

Acura RLX offers crisp styling and performance at a good price

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The base package, at just a tick under \$50K, has a long equipment list that won't leave many buyers wanting. This includes tri-zone automatic climate control; heated front seats with 12-way power adjust; power tilt and telescoping steering that is leather-wrapped with audio, phone and cruise controls; smart key with push button start; power moonroof; seven-inch infotainment display; multi-angle rearview camera; lane departure warning; 10-speaker AM/FM/XM/CD/MP3 audio; Bluetooth and more.

The touchscreen display cuts the clutter. Many functions are available within its intuitive menu system, and it provides feedback in the form of a vibration under your fingertips. There's no doubt when a virtual "button" has been pressed.

Abundant soft-touch materials line the passenger cabin, and elements like the stitched leather instrument panel cover, woodgrain trim, chrome accents and ambient lighting, all combine for an upscale environment. I've always felt that Acura interiors are among the best in the business.

But my tester was the top of three trim levels that included all of the above, along with everything in the Tech model at \$55,990, and much more.

Like the Tech, Elite includes such features as the AcuraLink Connectivity System, navigation on an additional eight-inch display, heated steering wheel, blind spot information system, rain-sensing wipers and Milano leather seating.

But the extra \$6K also adds parking sensors, auto-dimming side mirrors and other driver aids.

You're probably familiar with adaptive cruise control, which maintains a preset speed and distance from the vehicle ahead. But 'low-speed follow', also part of the Elite package, extends this capability to stop-and-go traffic.

The Collision Mitigation Braking System uses radar to determine the distance and closing speed of objects ahead and if you don't heed the warnings, it will



Acura is known for its well-crafted interiors and the RLX is no exception. Abundant soft-touch materials, Milano leather, woodgrain and chrome accents all contribute to a premium look. The two large touchscreens reduce clutter by eliminating many buttons and knobs. (Below) Upholstered in optional Milano leather, front seats are both heated and cooled at the 'Elite' trim level.

tighten your seatbelt and apply the binders. This won't necessarily prevent an accident, but should reduce the impact.

And lastly, the e-pretensioners automatically snug your seatbelts when sensors detect anything out of the ordinary. Say, for example, going a little hard into a corner.

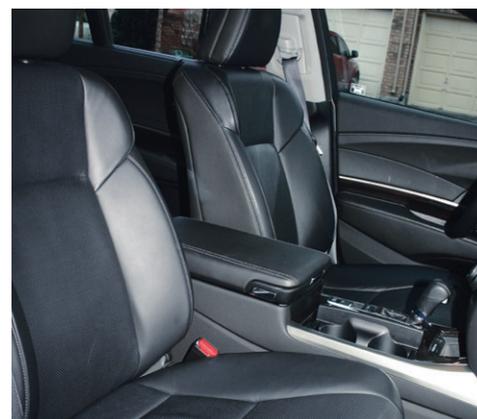
Elite also receives some less complex goodies, like power rear sunshade, heated rear seats, ventilated front seats and manual sunshades in the rear side windows.

The RLX exterior hasn't missed out on Acura's high tech treatment. Case in point is the Jewel Eye headlamps that create a striking element with their dual-stacked array of LEDs to illuminate the road. It works as well as any HID headlamps I've tested, while using less power – just 68 watts in total.

There are LEDs in the taillights as well.

The RLX is not a small vehicle, and despite its extensive use of lightweight high-strength steel and aluminum, it still tips the scales at two tons.

With that in mind the all-new 3.5-litre Direct Injection SOHC i-VTEC V6 engine that delivers 310 hp and 272 lb/ft of torque doesn't sound like overkill.



Still, that's 10 more horses than the 3.7-litre V6 it replaces, and more importantly, the new mill produces more than 90 percent of its peak torque between 2,000 and 6,600 rpm. Believe me, there's ample power on tap when you need it.

Sport mode delays shifts from the six-speed SportShift automatic (for better acceleration) and adds weight to the electric power steering. This function may see little use from those who'd buy the RLX, and won't turn the car into an M5, but it does notch up the fun factor.

Resist the urge to mash the pedal, and you'll be rewarded with surprising fuel economy. Maybe not equal to its 10.5/6.4/8.6L/100km (city/hwy/comb)

NRCan rating, but more than you would from a vehicle of this size and heft.

Also surprising for a large, mid-size sedan is this Acura's agility.

Thanks to precision all-wheel steering (P-AWS), it handles more like a sports sedan than a boulevard cruiser.

P-AWS senses the right amount of independent rear-wheel steering (toe angle) needed for the driving conditions and can apply up to 2.0 degrees of negative or positive toe angle.

It's subtle, but enough to deliver crisper lane changes (all wheels angled the same direction), sharper low-speed turns (wheels angled opposite), and more confident handling on twisty roads. In particular in snowy conditions is where P-AWS counteracts understeer through the corner.

There's still more to be said about Acura's top-of-the-line sedan, but like many of today's premium autos, a reviewer could write an entire story on the technology and still run short on space.

Suffice to say that if you're in the market for a five-passenger, mid-luxury sedan, you'd be wise to give the RLX a closer look. Crisp styling and performance, along with a comfortable cabin and long list of driver aids and amenities – all at a competitive price – make it a contender among some of the best in its segment.

(Acura RLX Elite 2014 at a glance)

BODY STYLE: Large mid-size, luxury sedan

DRIVE METHOD: front-engine, front wheel drive

ENGINE: 3.5L Direct Injection, 24-valve, SOHC i-VTEC V6 (310 hp, 272 lb/ft of torque)

FUELECONOMY: 10.5/6.4/8.6L/100km (city/hwy/comb)

CARGO: 423 litres (417 litres in Elite)

PRICE: base \$49,990; Tech \$55,990; Elite \$62,190

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