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2010 Acura TSX New V6 model offers more power.

Overview

For the first time, the Acura TSX is now available with a V6 engine. The availability of a V6 for the 2010 Acura TSX represents a step almost as big as the styling changes introduced with the 2009 model year. More than just an engine change, the Acura TSX V-6 has a character all its own, distinct from the four-cylinder version.

Technology has always been one of the main appeals of the TSX, and this extends beyond the drivetrain and chassis. Acura's superb navigation system is the equal of anything in the class, and it displays real-time traffic with congestion re-routing and local and national weather. An airlines display lets you track a flight's progress across the country. The top-line audio system sets a standard for the class, too, with superbly crisp surround sound. Like the other features, hands-free Bluetooth cell phone architecture is cleanly integrated with the car's electronics.

The Acura TSX is a four-door, five-passenger, front-wheel-drive sedan. Considered a near-luxury car, the TSX comes standard with leather-trimmed seats, power everything, dual-zone climate control and heated seats and outside mirrors, electronic stability control and a full array of airbags.

The 2010 TSX is available with a 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine or a 3.5-liter V6. The four-cylinder comes with a choice of manual or automatic transmission, while the V6 comes with an automatic. The four-cylinder is rated at 201 horsepower and just 172 pound-feet of torque but it revs happily and, with the six-speed manual, it's the enthusiast's choice; figure on 0-60 acceleration in the mid-seven-second range. Fuel economy, according to the federal government, for a TSX four-cylinder automatic is 21/30 mpg City/Highway.

The new V6 changes the character of the car. Acura's V6 is smooth and linear, and up in the higher revs makes a pleasant growl. Good as the five-speed automatic is with paddles and a sport mode that holds manual gear selections, it hasn't the involvement factor of the six-speed manual offered only with the four-cylinder. The V-6 model is heavier by 210 pounds and takes 3 mpg off EPA city and highway ratings. And it needs an extra 15 inches of space for a U-turn. The TSX V-6 gets an EPA-estimated 18/27 mpg.

The TSX uses front-wheel drive, whereas true sports sedans are rear-wheel drive. That said, the TSX is one of the better-handling front-wheel-drive sedans. And in its class it's hard to beat as an everyday driver that can still be fun on a winding road. The 2.4-liter engine is rated at 201-hp,

Styling is true to Acura themes, the more aggressive, buff look to emphasize stance introduced on the 2009 model.

The 2010 Acura TSX competes primarily with the Audi A4, BMW 3 Series, and Lexus IS. Other competitors include the Cadillac CTS, Infiniti G37, Mercedes-Benz C-Class, Saab 9-3,

Volkswagen CC, Volvo S60. Among them, the 3 Series, CTS, G37, and C-Class use a more sporting rear-wheel-drive setup.

Model Lineup

The 2010 Acura TSX (\$29,310) comes with a 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine and a choice of either a six-speed manual or a five-speed automatic transmission at no extra cost. The TSX V-6 (\$34,850) comes exclusively with a five-speed automatic.

Standard features include leather upholstery, dual-zone automatic climate control, heated seats, eight-way adjustable driver's seat with memory, four-way passenger seat, power seats, windows and locks, heated outside mirrors, steering wheel controls for cruise and audio, seven-speaker AM/FM/XM/6CD stereo, USB and auxiliary audio input jacks in the center console, moonroof, Bluetooth, HomeLink, trip computer, two power outlets, Xenon headlights, fog lights, and speed-sensitive wipers.

The TSX V-6 model adds 18-inch wheels, recalibrated steering and suspension, and active sound control, in addition to the drivetrain changes.

The Technology package for the TSX (\$32,410) or TSX V-6 (\$37,950) upgrades to a 10-speaker, surround-sound, 415-watt, AM/FM/XM tuner with multi-format, six-disc CD/DVD audio changer; the voice-recognition navigation system adds a rearview camera, AcuraLink communications with real-time weather, traffic and dynamic re-routing.

Dealer-installed accessories include interior trim kits, trunk tray, trunk hooks, cargo organizer, and cargo net. Other Acura-approved accessories include 18-inch, 10-spoke, chrome-look or ebony-finish alloy wheels; backup sensor; wheel locks; sport bumper kit; rear bumper applique; deck lid spoiler or wing spoiler; moonroof visor; car cover; and nose mask.

