

There will be a few benighted souls who will view this as just another econo coupe. But this is nothing less than the new Honda Civic Si, one of the hottest small-scale street tigers ever to claw the pavement. Of course, the Si hasn't been a tiger in every renewal. The current edition is a swoopy little hatchback that falls more into the

realm of pussycat—overdomesticated and overfed.

But here's its replacement—the sixth generation in the Si tradition—and it's a predator, with more power, more feline grace, and more feline agility. More mass, too. Like almost every new car these days, this Si is heavier than its predecessor. But if it ain't lean, it is mean and hungry.

Bureau of stats: Sharing chassis dimensions with the regular Civic coupe, the Si is 9.2 inches longer and 2.2 inches wider than the hatch, on a 104.3-inch wheelbase—a 3.1-inch stretch. Also wider is the track, to 59.0 inches in front and 60.1 in back. The wide stance, the chin spoiler, the sloping hood, and the fast windshield combine to give the coupe an aggres-

sive look, finished off by a decklid spoiler that lends downforce at higher speeds—136 mph tops, Honda says.

As noted, the new Si is even heavier—at roughly 2900 pounds—than the pudgy hatchback it replaces. In fact, the specs make it a few pounds heavier than the Acura RSX Type-S. Dimensional increases account for much of this, along with