

2006 Honda Accord Hybrid – Technical Details of Problems to Date

Summary:

I purchased a new 2006 Honda Accord Hybrid in February, 2006. Almost immediately after taking delivery, I noticed a problem that was later diagnosed as a fault of the active engine mount damping system. The fault occurs randomly, but persistently. Several (>7) diagnosis attempts have been made, and parts have been replaced on at least three occasions, without solving the problem. While Honda and its dealerships have been professional about the issue, and all agree that there is a problem, they have been unable to resolve the problem and don't know what causes it.

Having driven the car for the past 15 months with this problem, I feel that it is a substantial problem which limits my enjoyment of using the car and compromises the resale value of the car. I feel that I have been acting in good faith throughout the process, but at this point, I am tired and fed up with numerous unsuccessful repair attempts, and since Honda cannot figure out what causes the problem or how to fix it, I feel that they should repurchase the vehicle and compensate me for the value of my Trade In, based on the Book Value of the trade. Since the problem was first reported to Honda when there were less than 1,000 miles on the car, I feel that any deduction based on mileage or use of the car should be calculated based on when the problem first occurred.

Detailed Chronological History

The ACM system is apparently the root cause of the recurring, unresolved trouble that I have experienced with this car.

I took possession of the car in late February, 2006. Prior to taking delivery, the dealership told me that they had to make a repair because the Check Engine light was on, but I am not sure what the diagnosis ever was, or whether the problem was related to the subsequent issues that have occurred.

Shortly after taking delivery of the car, I began to notice a vibration that occurred intermittently. The vibration felt like what you experience when you try to start out in third gear instead of first in a car with a manual transmission. It did not occur on every trip in the car, but once it started to occur on any given trip, it would continue until the car was turned off. Restarting the car seemed to make the vibration go away. The vibration is most pronounced at speeds between 30 and 40 mph, in ECO (3-cylinder) mode, and on a slight upgrade. The vibration can be felt in the pedals, the seat, and the steering wheel. The vibration is not as pronounced in other driving conditions, for example, you can temporarily make the vibration go away by stepping harder on the gas.

After the problem had occurred a few times, I decided to bring the car to the dealer. The first service record that relates to this issue is attached. The car was approximately one month old (03/24/06) and had 970 miles on the odometer. Although I don't believe that the problem was occurring at the time that took it into the dealer, the dealer was able to retrieve a fault code "P0A14" that indicated a failure of the ACM system. According to

the service records, the dealer reset the fault code, and the fault did not recur during the time that they had the car, so they were unable to determine the cause of the fault and returned the car to me without making any other repairs.

Although the problem only occurred intermittently, say on average one trip per week, the symptoms were consistent at each occurrence. There was a strong vibration occasionally accompanied by a booming noise. The vibration was most pronounced at 40 mph, with the engine in ECO mode. Stepping on the gas causes the vibration to go away because the car goes back into V6 mode, where the engine is more dynamically balanced. The vibration persists as long as the car is on. Turning the car off and then back on again seems to “reboot” the computer and causes the ACM system to resume normal operation. There is no obvious pattern as to what causes the system to fault. (Weather, speed, type of road, cold start or hot start, etc.)

After experiencing the problem a few more times, I brought the car back to the dealership on 04/06/06, with 1,458 miles. This time, the problem was occurring as I drove to the dealer and I asked to take a test drive with one of the service technicians. The technician agreed that the car was not performing properly during the road test. The car was brought into the shop and a diagnosis was performed with their diagnostic computer. The computer test that was conducted was able to determine that the ACM system had failed. The way that the test works is that they send a test signal to the engine mount, causing the engine to vibrate on purpose. If the engine mount does not respond, it indicates that there is a problem with the system. The technician decided that the first step in the repair process would be to replace the engine mount itself. The mount was replaced, details of the date and mileage are attached on the second service report.

The problem initially seemed to be resolved by the replacement of the engine mount, and it was not until a few months later that the problem recurred. I took the car back to the dealership at least once, and they were unable to duplicate the concern at this time. (08/16/06, third service report)

Then I took the car back again, on 10/18/06, this time when the problem was occurring, and the same diagnostic procedure was conducted, which determined that the ACM system had faulted again. The dealership kept the car for three days, during which time they performed numerous diagnostic procedures, but ultimately, they were unable to come up with any suggested repairs, and they returned the car to me. The details of this repair visit are in the fourth service report.

As the problem continued to occur, I brought the car back once again, on 12/07/06, took the car for yet another test drive with the service manager, and they again diagnosed that the ACM system had faulted. The same fault code was retrieved from the car. The suggested repair this time was to replace the electronic control module for the engine mount. There were also two other issues that were addressed at this time, one of which was that the check engine light had come on. The check engine light issue appeared to be unrelated to the ACM faulting, and was in fact related to engine misfiring. The details of this repair visit are in the fifth service report.

Replacing the engine mount controller did not solve the problem. By this point, the dealer's service manager had begun to promise that they would "fly in" the Honda engineers to diagnose the problem.

