

A new balance point. by Joe Sage

The GMC Acadia used to be a full-size utility and was the first seven-seater that made us realize we personally like those, even driving solo. Last year, Acadia evolved into a midsize—bigger than the five-seat Terrain, smaller than the up-to-eight Yukon line. The net result is an Acadia that's still a seven-seater but doesn't have to be: when set up for five seats, you have a healthy 41.7 cu.ft. of cargo space, or pop up the third row and you can haul soccer kids and 12.8 cu.ft. of cargo—a tradeoff in the ratio of cargo to people, but generous in the majority of one-to-five-seat situations.

There are six flavors of Acadia, starting with SL (\$29,995) and running through SLE-1, SLE-2, SLT-1, SLT-2 to Denali (\$46,095). Our SLT-1 is about 60 percent of the way through the price range, yet has a rich leather interior in Kalahari brown and black, with considerable pizzazz.

Our model had some feature shortcuts, such as one-touch down but not up for the driver's window.

On the plus side, the extensive features it does have were intuitive and quick to configure. The touchscreen had us set up with radio presets good for our week in just minutes, and an owner can surely become a virtuoso with more time. Headlight controls

were a little odd, but not for long. Instruments are clear and comfortable, with easy controls for temperature and air flow. There's impressive completeness but refreshing simplicity to the layout.

With all seats up, rear cargo volume is small indeed. But dropping the third row seats is fast and easy—a strap on the back of each retracts the headrests, then the seat goes flat. Third row seats are small, as is typical, but overall it's a good balance of possible configurations. And an adventurous twosome has almost 80 cu.ft. of cargo space.

One comic frustration was with the liftgate. When parked in a tight garage, you might want to open it just a little, to grab a small package—but it only wants to open all the way, yet won't, rather bumping your wall then slamming shut before you can grab anything. No choice but to drive back out.

Ours had all-wheel drive, which we favor. This pushed our Acadia a bit above two tons, not bad for a seven-seater. It also tows two tons, and even with average fuel mileage, its 22-gallon tank gives 550 miles of highway range. Bearing the heavier V6 (there's a four available), ours felt somewhat ponderous upon acceleration, cornering or maneuvers. Its torque is noticeably lower than its horsepower. Few soccer moms or dads seek neck-snapping performance, though, and in motion, it's a solid ride. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	3.6L DOHC VVT dir inj V6 (2.5L I-4 avail)
DRIVETRAIN	AWD (FWD available)
HP/TORQUE	310 hp / 271 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	HydraMatic 6-speed auto
SUSPENSION	F: MacPherson, direct-act stblzr bar; R: 5-link indep, coils w stblzr bar
STEERING	elec vari-effort power, active return assist
BRAKES	F: 12.6" / R: 12.4"
WHEELS/TIRES	18-in alum / P235/65 R18 a/s
LENGTH/WHEELBASE	193.6 / 112.5 in
TURNING CIRCLE	38.7 ft
HEADROOM (F/2/3)	(w/o sunroof) 40.3 / 39.6 / 37.2 in
LEGROOM (F/2/3)	41.0 / 39.7 / 31.1 in
CARGO VOLUME	12.8 / 41.7 / 79.0 cu.ft
WEIGHT	(FWD 4-cyl 3956 lb) AWD V6 4259 lb
TOW CAPACITY	4000 lb
FUEL CAPACITY	22.0 gal
MPG	17/25/20 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	\$41,560
ALL TERRAIN PACKAGE:	7-passenger seats, advanced AWD system, hill descent control, 20" aluminum wheels, black roof rails
	1800
DUAL SKYSCAPE SUNROOF	1400
EXTERIOR CONVENIENCE PACKAGE:	Roof rack cross rails, molded assist steps
	860
TRAILERING PACKAGE:	w active tow
	650
NAVIGATION	495
QUICKSILVER METALLIC PAINT	395
GMC INTERIOR PROTECTION PACKAGE:	All-weather floor mats 3 rows, all-weather rear cargo mat
	300
DESTINATION CHARGE	975
TOTAL	\$48,435

