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HEADLINE: Subtle Systems To Cut Noise

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BODY:

IN a world obsessed with cellphone ring tones and plugged in to iPods, simple silence can be precious. That's the reasoning behind Honda's two new and very similar noise-reducing systems.

New this year in the 2005 Honda Odyssey (the first minivan to carry a noise-reducing system), the 2005 Honda Accord Hybrid and the 2005 Acura RL (the company's luxury brand), the kindred systems use microphones in the front and rear of the vehicle to analyze noise from the engine and exhaust. By producing sound waves that oppose the frequency of the noise -- yet are virtually imperceptible to those riding in the car -- they are able to lower the overall decibel level. John Watts, manager of product planning at Acura, said that the systems, which come standard, can reduce interior noise by 10 decibels.

In the Odyssey and the Accord Hybrid, the active noise control system counteracts a low-frequency boom caused by the cars' variable cylinder management system, which reduces the number of cylinders in use while cruising. The RL's active noise cancellation system is designed to limit the noise produced by the exhaust.

Noise-reducing systems have been available in luxury sedans since Bose introduced its AudioPilot system in 1998. But the Bose system -- also in the 2005 Acura RL -- works with the stereo, tweaking the volume level to limit ambient noise. Honda's systems work on their own, sending the balancing sound waves through the speakers in the cars' doors even if the stereo is off.

Of course, one of the reasons the cars need an active system is that they're generally noisier than luxury sedans, which have more padding for noise insulation. For the moment, Honda has no plans to add the systems to other models. But, Mr. Watts said, "We believe in the technology, and we see that there's a lot of potential application for it in the future." NICK KAYE

URL: <http://www.nytimes.com>

GRAPHIC: Drawing (Drawing by Stuart Goldenberg)

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