### 隔週刊『日本の名車コレクション』 第4号

Legendary Japanese Cars ホンダ S8001
<b>名車の系</b> 譜 ホンダ S500 / S600
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Legendary Japanese Cars

# Honda **S800** 1966-1970

## Honda S800

Model	AS800
Engine Name	AS800E
Displacement	791cc
Maximum Output	70ps/8000rpm
Maximum Torque	6.7kg-m/6000rpm
Overall Length	3335mm
Overall Width	1400mm
Overall Height	1200mm
Wheelbase	2000mm
Vehicle Weight	720kg



The S800 embodies the founder Soichiro Honda's vision of "innovative ideas, original technology, relentless pursuit of high performance, and a love for cars." The photo shows the 2-door open model.





The previous S600 featured round tail lights, but the S800 has switched to square combination-type lights.

On the left side of the photo, there is a bulge on the right part of the hood. This is a power bulge, which originally served to emphasize the presence of a highpower engine that could not fit under the hood. However, in the case of the S800, this bulge is considered to be a dummy.

## Legendary Japanese Cars





## The Final Evolution of the S Series with Export in Mind

In the 1960s, Honda gained worldwide fame in the motorcycle industry and ventured into the passenger car market with the "S Series." The final evolution of this series, designed with a greater focus on overseas export, was the \$800. The 606cc capacity of its predecessor, the S600. was deemed too small for the international market. Thus. Honda showcased a model with an expanded engine capacity, named the "S800," at the Tokyo Motor Show in the fall of 1965, and it was released in January 1966.

The S800 continued to offer both open and coupe body styles, sharing the same basic framework as the S600. However, with changes to the bumper design, the overall length increased by 35mm. The AS800E engine, scaled up to 791cc, featured an enlarged bore and stroke of 60 × 70mm. Despite a reduced compression ratio of 9.2, the engine produced 70ps at 8000rpm and a maximum torque of 6.7kg-m at 6000rpm (compared to the S600's 57ps at 8500rpm and 5.2kg-m at 5500rpm). This enhanced performance significantly reduced the 0-400m acceleration time from 18.7 seconds (S600) to 16.9 seconds and increased the top speed to 160km/h (from 145km/h). The speedometer was marked up to 200km/h, and the red zone began at 8500rpm, reminiscent of highrevving motorcycles. To support the increased power, the S800's air cleaner, radiator, and oil pan capacities were enlarged.

Visually, the S800 featured a power bulge on the hood, initially planned for an injection system. which ultimately became a distinctive, albeit non-functional. icon. The front grille was adorned with a chromed "H" emblem, and the cloisonné badge was relocated to the side fenders, giving the S800 a distinct appearance from its predecessors. Other notable changes included a larger front bumper. larger indicators. and combination rear lamps, all designed to meet American safety standards.

By the time of the S800, the "S Series" had grown into a globally recognized lightweight sports car that met international standards and boasted performance that exceeded those standards, making it a car to be proud of anywhere in the world.

The engine was a 4-cylinder DOHC, praised for its precision like that of a clock. It featured four Keihin carburetors and four exhaust manifolds, like the S600. This engine was mounted longitudinally under the hood, with an FR (front engine, rear-wheeldrive) layout, which was standard at the time. This layout was later inherited by the "S of the Heisei era," the Honda S2000.

## Switched to Shaft Drive Four Months After Debut

"S Series" is still renowned for its chain drive, incorporated into a trailing arm for independent suspension. Initially adopted in the S800, as with the S500/600, this setup was changed to a conventional rigid 4-link shaft drive just four months after its debut.

This shift was prompted by concerns over noise and maintenance issues for export markets. Development head Yoshio Nakamura convinced



The convertible top of the 2-door open model is deployed. The small cabin, characteristic of a sports car, covers only the essential parts.



A cloisonné emblem featuring Honda's "H mark" combined with the car's name is mounted on the side of the body.

Soichiro Honda, who had initially opposed the chain drive, citing difficulties in selling it in America. However, integrating the chain case with the trailing arm couldn't create enough space, resulting in a smaller trunk volume. Alongside this drive change, the engine's performance was revised to address lowspeed torque deficiencies, making it more accessible to a broader audience.

The front suspension retained the double wishbone design with torsion bar springs, akin to the S500/S600, while steering featured quick-response rackand pinion, embodying qualities of modern sports cars over half a century ago.

In May 1968, the final iteration, the "S800M," was introduced, meeting North American safety standards with features such as radial tires, front disc brakes, body corner markers, and a 3-point seat belt. During this update, the coupe model was discontinued from domestic catalogs but continued to be produced as the overseasexclusive S800M coupe due to its popularity abroad.

## In racing, it threatened the performance of more advanced machines!

The S800 continued the racing legacy of the S600 but faced unique challenges at its debut. It often lagged Toyota's Sports 800, a frequent rival of the S600, primarily due to its heavier body and the teething issues of the newly adopted engine.

