

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

In The Matter of)
)
) DOCKET NO. C-3711
AMERICAN HONDA MOTOR CO., INC.,)
a corporation.)
)

COMPLAINT

The Federal Trade Commission, having reason to believe that American Honda Motor Co., Inc., a corporation ("respondent" or "Honda"), has violated the provisions of the Federal Trade Commission Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 45-58, as amended, and the Consumer Leasing Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 1667-1667e, as amended, and its implementing Regulation M, 12 C.F.R. § 213, as amended, and it appearing to the Commission that this proceeding is in the public interest, alleges:

1. Respondent American Honda Motor Co., Inc. is a California corporation with its principal office or place of business at

television lease advertisements (attached hereto in video and storyboard format). Honda Exhibit C is a print lease advertisement. These advertisements contain the following statements:

- A. [Audio:] "Here's what you might put down on a typical car lease [\$1750]. At Honda, however, we had a different idea. We took our fully equipped 1995 Accord LX and lowered the downpayment to some rather nice round numbers. [pause] The zero down, short-term lease from your Honda dealer. Zero down and \$289 a month for 30 months."

[Video:] [View of an odometer set on \$1750 that rolls down to \$0000] "The \$0 Down Lease."

The Accord LX
\$0 Down
\$289/30 months"

[The advertisement contains the following lease disclosure in white print superimposed on a black background and accompanied by background sound: ". . . Advertised rate based on 30-mo. closed-end lease for 1995 Honda Accord 4-Door LX w/Automatic Trans. (Model CD583S). MSRP \$18,880 (includes destination) with dealer cap. cost reduction of \$620.50. DEALER PARTICIPATION MAY AFFECT ACTUAL PAYMENT. Taxes, title, lic. & reg., ins., opt. equip. & services not included. Due at lease signing are 1st mo.

[Video:] "\$239 a Month, 36 Months, \$1500 Down."

[The advertisement contains the following lease disclosure at the top of the screen in white print superimposed on a black background and accompanied by background sound: ". . . Advertised rate based on 36-month closed-end lease for the 1994 Accord LX Sedan with MSRP of \$18,330.00 with a dealer capitalized cost reduction of \$795.35 (\$965.35 in IL, IN, KS, ME, NY, OK, and UT where no security deposit is required); condition of dealer participation may affect actual rate. Taxes, title, license, and registration, insurance and optional equipment, and services not included. Due at lease signing are \$1,500.00 down-payment, first lease payment, refundable deposit equal to one payment rounded to the next highest \$25.00 increment where applicable, title, license and registration fee, and tax as applicable. Total monthly payment is \$8,604.00 (plus tax, as applicable). Option to purchase at end of lease for \$10,061.50 plus tax and official fees, except in MS, NY, and SD where no option available. Lessee pays maintenance, insurance, repairs, service, any and all related taxes, registration renewals, and excessive wear and use. Mileage charge of \$.15/mile over 15,000 miles per year. A disposition fee up to \$400.00 is due if vehicle not purchased at end of lease term. . . . " The fine print is displayed on three screens, each containing a block of eight lines, each block appearing for approximately three seconds.] (Honda Exhibit B).

C. "INTRODUCING ZIP, ZERO, NADA.

Civic LX
\$229 per month/30 months

Accord LX
\$289 per month/30 months

Passport 4WDLX
\$389 per month/30 months

The \$0 down lease

[The advertisement contains the following lease disclosure at the bottom of the page in small print:
". . . Taxes, title, lic. & reg., ins., opt. equip. & services not included. Due at lease signing are 1st mo.'s lease payment, refundable security dep. equal to 1 mo.'s payment rounded to the next highest \$25 increment (except where no security dep. is collected) & applicable title, lic., reg. fee & tax. Total monthly payments \$6,870 for the Civic LX Sedan, \$8,670 for the Accord LX Sedan and \$11,670 for the Passport 4WD LX + applicable tax. Opt. to purchase at lease end for \$9,681.50 for the Civic LX Sedan, \$12,649.60 for the Accord LX Sedan and \$15,879.50 for the Passport 4WD LX + tax + official fees, except in MS, NY & SD where no purchase opt. avail. If not purchased at lease end, customer returns vehicle & pays a disp. fee of no more than \$400. Lessee pays maint., ins., repairs, service, all related taxes, reg. renewals, excessive wear & use. Mi. Charge of 15[cents]/mi. over 12,000 mi/yr. . . ."]
(Honda Exhibit C).

Federal Trade Commission Act Violations
COUNT I: Misrepresentation in Lease Advertising

5. Through the means described in Paragraph 4, respondent has represented, expressly or by implication, that the amount stated as "down" in respondent's lease advertisements, including but not necessarily limited to "\$0 down," is the total amount consumers must pay at lease inception to lease the advertised vehicles.

6. In truth and in fact, the amount stated as "down" in respondent's lease advertisements is not the total amount consumers must pay at lease inception to lease the advertised vehicles. Consumers must also pay additional fees beyond the amount stated as "down," such as the first month's payment and security deposit, at lease inception. Therefore, respondent's representation as alleged in Paragraph 5 was, and is, false or misleading.

7. Respondent's practices constitute deceptive acts or practices in or affecting commerce in violation of Section 5(a) of the Federal Trade Commission Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45(a).

COUNT II: Failure to Disclose Adequately in Lease Advertising

8. In its lease advertisements, respondent has represented, expressly or by implication, that consumers can lease the

advertised vehicles at the terms prominently stated in the advertisements, including but not necessarily limited to the monthly payment amount and/or the amount stated as "down." These advertisements do not adequately disclose additional terms pertaining to the lease offer, including but not necessarily limited to a required security deposit and first month's payment due at lease inception. The existence of these additional terms would be material to consumers in deciding whether to lease a Honda vehicle. The failure to disclose adequately these additional terms, in light of the representation made, was, and is, a deceptive practice.

9. Respondent's practices constitute deceptive acts or practices in or affecting commerce in violation of Section 5(a) of the Federal Trade Commission Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45(a).

COUNT III: Consumer Leasing Act and Regulation M Violations

10. Respondent's lease advertisements, including but not necessarily limited to Honda Exhibits A through C, state a monthly payment amount, the number of required payments, and/or an amount "down." The lease disclosures in these advertisements contain one or more of the following terms required by Regulation M: that the transaction advertised is a lease; the total amount of any payment such as a security deposit or capitalized cost reduction required at the consummation of the lease or that no such payments are required; the total of periodic payments due under the lease; a statement of whether or not the lessee has the option to purchase the leased property and at what price and time or the method of determining the purchase-option price; and a statement of the amount or method of determining the amount of any liabilities the lease imposes upon the lessee at the end of the term.

11. The lease disclosures in respondent's television lease advertisements, including but not necessarily limited to Honda Exhibits A and B, are not clear and conspicuous because they appear on the screen in small type for a very short duration. The lease disclosures in respondent's print lease advertisements, including but not necessarily limited to Honda Exhibit C, are not clear and conspicuous because they appear in small type.

12. Respondent's practices violate Section 184 of the Consumer Leasing Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1667c, as amended, and Section 213.5(c) of Regulation M, 12 C.F.R. § 213.5(c), as amended.

THEREFORE, the Federal Trade Commission this sixth day of February, 1997, has issued this complaint against respondent.

By the Commission.

Donald S. Clark
Secretary

SEAL:

[Exhibits A-C attached to paper copies of complaint, but not available in electronic form.]