



Vigorous

Story and photos by Joe Sage

"The world's fastest family of vehicles" hits the ground running at Firebird

The Cadillac V-Series Performance Lab is an invitation-only consumer event held several times a year at track locations around the country. Last year's schedule wrapped up with sessions at Firebird International Raceway in Phoenix, in early November, and at the brand new Circuit of the Americas in Austin, Texas, in early December. We put on our civilian clothing and headed to Firebird for the November event.

As confirmation that Cadillac has long since moved lightyears beyond your grandfather's soft sedan, the crowd on hand was dressed for the track and ready to rock.

Participants were broken into subgroups by wrist-

band color, and we then cycled through a series of in-depth presentations on everything from drivetrain to tires to seats. These prepared the group for time both on the Firebird racetracks and, yes, dragstrip.

What Cadillac bills as the World's Fastest Family of Vehicles comprises three Cadillac V-Series models—the CTS-V Coupe, CTS-V Sedan and CTS-V Wagon, all with the same CTS-V chassis and 556-hp powertrain.

The Performance Lab experience was rounded out by inclusion of the new Cadillac ATS—widely known as their new 3 Series fighter—which is part of neither the CTS nor V-Series, but highly compelling, nonetheless.

Prior drives and expectations

We drove the Cadillac CTS-V Sedan for a week, a couple of years back (see our May/June 2010 issue) and liked it a great deal, with Bill Schaffer noting as follows:

"Last year, we drove more than 150 different cars in the course of our weekly evaluations and manufacturer introductions. We are often asked which of the cars is our favorite. Not only is the Cadillac CTS one of the best-looking cars we've driven, but with a new opulence and more attention to detail, (it) shows that American-made cars can match the best European models when they keep their eye on the target. And then there's the CTS-V. When the accelerator slams to the floor, the CTS-V explodes from a complete stop to 60 mph in just 3.9 seconds. On a track, or a salt flat, it has a top speed of 176 mph (191 mph with the six-speed manual transmission). It broke the record for production sedans at the famous German Nürburgring. This is the Cadillac CTS-V, and it is one of the fastest production sedans in the world, if not the fastest. We didn't expect the test car we were driving to be such a head turner, but with the chrome chain-link grilles with imbedded Cadillac crest, headlights that shined like a trophy wife's ring and sharp character lines, it turned a lot of heads. The deep muscular exhaust note

coming through large dual exhaust outlets seemed to make men smile with desire. The Cadillac CTS-V rides like a luxury sedan, handles like a sports car, goes like a bat out of hell and is priced like none of the above."

Surprisingly enough, we hadn't driven the CTS-V Coupe before this track event (though we somehow felt as though we must have), nor had we driven the CTS-V Wagon (though many of our colleagues had absolutely raved about it). At the V-Series Performance Lab consumer event—ironically not a more likely media introduction—we would finally drive them all. There are subtle differences in feel, among the three under track conditions, but all were strong and solid drivers, even under duress. Your own model decision will of course be made by routine considerations of style and function.

We also had not yet driven the brand new Cadillac ATS, and we had very much been looking forward to time with this one. Given our clear enthusiasm for the CTS-V Sedan (as well as for the all-new Cadillac XTS, launched

earlier in 2012—see our July/August 2012 issue), coupled with the general specs, style and market niche of the ATS, we have expected a lot out of it. Sometimes a track is a great place for a first drive; other times, you might really prefer road time. But starting out with a first drive on the dragstrip at Firebird? Well, why not?

V-Series (and ATS) fundamentals

Every one of the CTS-V threesome—and in some cases also the new ATS—comes with a 6-speed manual transmission (with a 6-speed automatic also available). This surprising and very welcome feature sets the tone.

Whether two-door coupe, four-door sedan or four-door wagon, each CTS-V sits on the same 113.4-inch wheelbase, although overall length varies by 3.5 inches from Coupe to Wagon. Wheels are 19x9 front and 19x10 rear for the Coupe and Wagon, but 19x9.5 in the rear for the



Festivities led off with Team Cadillac World Challenge racecar driver Johnny O'Connell (top left). Various Cadillac and supplier reps were on hand to explain the engineering, drive and handling features of the V-Series Cadillacs and the new ATS. Participants were then able to check out the hardware and get a feel for the cockpit, before donning their helmets and hitting the track in earnest.





