

The Itty Bitty SUV – Small Cars for Onshore-Offshore Success

by Joshua W. Broer

Suppose there may be many different opinions and definitions about what an SUV (sport utility vehicle) really is. Here's one of them. Before I ever purchased my first truck, I drove around the same old 1991 Honda Civic Hatchback for 13 years. It allowed me to canoe, kayak, road and mountain bike, camp, and most importantly fish, all throughout the southeast U.S. Early into the ownership of this vehicle, what I liked to refer to as the Itty Bitty SUV, I made a few modifications in order to have enough space inside and outside of the car to fit all the gear I needed for any given day on the water or in the woods.

The first change I made to my little SUV-to-become was to install a Thule roof rack with extra long 60" bars. These long bars allowed me to fit any assortment of outdoor hunting and fishing tools and vehicles without taking up any space in the interior. If I was heading out for a long trek across the state or into the southern Georgia hills, it was not uncommon to see my Civic roof rack loaded with a canoe, sea kayak, mountain bike and gear box. I developed a great lock system for every item up top so could venture away from the car without fear of theft. The roof rack system proved to be the most efficient and inexpensive method of transporting my outdoor gear. I did use the interior, however.

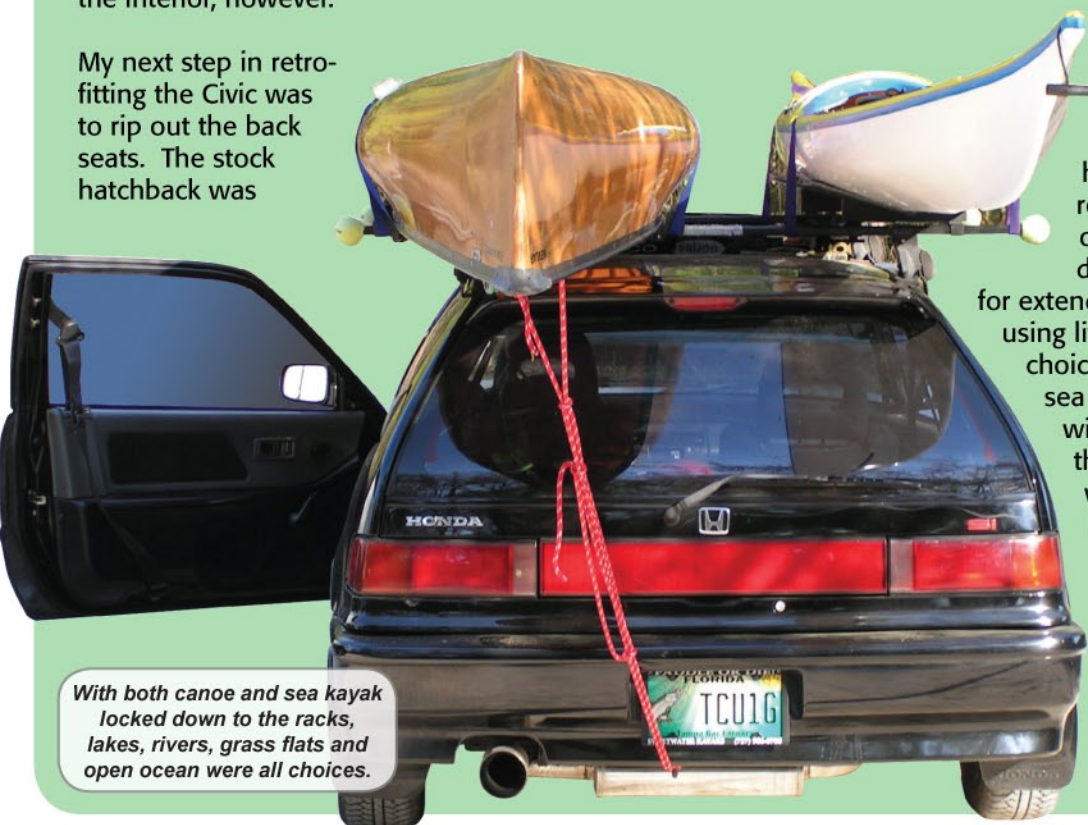
My next step in retrofitting the Civic was to rip out the back seats. The stock hatchback was



