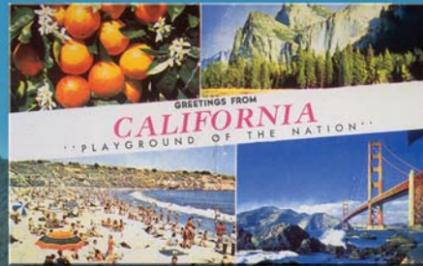


XTS ecstasy

Cadillac more than replaces
two cars with one new one

by Joe Sage



For anyone who hasn't noticed, Cadillac has undergone a red-hot, blood-pumping transformation over the past decade. It started in 2002, when they introduced the Art and Science design language in an all-new CTS, with rear-wheel drive, and with Led Zeppelin—even if they were from 30 years prior—pounding out the then-uncharacteristic rocking soundtrack for a new generation of Cadillac. People who hadn't noticed may be those who hold an image rooted in the DTS and the STS, the staid and conservative full-size sedan offerings Cadillac had kept going through 2011, while the rest of the brand learned to rock. Now, Cadillac turns the final page in the lineup's transformation: introducing the Cadillac XTS.



Cadillac will tell you that the new XTS does not replace the STS and/or the DTS. Those two full-size sedans did drop out of the model lineup after 2011, though, and this full-size sedan now launches. Cadillac vice president of marketing Don Butler tells us, "I like to look at (the XTS) as a bridge vehicle, in the sense that it will be very satisfying to those customers who know and love Cadillac today in the DTS and STS. This is not a replacement for those vehicles, but the attributes of XTS will very much appeal to those customers. At the same time, it helps us attract consumers who may not necessarily be looking at Cadillac. They may be looking at the Audi A6 or Mercedes-Benz E 350, but because of what we've done in terms of the design, in terms of technology, in terms of what we call confidence, the XTS is simply a beautiful and stunning vehicle." True enough.

Cadillac XTS design and styling

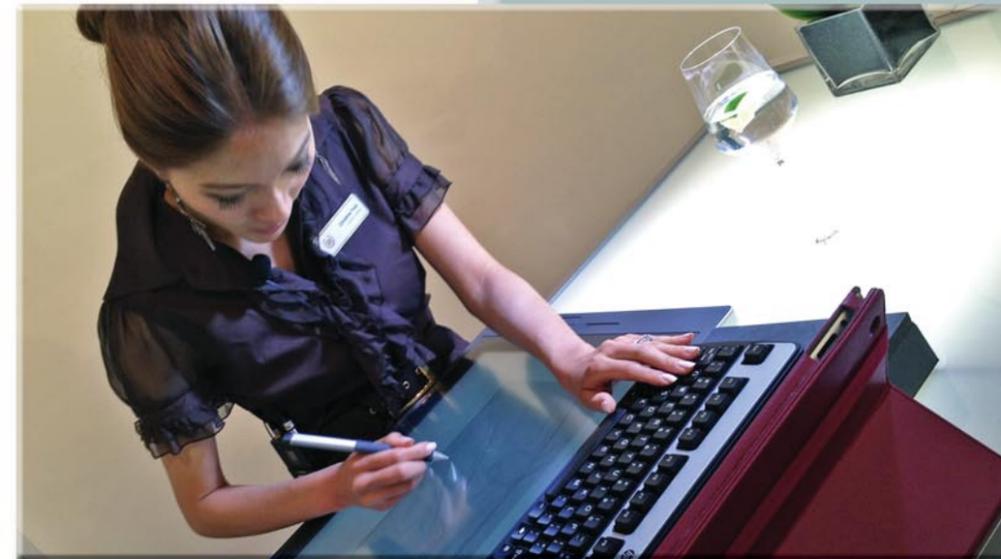
One of the first things anyone would note is the car's beautiful execution. Designer Christine Park has delivered a solid combination of gorgeous-hot Cadillac Art and Science body language, with the presence of a full-size luxury sedan. Design details abound, large and small, but none are superfluous and all will delight. We found some new detail each time we approached the XTS. We mentioned the interior door handle to her as one example. She explains, "Art and Science is the seamless integration of technology in an artful, expressive manner. When you look at the door handle in the interior, not only is it beautiful, but it feels right in your hand. Luxury is very experiential, right? When you look at it, it looks good, but the real test becomes when you actually use it. The door handle is a beautiful sculpture, and it feels good in your hand, as well." Yes, it does.

CUE: the Cadillac User Experience

Technology runs deep throughout the new Cadillac XTS and includes CUE—the new Cadillac User Experience—which, though it can't speak for itself, has become very good at listening.

Intuitive, contextually aware and highly customizable, the CUE system—included on all model levels—seems to demonstrate an appreciation for what has made the best smartphones and tablets most appreciated by their users. If tech device overkill has been a problem in some vehicles, Cadillac has figured out where to draw the line. Cadillac has often put controls off to one side, for settings you may seldom need. Good thinking: leave the primary ongoing options clear of clutter. An electronic touchscreen interface, with its contextual nature, can encourage engineers to apply it to everything imaginable. But a clever designer knows this approach can work against itself. And on this, Cadillac has been clever.

CUE concentrates on telephone, audio and navigation functions (including weather, which is XM-generated and can overlay the nav). CUE design manager Stuart Norris explains how the climate system, for example, was best done with conventional controls: "We came to the conclusion that we have full climate functionality here. I can control all of this just by simple taps, I can sync it all here, and I can also control temperature and fan all from here, as well, and people are completely happy to use manual controls to control their HVAC. If



GM Creative Designer Christine Park (top) demonstrates the form and discipline that has led to many superb style details throughout the new Cadillac XTS.

we instead put our energy into stuff that takes a long time to execute and can be taxing on the driver, like looking through all my phone contacts or going through 2000 different songs on my iPod, that's much better value for the customer than turning my temperature up."

