is still a pretty clattery oil burner under the hood. The vocal chords start to get strained as the motor gets revved hard, and at high revvs, the motor is really throaty. A fair bit of engine noise finds its way into the cabin at higher speeds; vibrations are also felt on the pedals and steering. Thankfully, the petrol motor is one of the most refined units. Even at higher revvs, while the motor can be heard singing, it is a pleasant aria that is heard.

The petrol motor is the same 1.2 litre unit. With a light clutch, smooth gear changes, and short throws (like a joystick), it is a bliss to drive. It is revv happy (like a sports car), and is home at higher revvs and higher speeds. It is at lower speeds that it has a problem. Much like the issue that I have faced in the past with the petrol mills of the Jazz and the WR-V, this i-VTEC has a tendency to cough, wheeze, and possibly even die on you at lower speeds/revvs if not handled well. This can be quite irritating in urban stop-go traffic, as I discovered on more than a few occasions. The trick is to keep the engine constantly on the boil, and drive at half-clutch. But for that, the i-VTEC is a lovely motor and the car drives very well. The auto box in the i-VTEC is a little slow in its responses, which is disappointing. Use the paddle shifters on the CVT (the oil burner doesn't have them), and the effect is similar. Here too, there is a delay in response. And I fail to understand why a 'Sport' mode has been given in both CVTs – barring an increase in noise levels (to an angry growl in the case of the petrol mill), I failed to notice much of a change in performance.

While the i-DTEC is one of the most powerful motors in the segment, the engine is lethargic or laid back in comparison with competition. While the car is quick, it does seem that Honda has paid more attention to making the oil burner into a more fuel efficient unit, rather than a sporty one. It is still the old unit that powers the car, and it has been calibrated differently. While the gears do slot in well, the transmission feels slow in response, and shift quality could have been slightly better. Low-end torque isn't a problem for the diesel manual at all, and nowhere did it stall or wheeze even if it was made to trundle at "Lower Parel-Mumbai" traffic pace in the evenings. But clearly the diesel is



tuned towards ease of driving rather than outright performance. This is also fine, as most buyers in this segment would be family oriented or those that have graduated from a sedate hatch, and would be looking for this kind of a package. With a lower power and torque figures as compared to the manual variant, the CVT is no slouch. The lower figures have been calibrated to give faster thrust of power, and hence the lower figures don't show up much in real time.

The Amaze's suspension setup is a little on the stiffer side in the i-VTEC (sporty), while the i-DTEC is set-up for comfort (family). Braking is sure for both, but the ride comfort is a little different. The oil burner behaves well on all sorts of surfaces, doesn't really throw you around when bumps are encountered, and takes undulations in its stride. The focus is on comfort – both for the driver as also for rear passengers. It is also no corner carver and is reluctant to dive into fast corners, although there is virtually no body roll and straight line stability is very good. In the petrol cars, brace yourself for fun, and the manual is the one to get you to let your hair down. Barring the low end torque issue, I would any day prefer driving the manual variant of the i-VTEC, as it is willing to be thrown into curves, is eager to dive into corners, and feels planted on high speed straights. The heavy steering is a boon in such situations and also at high speeds, as it lends confidence. At the same time, the steering is intuitive enough to do your bidding. Overall, this is a very fine package.

Not 'Amaze'd at the sales!

With a completely grounds-up new package and revamped interiors, it is no surprise that the new Amaze is costlier. But it is worth the higher price being paid, and that is reflected in the sales. While the Amaze was lying third in the compact sedan segment sales, the advent of the new model meant that Honda has had an amazing step-up in sales @ roughly 10,000 cars per month for the past four months, thus managing to get to the runners-up position in the CS segment – of course, segment leader Dzire is way ahead in the race. A major highlight is how Honda has revised service costs for the new Amaze. The Amaze now comes with a 3-year, unlimited kilometres warranty, along with the option of extending it, to the fourth or fifth year of ownership, for unlimited mileage as well.

While the diesel motor is clearly being aimed at the family man, the enthusiast is being targeted by the petrol mill. Overall, with its higher equipment levels and improved interior space and features, the new generation Amaze has clearly made its mark with buyers. Spending a few days driving each of these variants told me that the new Amaze is a big improvement over the outgoing version in every manner. Honda has been known for build quality, premium interiors, impeccable fit-and-finish, superb paint job, and a great ride. In recent times, with a few of its launches, Honda has been slipping up, and the sales charts heading 'South' told their own story. The new Amaze has turned things around, it would seem. And even though Honda still hasn't managed to undercut its biggest rival – Dzire – this time around buyers don't seem to be grudging Honda the premium pricing.

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