The dealer called back within a few days and said that instead of bringing in the Honda engineers, they wanted to try replacing the wiring harness that connects the engine mount to its controller. This was replaced, as detailed in the sixth service report (01/22/07). The code for the failed engine damping system was again stored in the car's computer.

The problem returned the same as ever. I called the service manager to report that the problem had not been resolved, and he suggested again that they would bring in the Honda factory engineers to diagnose the problem. I pointed out that because the problem occurs intermittently, it would be difficult to demonstrate it for the engineers.

A few days later, the service manager called back, to say that the decision to bring in the engineers had been changed. According to the service manager, he had contacted his district service manager, who had in turn contacted the factory engineers by phone. The district service manager apparently told the dealership service manager that the problem was "normal" and that there was nothing else that could be done to repair it. Based on my experience driving the car, and the repair work described above, I strongly disagreed that this can be characterized as normal operation. I asked the service manager if I could speak directly with the Honda engineer that the district manager had spoken with, but he said that was out of the question. He offered to have the district manager call me to discuss my concerns, but he has not yet called.

Around 2/26/07, I called Honda in California, to state that I was not satisfied with the attempts to date to repair the car, that I had owned the car for one year and they had not been able to solve the problem despite numerous attempts. I told them that I wanted to give them a final opportunity to repair the vehicle, or else that we had to find some other resolution to the problem. The woman that I spoke with suggested that I must first bring the car to another local dealership for a "second opinion". She gave me a list of dealers in the area, I chose Bernardi Honda of Natick, MA

A few days after speaking to Honda in CA, on 03/01/07, I was driving to work, and the problem occurred again. I called Bernardi to see if I could bring the car in on an emergency basis. I brought the car to them, as detailed on the seventh service report. I went for a drive with Don K, the shop foreman. He agreed that the car was not driving properly. He brought the car back to the dealership and hooked up the diagnostic handheld computer. He retrieved the same PA014 code. There were also codes indicating engine misfire, which was the cause of the Check Engine Light coming on back in December.

Bernardi ran through a few other diagnostic procedures, and could find nothing obvious that was wrong. They called the Tech Line and sent me on my way, saying that they would be back in touch soon. A few days later, Bernardi called back to set up an

appointment to install a datalogger in the car to record the driving conditions that were occurring when the ACM system faults. I went to Bernardi on 03/12/07. They had the car for about 2 hours, during which time they installed a datalogger. I drove the car for about two weeks with the datalogger. I returned on 03/27/07 to have the datalogger removed.

The datalogger was sent back to Honda Tech Line for their diagnosis. At this time, Bernardi told me that there were apparently other Accord Hybrids with the same problem. I called Bernardi several times over the next few weeks asking for updates on the status of the diagnosis by Tech Line. While the service advisor was polite and followed up with me, there was no further resolution from Tech Line and no further repair attempts have been made.

On 05/03/07, about five weeks since Tech Line had received the datalogger from Bernardi and with no solution or repair in sight, I called Honda in CA again, and spoke with a woman named Carla and explained the history, that I had been to the second opinion dealer, and that the problem had still not been resolved. She gave me a case number N012007050301236. The next day, Matt Ramelb from Team H called me back. I gave him the description of the problems, and faxed him over the service history.

Matt has been very professional and has always called back with updates when he said he would. He called the dealer, the Tech Line, the district manager, etc. Ultimately, on 05/17/07, Honda offered a settlement, which was to pay the cost of the extended warranty that I had purchased with the vehicle and upgrade the terms of the warranty for more months or more miles. In exchange for this settlement, I would waive any further rights to make claims regarding the issue. My understanding was that by accepting this settlement, I was basically agreeing to continue to drive the car with the problem, and that Honda would not be required to make any further repair attempts. This is not acceptable to me.

On 5/18/07, I decided that I did not want to accept Honda's proposed settlement, so I called the BBB Auto Line. On 05/21/07, Matt called me to tell me that he was aware that I had talked to BBB Auto Line. He asked for one more day to try to resolve the issue. In the meantime, the paperwork form BBB Auto Line arrived.

I sent in the BBB Autoline paperwork. BBB refused the claim on 5/31 saying that the issue is that the vehicle is used for business purposes and is therefore not eligible for Lemon Law consideration.

Ownership of the Vehicle:

I am the owner of an energy efficiency engineering consulting firm. The vehicle was purchased by the business for my exclusive use. The reason for registering the vehicle as owned by the business was to make the accounting easier (rather than submit mileage reimbursements). The car is registered with a normal passenger license plate, not a commercial plate. I drive the car in the same way and for the same uses that one of my employees would drive a personally owned car.

It is used to commute in, and to drive to and from meetings for work, and for other personal use. It is not driven by anyone else, and is not subject to any harsh driving conditions. It is not used for hire, for deliveries, etc. While I can understand that a vehicle subjected to the harsh use of a commercial, for hire, or delivery vehicle would affect warranty treatment, I don't feel that my use of the vehicle can be categorized in this way, and my claim should be processed using the same rules that would apply to a privately owned car.