

Autocar

**EUROPE'S
BEST
SELLERS**

The cars that other countries buy-and why

Autotest:
New Colt Galant 2000GLS

**A sports car
code-named Cinher**



NOT TOO deep under its skin, the Ritz started life as a Honda Accord Executive with three-speed Hondamatic transmission. So what can have been done to put the price up from Honda's £5,060 to the £10,986 being asked by Rapport?

The Executive is a pretty substantial base from which to build a luxury car. It has power steering, air conditioning and electric window lifts and even illuminated door ashtrays as standard. To change the entire character of the car, both in feel and appearance, Rapport indulge in some fairly major cosmetic surgery. At the front, the wing panels ahead of the A-post are scrapped, as is the bonnet itself. The new wings, fabricated in aluminium, extend the nose forward. Beneath the rectangular section, body-colour, bumper is a fairly deep air dam, while above is the moveable aerofoil, first seen on the Forte (Autocar, 19 July 1980). Lowered, it forms a

Production versions of the Ritz have the centre section of the wheel hub blanked off to hide the studs. The rectangular-section bumpers and new boot line can be clearly seen

Luxury suite

Could the Rapport Ritz be a forerunner of a new breed of compact luxury town cars?

By Martin Lewis



smooth nose to the car, and when raised on its hydro-electric rams, it reveals the headlamps. When it is down, about 80 per cent of the Ritz's headlamps can be seen at the front, for warning flashing. The front, side and indicator lamps are carried in the bumper.

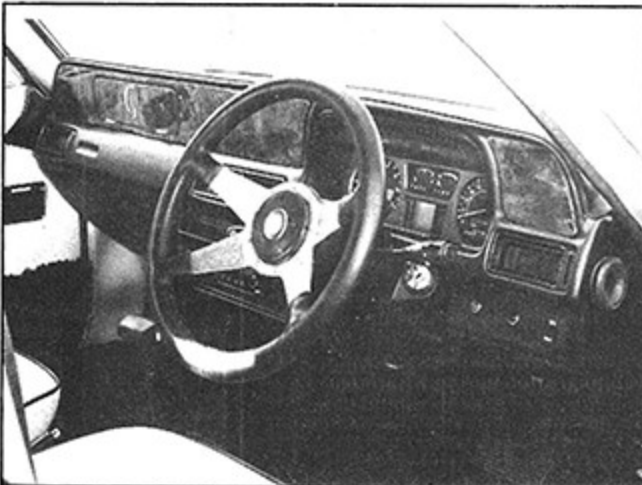
Glass fibre is the material used for the new bonnet, deeply louvered laterally just aft of the radiator, which, if you peer closely enough, can just be seen.

At the back of the car the original Honda wings are retained, but a matching-section bumper moulding to that at the front is used; a new boot lid, again in glass fibre and with a vestigial spoiler, is fitted.

To complete the external appearance of the Ritz, multi-spoke light alloy wheels shod with 175/70SR13in. tyres are fitted. The paintwork, in any of 18 standard Rapport colours was, on the two test cars inspected, of

Connolly hide and Dralon are used for the seats which are based on the original Honda frames. The door panels are leather trimmed at the top, with carpet kick panels, and the window sills have a burr walnut finish

Production cars will have a plainer Motor Lita steering wheel, rather than this "hand tooled" model. The outline of the original Accord fascia can be seen beneath the walnut trimmed Rapport one, with its small additional cubby



highly professional standard.

Open the doors (which have been specially weighted to improve their feel of solidity when being closed) and the feel of luxury oozes very discreetly. The frames of the Honda seats are just about all that remains in that area. They are stripped down, reupholstered and then trimmed in Connolly leather, with Dralon centre sections. Matching leather is used on the upper sections of the door trim panels, with carpeted kick panels. The window sills and the upper part of the revised fascia are finished in cabinet maker's burr walnut. Because it is such an integral part of the car, Honda's original fascia and instruments have been retained. But now the stand-up instrument binnacle has been incorporated into a full-width panel, with a non-reflective black leather trim. An additional and very small cubby is used and an analogue quartz clock replaces the normal LED digital one from the Accord. Gone, too, is the little coin tray on the right of the steering wheel, now a Moto Lita leather-trimmed one in place of the standard Honda type.

Naturally the floor is fully carpeted, with lambswool rugs; the boot too is fully trimmed, and on production cars a special tool case will be provided. The internal boot release, with the lever on the floor to the right of the driving seat, is retained, and there is no external boot lock.

At present the Ritz is available only in its four-door saloon version, and with Hondamatic three-speed semi-automatic transmission. The car we drove was fitted with a turbocharger, running at comparatively low — around 3 psi maximum — boost; this is available mainly to retain, rather than improve performance, for the Ritz weighs around 100lb more than the standard Executive. In the New Year, two new versions, a convertible and an estate, will become available, and with these there will be a sport pack, and a more potent form of turbocharging. And naturally there is a great list of extras, including tilt and slide sunroofs, Everflex roof capping and hi-fi stereo system to replace the standard (Rapport) AM/FM/cassette system.

On a brief drive around London's Hyde Park, the Ritz gave an impression of smoothness and, above all, quietness. With the larger section, lower profile tyres, the power steering had rather more feel. The Honda system has a gearbox driven pump which progressively shuts down the power assistance, starting at 24mph and finally cutting it out altogether at around 30mph. □

The longer bonnet line, with the headlamps hidden away under the lift-up aerofoil, effectively disguise the Honda Accord Executive which forms the basis of the Ritz