The CUE system includes an eight-inch screen in the center stack, a faceplate below that screen, and steering wheel controls for redundant access. Based on capacitive touch—the technology behind the best tablets and smartphones—CUE has a wide range of gesture recognition, and another industry first: haptic feedback. This is the sense that as you pass your fingers

KEEP RIGHT >>





(At left, top to bottom): Cadillac CUE design manager Stuart Norris gives an in-depth demonstration of CUE's touchscreen, gesture, haptic, voice-recognition interface; US marketing VP Don Butler runs through a thorough analysis of the XTS's features and positioning; and XTS lead engineer Bill Peterson explains the inner workings of Magnetic Ride Control.

mands required by many systems—"computer > music > play > artist > song > confirm"—CUE recognizes keywords, regardless of their context. As Norris says, for example, he could yell out, "for the love of Pete, can you just play me some Black Keys?!" CUE hears "play" and the artist, and up comes the music. Equally amazing is its ability to know when pertinent words have been spoken and he has just reverted to conversation. We doubt any system will work flawlessly every time, but we spent a good 20 minutes challenging CUE's voice recognition and had consistently successful results.

Each XTS buyer will receive an iPad with their new car, containing an application that recreates the CUE screen and its functions. (It's also available for shoppers to experiment with at the dealership.) As marketing VP Butler points out, "we think that's a very cool way of not only teaching about CUE itself, but, for those who may not be comfortable with touch gestures and tablets in general, will familiarize them with that interface."

Cadillac XTS drivetrain

The new Cadillac XTS is a front-wheel-drive sedan, also available with all-wheel drive. Front-drive might not be our first choice, though all-wheel very well might. (The no-longer-extant STS was a rear-driver, but the larger DTS was a front-driver.) Cadillac of course has cross-platform reasons for going this route. Special attention has been given to the axis of the front wheels, and in our extensive driving—urban, rural, hilly, curvy and fast—we experienced no torque steer characteristics.

The Cadillac XTS's engine is an LFX 3.6-liter V6, rated at 304 hp and 264 lb-ft of torque. Lightweight features include integrated cylinder heads/exhaust manifolds and a composite intake manifold. The transmission is a HydraMatic six-speed automatic with tap-shift controls, and the available Haldex all-wheel-drive system has an electronic limited-slip differential.

The net result is a 4004-pound full-size luxury sedan

that achieves almost 30 mpg (28 mpg highway with FWD, 26 mpg with AWD, and 17 mpg city).

The XTS achieves those stats while delivering a modern luxury ride—not the cushy wallowing of twenty years ago, but rather a firm and solid road experience. One key to this is Cadillac's Magnetic Ride Control, standard across the XTS lineup. Butler says, "the reason we're doing it here is it enables us to deliver a no-compromises handling and drive equation. You have a comfortable ride without handling that compromises control or is not crisp. That's what we're able to do with MR Control. For sport mode, push the shifter all the way back to M, and tap-up/tap-down on the steering wheel. What that does is it lets you adjust the MR and the steering for a little bit more precise steering. The system will adjust in automatic mode as well."

Bill Peterson, Cadillac XTS lead development engineer, explains that the Magnetic Ride Control system is the dead opposite of any "random floating around. You've got a certain level of viscosity to the fluid, basically pistons inside the shock, so it goes back and forth very easily with no effort really, essentially changing the viscosity. The whole damper is charged. You can do that to varying degrees, and you can do it very, very quickly: the Magnetic Ride Control system is reading the road about once every millisecond. It really provides us a great tool for tuning this car: body, motion control, wheel control. Going down bumpy roads, you can have that nice, luxurious ride, and if you want to get more aggressive with it, a little more sporty, you can turn on that damping." All four wheels have individual Magnetic Ride Control dampers.

Says Butler, "We use two 'C' words for this car: confident and composed."

Cadillac XTS on the road

Our drive route was legendary, largely familiar and ideal for the mission. We started in the Hollywood Hills, headed to the Pacific Coast Highway, then north through Malibu, up into the Santa Monica Mountains, inland through a variety of sweepers and climbers, along Mulholland Drive, and ultimately back to Hollywood with even some freeway time on the final leg. We loved it. This car is a keeper, with a spacious yet crisp cabin and solid ride that can make you feel as though you're



in a Rolls-Royce and a Corvette at the same time.

Marketing VP Don Butler rode along with us and explained, "Today's DTS average customer age is 67, and STS is 62. The average age of the luxury buyer overall is 55. For the new XTS, we expect upper 50s." And what about those customers who have been used to the staid and conservative DTS and STS? Is Cadillac abandoning any market? Are they figuring this will be a new market? Well, as times and tastes have changed, so has this market. Butler goes on to explain, "This is really a bridging vehicle. Consumers who like the Cadillacs they're in now will love this vehicle. But it's also modern enough, with enough new technology, and in terms of the styling, it'll bring in new customers as well... customers who are looking at A6s or Mercedes..."

So you're not going to lose anybody, we asked? "Where are they gonna go?" asked Butler, rhetorically. "Where are they gonna go?" The generations have shifted, and Cadillac's move forward is now complete.

The new 2013 Cadillac XTS is available in four trim levels—Standard, Luxury, Premium and Platinum—starting at about \$45,000 (\$52,000 with AWD) and topping out at about \$60,000. The XTS is confidently taking on vehicles costing up to twice as much. ■

