



## IMPACT

## COMPACT

## 2013 CADILLAC ATS

MSRP: \$33,095 (BASE),  
\$46,695 (3.6L PREMIUM), \$49,185 (AS TESTED)

**C**adillac's history with compact cars has been short and sour. Their previous effort was the '80s era Cimarron. Cimarron was essentially a dressed-up version of GM's J body — the same family that included the Chevy Cavalier. It was badge engineering, and it didn't work.

However, black eyes heal, memories fade, and the allure of the compact sport sedan segment remains strong as ever. The roll call of cars in this class includes such notable (and notably German) entries as the Audi A4, Mercedes-Benz C-class and the BMW 3 Series. It's a who's-who of high impact compacts, and a fitting target market for GM's top tier division.

Fast forward to 2012 and the roll-out of the 2013 ATS. ATS is available in four trim levels — Standard (\$33,095), Luxury (\$37,590), Performance (\$41,895) and Premium (\$44,895). In developing the ATS, Cadillac had its sights set on the 3 Series. Long the standard of the compact sport sedan segment, these BMW's largely gained their fame through their driving dynamics. So, that's the lens we'll look through first in examining Cadillac's new contender.

The ATS rolls on a new rear-wheel drive platform. All-wheel-drive is available on all but the base trim level. The suspension combines a MacPherson strut, double pivot design up front, with a five-link independent setup in back — the first such application in a Cadillac model. GM's Magnetic Ride Control is also offered as part of the Premium trim level.

Three engine choices are offered, starting with a 2.5-liter four-cylinder (202 h.p./191 lb. ft., 22/33). Next up is a turbocharged, 2.0-liter four (272 h.p./260 lb. ft., 21/31), and finally, a 3.6 V-6 (321 h.p., 275 lb. ft., 19/28). All the engines are direct injection, with dual, overhead camshafts and vari-



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able valve timing. All are connected to a six-speed automatic transmission (the turbo four can also be specified with a six-speed manual). My rear-wheel-drive test car was a Premium trim, V-6/auto combination.

It doesn't take much time behind the wheel to realize how dialed in the ATS is. The largest of the available engines is, as expected, smooth, responsive and fast. The V-6 is capable of a 0-60 mph time in the high five-second range, and (with Brembo binders) can also brake from 60-0 in 129 feet.

The engine's power band is broad, and the exhaust note has a subdued snarl. Find any curving road, and the ATS will happily iron the kinks out of it — the car's supple suspension, 50/50 f/r weight balance and sticky, summer tires all playing a role.

The electric power steering is nicely weighted, at any speed. Premium level cars are the only ATS models to be fitted with Cadillac's Magnetic Ride Control. It seems to lend itself readily to each different application; tuned softer (but not flabby) in the flagship (XTS), and here sportier (but not

harsh) in the ATS.

Last winter notwithstanding, our market is a strong one for all-wheel-drive. Rear drive, no matter how well balanced, can't compare, when it comes to traction on wintry roads, so it's nice to have the AWD option on all but base levels). And, while the V-6/auto combo is strong and smooth, I have a suspicion that the turbo four/six-speed stick would be closer to the heart of this car.

The trim materials (real wood, carbon fiber, metal, cut-and-sew covering on the instrument panel, console and doors) and lighting (LED for the gauges, ambient lighting for the cabin) give the interior a look and feel that's upscale and up-to-date.

Fit and finish are first rate. The Cadillac User Experience — CUE, for short — is a touch screen (8-inch) and touch point control system located at the heart of the ATS center stack. On all but the base level car, this is the primary interface for info-



tainment and HVAC controls. You access features by the same methods that you would use on a tablet or smart phone. Most every driver in this car's demographic knows the moves, and it gives the car's switchgear a cutting edge feel. But — as anyone who works with a tablet or smart phone knows — it often takes more than one swipe or poke to get the desired result, and your aim needs to be very precise.

That's true with CUE too, which raises the potential for distractions while driving. Cadillac's iPad app allows drivers to practice their CUE access skills — a smart idea.

The front sport seats are supportive and comfortable (seat heaters are surprisingly an extra cost item). There's enough travel to accommodate even the very tall. Wide pillars, thick headrests and a shallow backlight collectively require some bobbing and weaving to maintain visibility.

Back seat leg and foot room runs short when front seat passengers run tall. That's not necessarily a deal breaker in this segment, but something to consider, if you regularly carry friends and family along with you.

Trunk space is on the small side of its peer group, at 10.2 cubic feet. Premium and Luxury trim levels include split, folding rear seat-backs that accommodate long items.

All of the above is packaged in the latest rendition of Cadillac's Art & Science styling. Shot down to compact scale, the look is most distinctive front and back, with marque-specific styling cues like vertical lighting, beveled sheet metal and the broad, Cadillac-crested grille.

Stylish, classy and seriously sporty, ATS is an impressive new addition to the segment. It's a fine gateway to the Cadillac brand, and a worthy adversary for the benchmarked BMW 3.