In response, Honda established the Racing Service Center (RSC), the predecessor to the current Honda Racing Corporation (HRC). within its main service division. RSC developed racing parts and supplied them to privateers. With this support and the car's gradual refinement, the S800 began to demonstrate exceptional strength. It dominated the GT-1 class at the 1967 Japan Grand Prix and remained unbeatable in this class, even challenging superior machines like the Toyota 7, Nissan R380, and Porsche Carrera 6. There were instances where the S800 overtook cars with more than double its engine capacity on straights.

The pinnacle of the S800's racing success domestically was

arguably the Suzuka 12-Hour race on August 4, 1968. The S800, with its engine capacity increased to 872.8cc and producing over 100ps, featured a hardtop with a flatter shape to reduce air resistance. Driven by RSC-contracted drivers Kuniomi Nagamatsu and Yoshifumi Kikura, it not only won the GT-1 class but also finished third overall. behind two 3000cc Tovota 7s. Internationally, Tetsu Ikuzawa secured a class victory in the Nürburgring 500km race the previous year, driving an RSCtuned \$800. Many private drivers also thrived with the S800. benefiting from parts supplied by RSC. The S800 not only served as a platform for nurturing racers but its engine was also a base for many pure race cars. Formula cars like the Brabham-Honda, Group 7's Macransa, and the Honda R800 were considered siblings of the S800.



In line with the sports car concept of being lightweight and compact, the dashboard area is also designed with a simple, no-frills approach.



By adopting low-back seats, the appearance when open was also taken into consideration. In the final model, the S800M, three-point seat belts were standard equipment.

## Legendary Japanese Cars



Despite being a high-revving engine, it provides a pleasant feel across the entire range.

The defining feature of the S800 as a driving car was its high-revving engine. With a redline starting at 8500 rpm, it was a high-revving engine comparable to motorcycles. Despite this, it did not lack torque at lower RPMs, especially after the switch to the rigid axle setup, providing a smooth and enjoyable drive across all RPMs. The S800 also featured a fully synchronized first gear, unique to this model, which contributed to a more pleasant driving experience. Additionally. the ideal weight distribution of 53:47 front to rear was praised

The S800, a rival of the Toyota Sports 800. In the race-spec models, the hardtop has a unique flat design.

for enhancing the sense of unity between driver and car, a characteristic that was passed down to its successor, the S2000.

When it comes to driving feel, classic car enthusiasts still debate "chain vs. rigid." Generally, "chain for higher limits, rigid for better handling" seems to be the consensus. Many enthusiasts also love the unique rear-end lift during acceleration specific to the chain drive.

The S800 ceased production in 1970 due to its status as a sports car and the limited sales potential. It is also said that resources were allocated to models like the N360. The total production of the S800, including both open and coupe models, was 11,406 units, with the cumulative production of the \$500/600/800 series totaling 25,853 units. The \$ lineage then paused until the \$2000 was introduced in 1999.

Honda's "S Series," with the S800 at its pinnacle, established the brand's ethos of "originality," "innovation," and "challenge spirit," laying the foundation for Honda's unique path as a car manufacturer. For fans disappointed by Honda's withdrawal from F1 and its move away from internal combustion engines, the "S Series" remains a poignant and significant chapter in Honda's history.



The S800 catalog at the time of its release highlighted several features, including its high performance engine, rear-wheel chain drive, and the ease of deploying the convertible top with a single touch.

> The S800M, introduced with a minor change in 1968, was a right-hand drive version of the export model. It included 20 safety measures to meet U.S. safety standards, such as the addition of new turn signals.





The trunk also provides ample space, with a 35liter capacity gasoline tank visible in the right rear.



packed into the narrow space, with four carburetors made by Keihin Seiki (later Keihin, now Hitachi Astemo), a major parts manufacturer under the Honda group, fitted in the back. The wind deflector on the



On the right is a speedometer with a 200 km/h scale. The left tachometer features a redline starting at 8500 RPM, resembling the highrevving engines found in motorcycles.



## The design of the coupe model's roofline.

The S800 had two body types: open and coupe, both inherited from its predecessor, the S600. However, many people today are surprised to learn that a coupe version of the S800 eve<u>n existed.</u>

When viewed from the side, the coupe's roofline forms a distinctive arc. Some might argue that this design spoils the S800's beauty. It appears to provide headroom for rear passengers, similar to the Jaguar E-Type 2+2 Coupe, but the S800 coupe is actually a two-seater.

The S600 was originally designed to have a rear seat, allowing for three passengers, but approval was never granted. As a result, the roofline intended for a three-seater remained, and this design was carried over to the S800. Masao Kawamura, who was responsible for the design, mentioned that a prototype of a two-seater model with a roofline 40mm lower in the rear half was created. However, the model that went into production retained the roofline intended for the three-seater. Kawamura later expressed regret over this decision. Fans also share the sentiment that a two-seater coupe with a dedicated design would have been exceptionally beautiful.



The coupe model, equipped with a hatch gate, offered more interior space compared to the open version. The photo shows the export model.