With the back seats removed, the huge hatchback area of the Civic held tackle, camping equipment and scuba gear.

already designed to fit lots of stuff. With the back seats torn out, I had a huge area to fit my 100 qt. cooler, camping gear, extra tackle, electronics, etc. This bubble-like storage area in the back of the car gave me plenty of space for all my gear and left the driver and passenger side front seats free of clutter.

The earliest years of ownership of my little SUV revolved around mountain biking, canoeing and sea kayaking. Mostly I canoed and kayaked in order to get to the fish. Many times I would have both kinds of boats on the roof rack depending on what type of water I might find and fish that day. The canoe was at the ready for extended, all day trips across the flats using live bait. It was also the boat of choice for camping expeditions. The sea kayak was for fishing bigger water with artificial baits. A typical day in the canoe might consist of slinging whitebait all around the Weedon Island or Anclote River area and a typical day in the sea kayak might consist of an open water crossing from Ft. Desoto to Egmont Key or Howard Park to Anclote Key. Either way, from gliding up to spooky schools of fish on the flats



With both canoe and sea kayak locked down to the racks, lakes, rivers, grass flats and open ocean were all choices.



Extra long roof rack bars allowed me to carry gear for both onshore and offshore activities.



You don't necessarily need a truck to enjoy a great boat. Marina life is good!



Running a 13 second quarter mile on the drag strip, my Civic defined the "sport" in sport utility vehicle.

in the canoe to chasing down tarpon and cobia on the beach in the kayak, whichever boat I needed was right there with me all the time.

In the early part of the 2000s, I traded in my paddle-fishing way of life in order to get back to my Tarpon Springs childhood roots which was fishing from flats skiffs. I decided to purchase an old 1982 Sheffield mullet boat that had been customized into a flats

charter tower fishing boat. At 23 ft long with a 9 ft beam, a huge tower, the motor moved to the transom of the boat on a giant scissor jack plate, and the entire hull and deck modified, this was one mean flat-bottomed, sandbar-jumping beast. The boat could run through six inches of water and float in ten. But the best thing about it was that for the next three years of what was likely the best fishing of my life, I didn't have to buy a truck to get the boat in and out of the water. I made a home for her at Port Tarpon Marina which I would drive to in that same old 1991 Honda Civic Hatchback at least three times per week if not more. The 100 qt cooler stayed in the back of the Civic at all times for fish transporting purposes and the Thule gear box stayed on the roof rack to carry my rods and tackle to and from the marina. I had my dream boat without having to sacrifice giving up my great little SUV that always got the job done.

It seems like only yesterday but those years are now past and the Civic has been replaced by a Ford F-150 and a sweet little 17 ft. flats skiff that sleeps in my garage. I miss the Civic and its unique ability to carry so many small boats and outdoor gear but usually, all good things come to an end. I would be remiss not to mention that I got a good 200K miles from that car and probably could have hit the 300K mark had it not been for an addiction to engine swaps, customized turbo chargers and late night drag racing. But that is probably better left a story untold! In any case, cheers to all those who have ever loved to hunt and fish and did so without a truck hitch. "Been there, done that", and loved every minute of it. ☑

ONSHORE-OFFSHORE Editor-in-Chief, Joshua Broer, a Tarpon Springs native, is the Facilities, Safety and Security Manager for the College of Arts & Sciences at USF. Having spent most of his life on or under water, his specialties include flats & bass fishing, scuba diving, canoeing & kayaking, and photography. He can be reached at 813-765-7381 or email: jbroer@tampabay.rr.com.



With the paddle fleet gone, the itty bitty SUV became my tower boat tackle transporter.