(Above): Participants admire a specifically race-prepared Cadillac CTS-V Coupe—one of two that compete in the SCCA World Challenge, North America's top production-based race series. Some components are modified for racing or to meet SCCA technical rules, but every effort is made to maintain as much production content as possible. ■ Cadillac CTS-V Sedans lined up for our track session at Firebird International Raceway. ■ (At right): The group completing dragstrip runs and track time in the ATS.



TONY FISHER, of Phoenix AZ, has an after-market parts business with his son on the side—ANT Racing (antracingaz.com). Tony learned a few things on the track. "I'm not braking hard enough initially, and I'm letting off the brake too much. But a few more laps in these cars, and I think I'd be doing pretty good," he says. "I love the acceleration. On some newer cars, with drive-by-wire throttle, there's hesitation, but with this, it's right there." Tony drives a 2001 Nissan Frontier pickup he's had since new, but "if I were buying one, I'd buy the CTS-V Coupe, so it'd be quite a step up!" ■ He has "had or had the chance to drive" his son's '72 Datsun 510 and an '88 Mazda 323 GTS all-wheel-drive turbo they shared—two "really great cars."



Sedan. Brembo four-wheel disc brakes are the same on all three—15-inch in front and 14.7-inch in rear—and these demonstrated highly fade-resistant, top-tier stopping power in our track driving. All three CTS-V iterations have rear-wheel drive, and all three are powered by the same 556-hp 6.2L supercharged V8, generating 551 lb-ft of torque. (If that's not enough for you, see Bob Judge's modifications in the sidebar.) Fuel mileage is what you would expect for a modern V8 in this power range: 14/19 MPG city/highway with manual (or 12/18 with automatic), again the same for all three bodies. The Coupe and Sedan weigh about the same: 4217 or 4219 pounds, respectively, with manual, 4255 or 4252 automatic. The Wagon, no surprise, weighs more: 4396/4424 pounds manual/automatic. Third-party sources have tested the Coupe and Sedan at just under 4 seconds for zero to 60 acceleration, with just over 4 seconds for the Wagon.

As for acceleration in the ATS, it depends greatly upon which of three engines you opt for—a 2.5L

standard four, hotter 2.0L turbo four or 3.6L V6. The V6 puts out 321 hp (and 275 lb-ft), while the 2.0L turbo pumps 272 hp (and 260 lb-ft of torque, higher pro-rata against the V6 than horsepower). The 2.5L trails at 202 hp (191 lb-ft). The ATS is also available with all-wheel drive, though not with the 2.5L, and it has an automatic transmission on all, but a manual only on the RWD 2.0L turbo. We ran full-blown timed runs on the Firebird dragstrip in the 2.0L turbo ATS, and it did startlingly well. We also ran it on the track and found a solid, hot performance sedan that is sure to make huge inroads against its competition. We are only left wishing for a 2.0L turbo ATS with manual transmission and AWD, all in one package.

The ATS has base prices ranging from \$33-55,000 or so. The CTS-V cars are in the \$65,000 range. (CTS non-V models start at about \$38-39,000.) Any one of these could trump or equal almost anything else you may consider buying in its category, in terms of sheer performance-to-value ratio. ■



BOB JUDGE, of Gilbert AZ, already drives a 2009 CTS-V Sedan, modified with a 3-inch header, high-flow cat, X-pipe, cat back exhaust system; ported TVS 1900 supercharger; Lingenfelter power package, with KDI Track Sweeper cams, new heads, cold air intake, hardened chrome moly push rods; "and about 615 horsepower at the wheels" (and 750 at the crank, up from 556 hp stock). Bob bought the car at one year and 12,000 miles, sight unseen, from a doctor in New York City. He flew east, gave the doc a check and drove the V home to Arizona. ■ Bob had both a 2006 Corvette Z06 and a 2007 Chevrolet Tahoe prior to his Cadillac. He still has Corvette in his blood, as next he is "kind of targeting a ZR1 right now, but I want to see what they do with the new (C7) Corvette."



KEN ZINSER, of Scottsdale AZ, currently drives a Chevy pickup, but would love to grab a Cadillac V-Series, if budget allowed. If so, he preferred the CTS-V Coupe. "I know the drivetrain is pretty much the same," he says—which is true among the three V models, along with the wheelbase—"but it felt better to me. And it's gorgeous. Maybe it's just because I drove the Coupe second, but it felt a lot better," he adds. ■ Ken says he has never had a hot car, but even his prior Acura Legend was a sleek black 6-speed coupe, "not a typical cruiser car," he points out. Prior to that, he had a first-year 2003 Nissan 350Z, also with 6-speed manual. But Ken says the Cadillac V-Series is "the fastest car I've ever driven in my life."