

Racing Integra arrives stripped-out. Even lights (right) have to be retro-fitted to make it road-legal. Spec is up to you – a car like this would cost around £14,500



✱ HONDA Racing Integra Type-R

Looking for a new trackday hero? Your search could just be over

Trackdays should be all about fun. Forget lap times and ego massage – if that's your thing you should be racing. Fun comes from being able to challenge yourself and push your car to its limits. Some would insist that in order to challenge yourself you need rear-wheel drive. Having just stormed through Donington's infamous Craner Curves in hazy rain with only the slightest lift, I feel sufficiently challenged in Lichfield Imports' front-drive Integra Type-R to forget the rear-drive purist nonsense.

Thing is, most people crave a bit of oversteer on a circuit and think rear-wheel drive is a must to achieve it. This particular Integra Type-R, created as a basis for a Japanese race series, built with no interior to speak of, and doing without the road-spec car's limited-slip diff and ABS, proves beyond doubt that oversteer fun isn't exclusive to powerful rear-drivers.

So I've successfully navigated the daunting Craner Curves, and I'm lined up for Old Hairpin. It's wet and I'm going in a bit too fast so I dab the brakes on turn-in and hope for the best. The Type-R has already shown an indecent turn of speed on the damp track and now reveals its

party piece. The nose turns in with total conviction and the rear of the car begins a gloriously telegraphed slide that starts way before the apex and ends pretty much whenever you like. Confidence duly bolstered, every corner becomes an opportunity for opposite lock. Either a jab of left-foot braking or a well-timed lift of the throttle is a surefire way to put a smile on your face and indulge in the Integra's fantastic chassis balance.

Lichfield Imports brings the Racing Integra Type-R into the UK and fits either a road pack or a track pack, the latter consisting of full rollcage, racing seats with harnesses, fire extinguisher and chunky leather-wrapped steering wheel. The basic car costs £11,995; the track pack another £1895. We've driven the Integra before and came away impressed with its speed but disappointed that a personal import would cost over £20,000. Lichfield's car is different – at under £14,000 in track guise it's one of the biggest bargains we've come across in some time. To put its abilities into perspective we've brought along a Civic Type-R, which provides the perfect benchmark. The Civic has always impressed more on track than on the road and it dealt with Donington's wicked combination of flat-out curves and

medium-paced corners with aplomb, feeling well balanced and very quick. The Integra, however, put clear air between itself and the Civic both in lap times and in terms of sheer enjoyment.

With superior body control that allows faster entry and exit speeds from every corner, better brakes working with less weight, and feelsome hydraulic – rather than electric – power steering letting you know just how much grip is left at the front wheels, it's a spectacular track companion. Later, co-editor Meaden chases a well-driven STI Impreza and reports that only out of long corners did the Subaru show signs of getting away.

Straight out of the box the Integra isn't road-legal because it isn't fitted with lights and a few other essentials, but this is pretty cheap to put right, as this car shows. Although a stripped-out and noisy track car doesn't sound like a promising recipe for a great road car, the Integra surprises again. On fast roads near Donington it's a raw but thrilling ride, very far from the weaving, crashy nightmare you might expect.

The peaky nature of the VTEC engine is more of an issue on the road, but the Integra manages to overcome the sometimes lethargic responses of an off-cam Civic due to its lower weight and

superior power. The firm suspension and super-reactive chassis help, and it doesn't seem such a bind to extract maximum performance when the whole car's egging you on. This is a cohesive package that begs to be thrashed. Lichfield expects some buyers to upgrade their cars to full-blown trackday-only specials but if you can't afford that indulgence then it can make a perfectly livable road car. It's compromised, but no more than an Elise.

