

Road Beat: 2017 Acura TLX high value continues



Acura TLX is a perfect midsize sedan. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Acura brought us the TL in 1996 and it continued through four generations. It was Acura's midsize offering and at one time nearly outsold the class leader in this segment, the BMW 3 series. It's third generation was the second best-selling luxury car in the U.S.

In a conversation with the head of Chrysler design, Ralph Gilles, who headed the team that created the second-generation Chrysler 300 in 2004, once told me that he thought the 2004-2008 third generation TL was his favorite design of all cars at the time. That says a lot.

While the fourth generation might have lost its way, the mid-

size TL moniker has been replaced in 2015 by the TLX. It fits in the dimension game as a perfect midsize sedan with a length, wheelbase, width and height of 190, 109, 73 and 57 inches respectively. Interior volume is 107 cubic feet including 13 cubes in the nicely shaped trunk.

While not a spittin' image of the third-generation superb looking TL, it fits into the category of great looking cars. I am not a fan of the aluminum plate in the traditional Acura five-sided grill design which in some applications looks like an eagle's beak from the side, but in the TLX it has been toned down significantly. Acura designers did an acceptable rhinoplasty. Overall the new TLX is eye-catching with its clever use of two character lines, its somewhat edgy sleek shape, great looking window line and proportions and strong, muscular back end. I am a new fan. But there is so much more to talk about besides its subjective quality appearance and it's all good, really good.



Specifications

Price \$31,900 to about \$45,000

Engines

2.4L DOHC, 16 valve, VTEC inline four 206 hp @ 6,800 rpm

182 lb.-ft. of torque @ 4,500 rpm

3.5L DOHC, 24 valve VTEC V-6

290 hp @ 6,200 rpm
267 lb.-ft. of torque @
4,500 rpm

Transmissions

Eight-speed DCT (I-4)
Nine-speed torque converter
automatic (V-6)

Configuration

Transverse mounted front
engine/FWD/AWD (V-6 only)

Dimensions

Wheelbase 109.3 inches
Length 190.3 inches
Width 73.0 inches
Height 57.0 inches
Track (f/r) 62.8/63.1 inches
Weight 3,492 pounds
Weight Distribution (% f/r)
60/40
Fuel capacity 17.2 gallons
Passenger volume 93.3 cubic
feet
Trunk capacity 13.2 cubic
feet
Turning circle 39.2 feet
Wheels 17X7.5 inch alloys
Tires 225/55X17 inches (high
performance, all season)

Performance

0-60 mph 6.88 seconds
50-70 mph 3.64 seconds
50-70 mph uphill 5.53
seconds
Top speed Way beyond sanity
Fuel economy EPA rated
24/35/28 mpg
city/highway/combined.

Expect 32-33 mpg in rural county driving with some stop and go, 42.5 mpg on the highway at legal speeds.

Acura TLX uses one of two engines, either a 2.4L direct injected VTEC, DOHC 16 valve inline four or a direct injected, VTEC, 3.5L DOHC, 24 valve V-6. My tester had in inline 206 hp at 6,800 rpm and 182 pounds of peak twist at 4,500 rpm. The V-6 cranks out 290 hp at 6,200 and 267 pounds of twist at the same 4,500 rpm. It means that for both these engines peak volumetric efficiency is at 4,500 rpm, the engine speed at which the intake and exhaust are working at their best.

Although all wheel drive is available with the V-6, it is not available with the inline four. However, all models have all wheel steering. More on that later. In my tester, the front wheels are driven through an eight-speed electronic dual clutch tranny. While there is a small torque converter it is mostly locked up as it is only used in taking off from a dead stop for torque multiplication and to help with the VTEC system. The V-6 drives either the front wheels or all wheels via a nine-speed torque converter auto cog swapper.

My tester was a model of decorum with surprising performance from the four-banger knocking off 0-60 mph in just 6.88 seconds. That is as quick as the original second generation V-6. And that stellar performance is backed up by super responsive passing times accelerating from 50-70 mph on level ground and up a six percent grade in 3.64 and 5.53 seconds respectively. This engine flat out gets it done especially with that terrific eight speed dual clutch tranny. Fly by wire throttle response was almost instantaneous and linear. It was a beautiful thing. I will miss this fuel-sipping rocket ship next week.

