

Road Beat: MDX Sport Hybrid SH-AWD is stellar



The 2017 MDX Sport Hybrid SH-AWD, Better in every way but one. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

The only way in which the MDX SH-AWD Hybrid is not better than the conventional MDX is the price, but that differential is only \$1,500; a small price to pay when you consider the advantages of more performance and about 15 percent better fuel economy overall and perhaps a 20 percent improvement on the highway.

Size-wise and in appearance the vehicles are virtually identical except for the hybrid badging. MDX is a large midsize with a 111-inch wheelbase, a length of 196 inches and a beamy width of almost 78 inches. It has the same new body

which received a face lift and rhinoplasty is much improved getting rave reviews from those who see it.

But what separates the MDX Hybrid from its siblings is its powertrain. While the 1.3 kWh battery and three electric motors have added about 200 pounds to its mass, the 4,471-pound MDX Hybrid is little affected.

A slightly smaller 3.0L DOHC 24 valve V-6 with 257 hp at 6,300 rpm and 218 pounds of twist at 5,000 rpm is the main motive force. It's so smooth it's difficult to tell when its running. Only the tach provides positive proof. It is supplemented by three electric motors as described below giving the MDX Hybrid a combined motive force of 321 hp.

MDX Hybrid's three electric motors consist of a 47 hp unit integrated in the super slick seven-speed dual clutch tranny up front and a twin motor pack of 36 hp each (72 total) driving the rear wheels when necessary. There is no drive shaft between the front and rear axles. Under the floor is a large for a hybrid 1.3 kWh L-I battery pack which during my test was able to go pure electric for up to 60 mph. The only indication of driving a hybrid was the starting of the engine when releasing the brake after being stopped and that transition would be imperceptible to most people. It had an extremely rapid recharge rate so you always seem to be able to go pure electric when appropriate.



Specifications

Price \$44,050 (MDX FWD) to \$58,000 plus \$975 for the boat

Engine

3.0L SOHC, 24 valve, direct injected V-6 257 hp @ 6,300 rpm
218 lb.-ft. of torque @ 5,000 rpm

Hybrid system

Battery 1.3 kWh L-I battery

One front electric motor integrated into the tranny 47 hp.
Two rear electric motors each driving as rear axle of 36 hp each.

A magical computer that imperceptibly integrates everything.

Transmission

Seven-Speed Dual Clutch automated manual fully automatic

Configuration

Transverse mounted front engine/AWD

Dimensions

Wheelbase 111.0 inches

Length 196.2 inches

Width 77.7 inches

Height 67.4 inches

Ground clearance 7.3 inches

Track 66.3 inches

Weight 4,471 pounds

Weight Distribution (f/r) 57/43 percent

Fuel capacity 19.4 gallons

Passenger volume 132.7 cubic feet

Cargo volume behind third row seat 15.0 cubic feet

Wheels 20X8 inch alloys
Tires 245/50X20
Turning circle 38.4 feet

Performance

0-60 mph 5.60 seconds
50-70 mph 2.74 seconds
50-70 mph uphill (6-7 percent)
3.58 seconds

Top Speed Probably way too fast
for me.

Fuel economy EPA rated at
26/27/27 mpg
city/highway/combined. Expect
27-28 mpg in rural country,
suburban driving. 31-32 mpg on
the highway at legal speeds.

Performance over the 290 hp conventional MDX is improved, and in some parameters more than marginally. Zero-60 mph arrive in just 5.60 seconds a small improvement over the conventional MDX of 6.15 seconds, but the passing times improved significantly with a 50-70 mph pass taking just 2.74 seconds and the same run up hill required a scant 3.58 seconds. The conventional times were 2.87 and 4.11 seconds respectively. MDX Hybrid rocks and its 31 hp gain becomes obvious.

EPA mpg numbers are conservative at 26/27/27 city/highway/combined mpg. Real world fuel economy also improved significantly over the conventional model with an overall mileage in 480 miles of driving of 27.2 mpg about a 4 mpg improvement over the conventional model. My highway mpg test averaged 31.6 mpg a 5 mpg improvement over the conventional model and my round trip run to Carson City from Placerville averaged 29.7 mpg a 3-mpg improvement. With its 19.4-gallon fuel tank range should stretch out to almost bladder busting 600 miles.

I said the conventional MDX was deafeningly quiet. The hybrid is even more quiet requiring one to think in a quiet whisper. Since the trannies between the two are different the Hybrid runs at a slightly higher engine speed at 70 mph at a still low 1,900 rpm. As with the conventional, the body structure feels like an Abrams tank, it's that solid. The ride couldn't be better, extremely smooth and capable of smoothing out the biggest of bumps and the smallest of ripples.

Suspension is state of the art MacPherson struts up front and a multilink system holding up the rear. MDX flat out handles with tenacious cornering power helped by 20 x 8 inch wheels shod with wide 245/50 series rubber, a good selection for quiet, ride and handling. Turn in is crisp and steering accurate with great off and on center feel. The more the road bends, the more you will enjoy the MDX Hybrid.

All the safety features are standard down to the surround view camera and lane keep assist system and everything in between. Its big brakes were amazing as well, strong and powerful. Acura's trick LED headlights are fabulous. With the surround camera, parking should be a snap in the tightest spots.

Acura MDX Hybrid also sports a luxurious and sublime interior with perforated leather seats adjustable in a million directions. Rear seating is copious and the third row which folds perfectly flat will hold a couple adults for a couple of hours.

Instrumentation is terrific in the Acura which has a standard tach and speedo left and right with a flanking battery level gauge left and a fuel gauge right. Also, Acura has taken pains to improve the center stack which is now easy to use and user intuitive. It has stacked LED screens one for the map and other info and one for the sound system which is excellent.

It's also a danger at a Home Depot or Lowe's as it has a cabin volume of about 148 cubes. It's big and when ensconced in the

interior it feels massive with amazing shoulder room.

MDX Hybrid comes with everything for one price at \$58,000 plus \$975 for the luxury suite on the Santa Fe or whatever railroad from Lincoln, Ala. Pricing includes the Tech Package and the Advanced Package. Seventy percent of the MDX originates in the U.S. and Canada and only the major part from Japan is the tranny and it's a great tranny. I used to poo-poo hybrids, but technology and its integration are amazing. This is not a great ride, but a superb, great, fantastic ride. Here's a vehicle that coddles seven in comfort, it can pretty much clear out a Home Depot, never worry if the road is paved or covered with snow, accelerate with World Class vigor and return over 30 mpg on a highway trip while achieving 27 mpg in most other driving. Acura has done an amazing job. What a vehicle. What a pleasure to drive (right pass gas stations).

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.