Safety features include a full complement of airbags for front and side curtain airbags in back. Rear outboard seats provide anchors (LATCH) for child safety seats. Antilock brakes let the driver steer the car during emergency stops, brake assist boosts initial brake pressure in panic stops and electronic brake-force distribution apportions brake application between front and rear to optimize stopping distance. Electronic stability assist, coupled with traction control, adjusts brake and throttle to keep the car going where it's supposed to go through evasive or avoidance maneuvers or when road conditions deteriorate. Tire pressure monitors are standard.

Walkaround

There is a consistency to Acura's styling that ties its current models together and the TSX is no exception. Although it stretches the mold a bit, as it should, there's still no mistaking it for anything but one of Honda's luxury line.

The front end blends elements from Acura's other two sedans, the sporty TL and the more serious RL, and from the MDX sport utility. The headlight housings, for instance, with their squinty lenses curling around the front fenders to reach deep into the arcs of the front

wheelwells, look like a direct lift from the TL. The elongated, pentagonal silver bar topping the similarly outlined grille pulls from both the MDX grille. The gaping lower air intake is a new design cue and shaves visual mass from what might otherwise be an overpowering front bumper while adding function by funneling needed cooling air into the engine compartment and reducing front end lift. Hood sculpting defines the TSX's centerline and front fenders.

The side view departs a bit more from the family look, but keeps just enough of the cues to stay true to its design DNA. This is especially evident in the side lenses of the headlight and taillight housings and the silhouette of the trailing lip of the trunk lid, all of which closely mirror the previous TSX. In much sharper relief, though, are the sculpted character lines in the door panels. These add visual bulk and combine with edgy wheel arches remindful, again, of the MDX to make a stronger statement about the car's sporty aspirations. Door handles embedded in the upper crease give the view a cleaner look.

The rear aspect, sad to say, suggests of recent Toyota Camrys more than of the previous TSX in its overly busy styling. A deeply cut horizontal line slices straight across the rear vertical of the trunk lid, itself looking almost concave against the gently convex vertical of earlier models. Taillights bridge the seam between trunk and fenders and the license plate recess mirrors the five-angle grille, visually pushing the trailing lip higher and seeming to add sheet metal across the lower reaches of the trunk lid. The rear bumper cups the trunk opening with unflattering sedan like bulk, which makes the hot rod-spec dual exhaust tips look a little lame.

Six-cylinder models are identified only by standard 18-inch wheels, "V6" badge on the trunk, and slightly larger lower grille inlets.

Interior Features

Liking the new Acura TSX interior is easy. It's comfortable without being plush, sporty without being sparse. Communication between driver and car is, for the most part, open and easy and unabridged.

The front seats are supportive, with enough side bolstering for reasonably rambunctious motoring on twisty roads. The bottom cushion could be deeper, but this is a common shortcoming in many cars. The front seat passenger still gets shortchanged with no height adjustment, which leaves even taller people feeling as if they're sitting in a hole. Cabin measurements show the TSX with the least front headroom, more rear legroom than the IS, and about par elsewhere.

The rear seat is more like a bench than twin buckets, and space for the lower extremities is snug; this is the typical pinch point in compact sedans. Rear head restraints adjust for height, which is a plus for its occupants, although even when at their lowest position they limit the visibility out the back window from the inside rear view mirror. All four doors have dual inside pulls, one horizontal and one angled up, for easy closing by passengers of any stature.

Gauges tell their tales with easy-to-scan graphics and floating needles. The steering wheel sports push buttons and toggles controlling more than a dozen functions, not counting the horn, making it look like it would be just as comfortable in a jet fighter cockpit as in a car. This is good for fighter pilot Walter Mittys who fantasize about mixing it up with the other side's Top Guns or those who like to keep their hands on the wheel at all times, but it could be a bit much if you just want to drive the car.

The center stack, however, with either the base sound and navigation system or the optional Technology Package, is one of the more intuitively arranged that we've seen, with large, finger-friendly buttons and a reasonably easy-to-learn multi-function joystick-like knob for the multi-layered information center-cum-map screen. The high-end audio setup does force the relocation of the CD changer down into the bowels of the center stack, where it's not as easily accessed as with the base system, which parks it at the top of the stack, but that's a minor complaint, and one that won't even show up on the technophiles' radar.

