

Touting an all-new design, revised dimensions, sportier handling and a solid horsepower boost, Acura's front wheel drive TL sharpens its focus on buyers seeking a four-door sedan with some punch. Compared with the previous design, this new TL not only projects a stronger presence, it has the muscle to back it up.

The TL's 3.2L SOHC engine remains essentially the same, but at 270 horsepower, adds 10 horsepower compared to last year's "S" version (discontinued), and is up 45 over last year's standard engine. Torque is up too, at 238 lb. ft. Two transmissions are offered: a 6-speed stick and the 5-speed "Sportmatic" that allows for either fully automatic functioning or manual control of shifting when desired.

From nose to tail, sharper-edged character lines and body panels create an angular, more "wedgy" look that should have greater appeal to youthful buyers. Slim standard Xenon HID headlights and a pointed front grille suggest aggression and speed. Proportions are sportier too. Losing six inches in length while adding over an inch in width and three inches in height complete the new look.

Inside, the new design continues to please. Honda sweats the details in ergonomics, and the TL's cockpit feels as though they suspended a human in mid-air and then built a car around him. The seat, wheel and pedal positions were perfect, adding to both comfort and confidence. Standard leather covers the heated seats, door panel inserts, steering wheel and shift knob. Two-position memory is included.

Safety is also given high priority. Front airbags, plus four-place side and curtain airbags are standard. A new stereo includes an in-dash CD changer, cassette and AM-FM-XM radio, and sounded great. Another nice touch is the textured matte finish on top of the dash. It's almost suede-like in appearance, and doesn't reflect the sunlight. Two complaints inside: Royal blue LED backlighting with red needles seemed difficult to focus on; I prefer more traditional light green or BMW's red-orange. Also, overly wide A-pillars hindered my forward view on left turns; I felt



PHOTO BY MICHAEL COONEY



## *Acura TL*

# New Look, More Power, Sharper Reflexes

forced to lean to the right to compensate and see around the corner.

Driving the new TL reveals a confidence inspiring connection between driver and road. Steering response, brake feel, suspension feedback and overall handling prowess are exemplary for a sedan. All you need do is tolerate a firm ride and the transmission of sharper-edged bumps thumping into the cabin. For those placing a higher emphasis on handling ability and who are willing to sacrifice a bit of ride comfort, this shouldn't be a problem.



Diehard enthusiasts may opt for a handling upgrade called "A-SPEC" that includes even stiffer springs and shocks, along with lower profile, Z-rated performance tires mounted on 18-inch wheels. Most, though, should be pleased with the standard setup that allows for harder cornering than 95 percent of buyers will probably

ever require.

Pushing this Sportmatic equipped TL to the point of tire squeal on winding roads showed handling limits to be right there with most good handling rear-drive sport sedans. Mild understeer lets you know you're at the practical limit; slowly easing off the gas lets the tires regain grip.

On SoCal's older cement freeways there is moderate bobbing up and down over expansion joints. Mostly, though, the TL is simply a pleasure to drive, its front seats offer good support and all systems contribute to a feeling of competence. Since my preference is for strong handling ability and a firmer ride, I found the TL to be an enjoyable car to drive, whether softly or with gusto.

Automatic TLs are EPA-rated at 20-city and 28-highway mpg. My week of driving city streets, freeways and winding mountain roads returned a respectable 21.5 mpg. Pricing begins at \$35,195 including destination.

As a 4-door sedan, carry five in a pinch; four comfortably. As a sporty machine, strafe corners with abandon and be rewarded with satisfying sideways G-forces. Versatile. Comfortable. Strong running. Sharp handling. There you have it—Acura's finest, "funnest" sedan to date. 

*Mike Cooney is a lifelong auto enthusiast living and writing in Southern California. Comments are welcome at michael@globalbrand.com.*