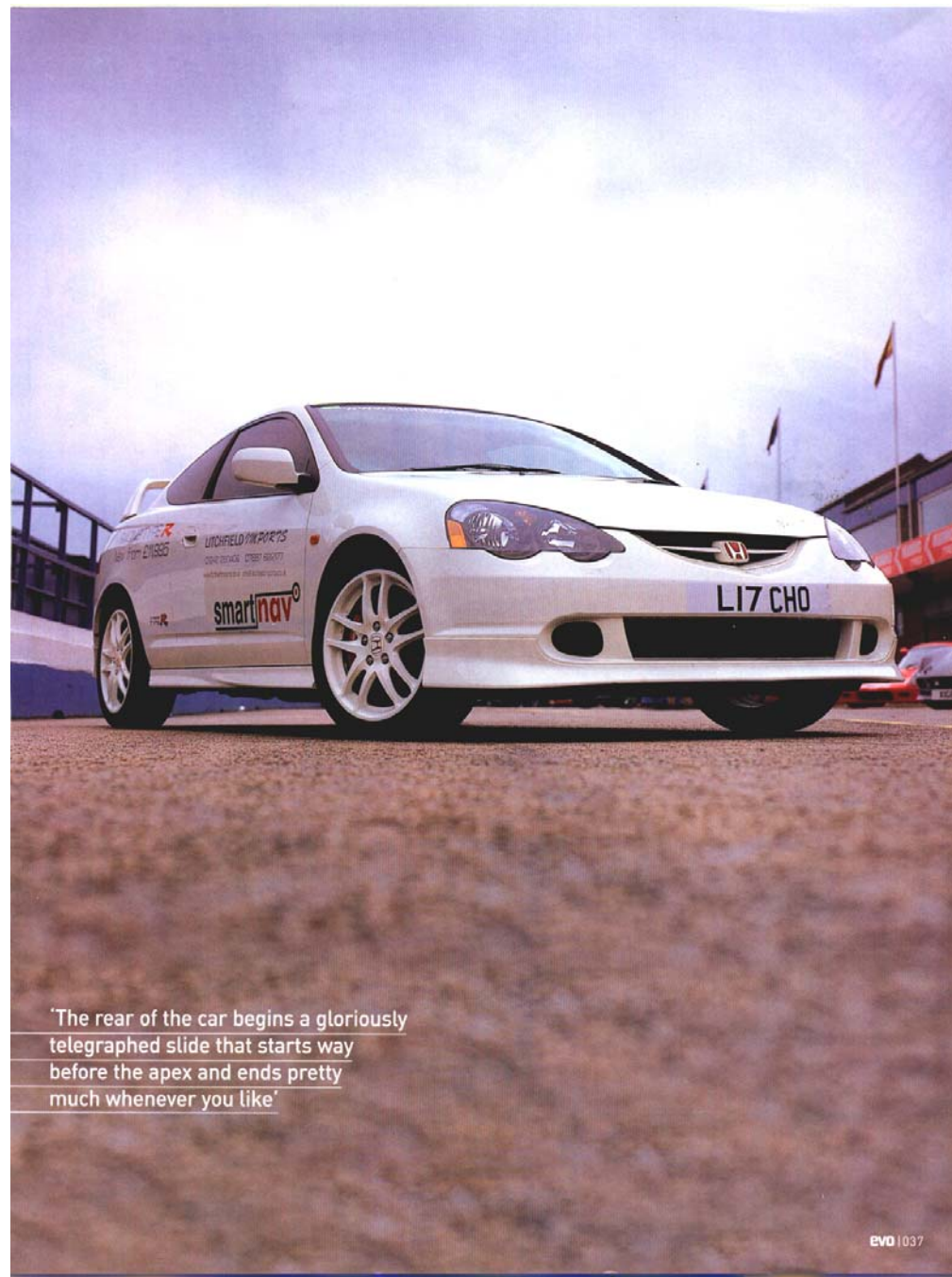
Jethro Bovingdon

SPECIFICATION

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1996cc, 16v
Max power	217bhp @ 8000rpm
Max torque	152lb ft @ 7000rpm
Top speed	140mph (est)
0-60mph	6.5sec (est)
Price	£14-15K (see text)
On sale	Now
	(Lichfield Imports: 01242 240461)

EVO RATING ★★★★★

- Massive fun, cheap as chips
- Not much of an interior



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