

Alpha Acura

BY JOE SAGE

We had driven the compact Acura RDX A-Spec last fall at the Run To The Sun open road comparo in Oregon. Here, a Performance SUV category included an RDX A-Spec (272 hp, 26 mpg highway, base price \$45,500, as tested \$46,495) and three other vehicles—ranging from \$70-120,000 base, \$86-132,000 as tested, and from 469 to 550 hp (though two of the three did have 20-something highway mpg ratings). It wasn't really a fair fight. Thus we were curious to drive the midsize MDX A-Spec—especially freestanding, not back-to-back with vehicles at two or three times its price.

An A-Spec package adds sportiness—wheels, spoilers, fog lights, aluminum pedals and such—geared toward style, not adding horses. A-Spec benefits from Acura's packaging and pricing practices, with no surprises from base price to purchase price. (As-built prices for others at Run To The Sun ran seven to 25 percent above base.) Apex Blue Pearl paint was this one's only add-on. And man, is it a screaming blue. To paraphrase Nigel Tufnel in *(This Is) Spinal Tap*, "How much bluer could this be? And the answer is none! None more blue!"

Power was adequate once in motion, less so when accelerating from a stop. In particular, it

seemed to fall short against a persistently promising growl from the powertrain. We spent considerable time with Drive and Sport modes, which affected shift points noticeably. Sport tightened up the first few shifts, but still left us with a feel of some lag through the power curve. Then again, we told ourselves it could just be due to expectations you might pick up from its earnest sound effects.

We had logbook nits about a number of feature details, such as getting seats adjusted; audio with a volume knob but not a tuning knob; and a back-up camera with lines we couldn't quite trust when curved; and a few other things (any vehicle has a few nits). We're still not fans of Acura's alternative shift interface—a collection of circles, trapezoids, levers and such that you push or pull to shift.

This MDX would benefit from a few more horses. An MDX Sport Hybrid in our fleet last spring was about 200 pounds heavier (about five percent), but had 321 total horses (about 11 percent more power), and we had found it very satisfying.

The Acura MDX lineup starts at \$44,300, front-drive. SH-AWD (for Super Handling) is an option we'd always take (two grand more on MDX models where it's an option, though A-Spec is AWD-only). A-Spec is the middle of three package possibilities (and a combination of the other two is actually a fourth possibility), and it adds \$8500 to the

SPECIFICATIONS

SEATING CAPACITY	seven
ENGINE	3.5L alum alloy VTEC dir inj V6
HP/TORQUE	290 hp / 267 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	11:1
TRANSMISSION	9-speed auto / sequential paddles
DRIVETRAIN	SH-AWD
SUSPENSION	F: MacPherson strut, 25.0mm stblzr bar; R: multi-link, 26.5mm stblzr bar; amplitude reactive dampers (active avail)
STEERING	elec power-assist rack & pinion
BRAKES	F: 12.6" ventilated / R: 13.0" solid
WHEELS	20x8.5 shark gray split 5-spoke
TIRES	264/45 R20 high-perf all-season
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	196.2 / 111.0 in
TURNING CIRCLE	38.7 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	7.3 in
LEGROOM (F/2/3)	41.4 / 36.6 (38.5) / 28.1 (30.9)
CARGO CAPACITY	15.0 / 38.4 / 68.4 cu.ft
WEIGHT / DISTRIBUTION	4275 lb / 57/43 percent
TOW CAPACITY	(when equipped) 5000 lb
FUEL / FUEL CAPACITY91 oct prem / 19.5 gal
MPG	19/25/21 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	\$54,800
APEX BLUE PEARL PAINT	400
A-SPEC PACKAGE: Sport seats w alcantara inserts and contrast stitching; sport pedals; heated and ventilated seats; 20-in alloy wheels w 265/45 R20 all-season tires; LED fog lights; addtl A-Spec-exclusive styling points.....	incl
DESTINATION CHARGE995
TOTAL	\$56,195

base price (equal to \$6500 in features, plus its AWD). The 290-hp 3.5L V6 is the same in all non-hybrid models (the hybrid has a 257-hp 3.0L V6). ■