A Grammy-winner helped tune the optional sound system. Rather than the kilowatt of power some high-end systems use, the Acura/ELS uses a more modest 415 watts of amplification, ten speakers, and DVD-audio capability to deliver detailed sound that could very well be the next best thing to being there. Ticket prices and musician fussiness what they are, we think it's better than being there.

Storage is more than adequate. Every door has a molded-in space for a water bottle, the front doors room for the proverbial map, although given a navigation system is standard, think guidebook or CDs. The glove box has a partitioned nook for the owner's manual and associated booklets, leaving the rest for smallish flat items. The front center console hosts a bi-level storage bin and two cup holders. The fold-down center armrest has two more. There's a bin in the front footwells on each side of what once was called the transmission hump.

Trunk space is 12.6 cubic feet, slightly more than BMW's 3-series and slightly less than the Lexus IS, and well behind Audi's A4. Only the center section is flat, the sides shaped by the need to accommodate the rear suspension components, and the opening itself isn't particularly commodious. Space is easily expanded by dropping the rear seatbacks simply by pulling the trunk-mounted release levers.

Driving Impressions

The standard Acura TSX is an enjoyable car to drive, with a free-revving, high-winding four-cylinder engine, slick six-speed manual gearbox, a reasonably balanced chassis with good compromise on the comfort/performance continuum, and decent feel to operating controls.

With 201 horsepower and just 172 lb-ft of torque the four-cylinder has its work cut out for it hauling around 3500 pounds of car and driver. It is very willing and happy to do that, and seems to rejoice in revs where others sound stressed. With the six-speed manual's shift and clutch action it's the enthusiast's choice and gets the best of the engine; figure on 0-60 acceleration in the mid-seven-second range.

The new V6 significantly changes the character of the car, not least by adding 70 horses and 84 lb-ft of torque and knocking about 1.5 seconds off that 0-60 sprint. Acura's V6 is smooth and linear, and up in the higher revs makes a very pleasant growl. Good as the five-speed automatic is with paddles and a sport mode that holds manual gear selections, it hasn't the involvement factor of the six-speed manual offered only with the four-cylinder. The V-6 model also adds 210 pounds and takes 3 mpg off EPA city and highway ratings. And it needs an extra 15 inches of space for a U-turn.

Fuel economy, according to the federal government, for the TSX four-cylinder automatic is 21/30 mpg City/Highway. Audi A4 gets an EPA-rated 23/30 mpg, BMW 3 Series rates 18/28 mpg, Lexus IS 250 gets 21/29 mpg.

Fuel economy for the TSX V-6 is 18/27 mpg while the quicker BMW 335 and Lexus IS 350 get a slightly poorer 17/26 mpg and 18/25 mpg respectively. Audi has dropped the V6 from its 2010 A4 lineup.

Both the V6 and the four-cylinder models offer composure that make for an ideal everyday ride. Changes to suspension and better steering feel do a good job of masking the extra 210 pounds the V6 brings to the TSX, most of it on the front end. Along with fatter tires on 18-inch wheels, the V-6 is the better handling model, except perhaps charging down a winding mountain road. The V-6 model is a more enjoyable drive primarily because of the vastly improved steering feel. Also, the automatic is happier behind the V6 than it is in the four-cylinder. Although the size of the brakes hasn't changed on the V-6 the braking system has been upgraded and feels every bit as stout it does on the lighter four-cylinder version.

What keeps the TSX off the shopping list of most enthusiasts is its front-wheel drive. While generally good for packaging and fuel efficiency, and the next best thing to all-wheel drive for most winter traction issues, it doesn't offer the handling characteristics, agility or feel of a rear-drive car nor an all-wheel drive biased to behave like rear-wheel drive as is Audi's A4 quattro.

Outward visibility is quite good forward and to the sides, the rear slightly hindered by rear headrests, a problem not unique to the TSX. The larger wheels appear to have added nothing to the minimal road noise and wind noise is muted to highway speeds.

Summary

The 2010 Acura TSX delivers the marque's hallmark traits of smooth mechanicals, feature-rich cabin and distinctive style. It's very good at what it is, a stylish, efficient, premium compact sedan with a sporty tilt, but it isn't a true sports sedan. If your passengers aren't too tall, the TSX is a comfortable and efficient commuter car.

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