

The TL: Luxury Aimed at Men

Driven by Women on the Move

By Roger Witherspoon

If you go by the ads, the Acura TL is a luxury car designed for the leisure tastes of upwardly mobile young men.

The images zipping across the television screen are fast moving, whether it's the sleek silhouette of the car with its aggressive, sharply angled face racing through dark city streets and zooming around corners with just a hint of a drift; or the lovely, partly-clad, equally fast women angling to hang out with the driver. It is clearly pitched to the man who fancies himself a professional on the way up.

So I wondered how a woman would react to the newest, \$40,000 boy toy.



To my wife's eye, the angled front grill resembled a smile or playful smirk, rather than a male-oriented, aggressive grimace. She ran her hands over the soft leather chairs, nodding at the hand-made quality of the double stitching and the precision holes in the seat and back, a feature which lets the leather breathe and minimizes heat buildup in the summer. She slid easily into the wide front, noting there was plenty of room to swing her legs under the adjustable steering wheel without having to first hike up her skirt and then perform an un lady-like split in order to fit.

She rested her arms on the padded, leather arm rest on the console and on the doors and ran her fingers around the leather wrapped gear shift. To my eye, the large gear knob's shape and X-stitching clearly emulated a baseball. But she noted the careful hand stitching and remarked that the soft lamb leather, of a type normally found in expensive lady's gloves, was an improvement over the usual cold chrome standard in performance cars.

She held the steering wheel, which had the same lamb's leather cover and X-stitch, looked slowly around the two tone interior, smiled and stated simply: "I could get used to this."

Note to Acura: you should let women write the ad copy.



The TL is Acura's venture into an exacting, performance luxury car market established by the Mercedes C and E-class, the Audi 4 and 6, the BMW 3 and 5-series, the Lexus ES, GS, and Is, and Infiniti's road running G37 and M35. It is a crowded field, but a tough one demanding interior refinements, and high speed control. It is a class which expects competitors to zoom to high speeds – not get there eventually – and straighten out the crookedest roads. And in these categories, the new TL just may give some of the established brands a run for their premium sedan money.

The TL experience starts with the ride.

The mid morning sun was bouncing off the wide, dry, nearly empty highway slicing through marshland in the western Connecticut countryside and enveloping the TL in a metallic glow as it sat on the shoulder beside some tall, waving grass. Under the shimmering hood, a 3.7-liter V-6 engine purred softly in neutral, its 305 horses waiting for the signal to go.

I set the five-speed transmission in "sport" mode, tapped the silver paddle shift behind the steering wheel, and floored the accelerator. The sound of the dual exhausts changed from a purr to a rumble, and the TL shot forward, the pressure pushing me back into the leather seats. I tapped the paddle shifts up through fifth gear as the speedometer zipped towards its top speed of 130 miles per hour. Motor Trend magazine's technicians clocked the TL's takeoff from 0 to 60 miles per hour at just 6.5 seconds, and it hit the quarter mile in 14.8 seconds at just under 100 miles per hour. Not bad for a sport sedan.



The TL comes in two flavors: front wheel, and all wheel drive. The test car was the all inclusive model, and I tapped the gear shift down to fourth, entered a wide curve at 105, and rolled on 18-inch wheels steadily through the curve until I was again on a straightaway, could tap the gear shift up to fifth and again accelerate towards the TL's top speed. Throughout the trip, the Acura's computer systems shifted torque among front and rear axels, and left and right wheels to maximize control and level out the road. Coupled with its stability and traction controls, the all wheel drive TL never wavered, reacting as a luxury sports car should, providing the comfort and feel of a Cadillac CTS.

Inside, the folks with Acura's crayons provided a number of refinements one would expect in a luxury sedan. The two-tone dash is shaped in a double curve, providing the illusion of private space for the driver and front passenger. The design motif for the main dials, including the tachometer and speedometer, resemble the circular racing dials and are angled for best viewing by the driver. From the side, though, they resemble sculptures in a wide, curved setting

The wide, leather arm rest over the front center console is U-shaped, and behind the center part is a recessed, pull-out drawer which can conveniently hold a cell phone or electronic toll pass. Underneath the arm rest is a bin which hosts the iPod, iPhone, USB port and MP3 connections. You can use the iPod's playlist, or download up to 2,500 songs through the car's in-dash CD player to an entertainment hard drive, and have a mobile play list. And if you're tired of your own tunes, there is built-in satellite radio. The sound emanates through a 10-speaker Dolby audio system that can blast Usher or soothe with Coltrane.

Getting around, even in traffic or bad weather, is facilitated by a satellite driven navigation system – either voice activated or using a touch screen – with real-time weather and Doppler radar mapping.

The car's Bluetooth cell phone communications systems is fast and easy to set up, and can instantly access your phone book and speed dial settings without you having to download them into the car where anyone can find them. The tie-in to your physical phone allows you to seamlessly continue using many of your personal cell phone's features.

With the new TL, Acura has come out with a sedan that looks fast when sitting still, and can quickly turn the world into a comfortable, passing blur. Whether or not Acura can muscle into a market with established luxury performance names like Mercedes, Lexus or Cadillac remains to be seen. But the TL will certainly give the big boys a run for their money.



2009 Acura TL
Super Handling – All Wheel Drive

MSRP:		\$43,995
EPA Mileage:	17 MPG City	25 MPG Highway

Performance / Safety:		
0 – 60 Miles Per Hour		6.5 Seconds
¼ Mile		14.8 Seconds at 96.9 MPH
Top Speed		130 Miles Per Hour

3.7-Liter V-6 aluminum alloy engine producing 305 horsepower and 273 pound-feet of torque; high-flow, sport-tuned, dual exhaust system with 4 exhaust tips; 4-wheel disc brakes; 19-inch aluminum alloy wheels; anti-lock brakes; 5-speed automatic transmission with sport paddle shift; double-wishbone front and multi-link rear suspension; vehicle stability and traction controls; dual-stage, dual threshold front airbags; dual chamber, front-seat side airbags; side curtain airbags; projector HID low beams and halogen high beams.

Interior / Comfort:

AM/ FM /XM satellite radio; 10-speaker Dolby audio system; 6-disc, in-dash CD changer; USB port, iPod and iPhone connection; auxiliary jack for MP3-players; DVD player; 2,500-song hard drive; Bluetooth cell phone communication; navigation system with 8-inch, touch or voice activated screen, traffic rerouting, and Doppler weather warnings; tilt & telescope, leather wrapped, 3-spoke steering wheel with fingertip audio, phone and cruise controls; power moon roof; powered leather seats; heated front seats.