As to the IDS (Integrated Dynamics System) system which remaps throttle and tranny aggressiveness, I used the Sport mode as

opposed to econ, normal and sport-plus which keep the tranny in lower gears to a much higher rpm. Sport was right for me and I even used the econ mode in leisurely driving and for most people the only mode they will notice a difference is in sport+.

Now here is the kicker, the Acura returns incredible fuel economy especially in light of its very high performance and 3,500 pounds of curb weight. EPA rates the Acura at 24/35/28 mpg city/highway/combined. Here is what the Acura did in the real world. On a level highway two way run with the cruise control set at 70 mph, the TLX returned 42.5 mpg. The engine spins just 1,950 rpm at 70 mph. Overall in 350 miles of varied driving with little time spent on a freeway the TLX returned 33 mpg. In a trip from Placerville to Carson City via Highway 50 and up and down both sides of the Sierras (about 220 miles), the TLX averaged 35.5 mpg. Because of two fuel economy computers I was able to track the fuel economy of the TLX from South Lake Tahoe to Placerville. The number was an astounding 47.4 mpg! TLX combines great performance and fuel economy. TLX comes with a large 17.2-gallon fuel tank.

Next on the list is handling and the TLX with its four-wheel electric power steering is fantastic even with its taller 225/55X17 inch rubber mounted on wide 17X7.5 inch alloys. It's accurate and you can subtly feel it helping the rear end when pushed in the corners. Suspension is state of the art MacPherson struts and a multilink system and track is a wide 63 inches. I would prefer 50 or 45 series tires with a lower profile, but maybe Acura is looking for ride quality. But notwithstanding that, this Acura is a true sporting sedan that is simply a blast to do the quick step with in the twisties. You can actually feel the four-wheel steering work guiding the back end. Steering is beautiful and its attitude when driven hard into the corners remains virtually flat. Yes, Acura handles with the best of them even with front wheel drive which only exhibited minor torque steer only a few times at

slow speed in a tight corner at high power settings. Turning circle is a bit large at 39.2 feet

Ride quality is simply smooth and quiet. It is firm but it is anything but harsh, a perfect blend for this butt. TLX does not do the bob and weave, instead It is supple and extremely compliant. About perfect. The body was bank vault tight and anechoic chamber quiet. There is no road, wind or engine noise unless you get your foot into it and then the inline four actually makes some sweet music. It loves to rev.

Ventilated front and solid rear discs over a foot in diameter make up the binders and they are powerful. Safety acronyms are complete right down to the LKAS (Lane Keep Assist System). If you want a safer motor vehicle, buy an M1A1 Abrams Tank. But it might not fit in your garage, it burns about a gallon of Jet-A for every half mile with a top speed of 45 mph but it sure can pack a wallop. Safe driving starts with an attentive driver. The LED headlights could be used for night tennis matches in a pinch.

Now for more Acura goodness, the interior. My TLX with the standard Tech Package had no options and none are offered nor needed. Inside are sublime perforated leather seating which after four hours in the saddle felt great (both the seat and my butt). Rear seating is spacious, even for three. The balance of the interior is soft touch material on the doors, instrument panel and console. There is nothing even remotely cheap about the Acura, no corners have been clipped and it leaves its occupants with a real feel of quality and luxury without being ostentatious.

Instrumentation is complete with a big tach and speedo left and right flanking the trip computer/info center with the great feature of two independent trip computers. That is well thought out.

Now here is what makes this mid-size sports sedan so inviting,

the price. The TLX starts at \$31,900 nicely equipped, plus \$940 for the train and truck from Marysville, Ohio. My TLX with the Tech Package ups the ante to \$35,950 which includes everything, NAV, leather, power everywhere including both front chairs and lane keep assist. There are no other options offered. The V-6 will add about \$3,450. But here is the deal. Many of your mid-size cars like Camry, Nissan, and so on can reach a sticker of \$35,000 plus. The Acura is a better deal at that point and therein lies the incredible value of Acura. I would buy one and I would go with the inline four. It has great performance without a shred of guilt. I would only buy the V-6 if I needed AWD which stickers for \$41,600 with the Tech Package, otherwise this TLX with the Tech Pack is the way to go, literally and figuratively. I will miss this TLX, it's like a perfect car, great performance, outstanding fuel economy, superb handling and ride, beautifully equipped and a sublime interior for a few bucks less than \$36 large. Such a deal.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.