



FEAR NOT

2012 ACURA TSX SPORT WAGON

MSRP: \$31,360 · AS TESTED: \$35,695

For years, automakers have suffered from SWS. Station Wagon Syndrome seems to stem from a combination of fears. By calling station wagons by their rightful name, manufacturers seem to fear that buyers will not buy them, for one of two reasons.

Either they grew up in the '60s, their parents had wagons, and they fear turning into their parents if they drive one. Or, they've seen 1983's "National Lampoon's Vacation" and they don't want to channel Clark Griswold driving a Wagon Queen Family Truckster (see my RVM column on page 2).

Therefore, to this day, station wagons are rarely referred to as station wagons. They're either cross-overs, or they're *sport* wagons.

However they're labeled, there are some fine wagons in marketplace, and this week we drive one of them — the Acura TSX Sport Wagon. TSX is Acura's series in the Entry Premium segment. It competes with other, gateway to the luxury brands notables like the Audi A4, the BMW 3-Series, Infiniti G, Lexus IS and Mercedes-Benz C-Class. TSX last had a complete makeover in 2009. In 2011, the model line was expanded to include an all new Sport Wagon model. This week, we drive the 2012 edition.

With wagons, there's a lot to getting it right, size-wise. Ideally, you want your wagon to be big enough to be truly useful for carrying people and cargo, yet small enough that it doesn't require its own zip code. The TSX passes this first test. The outside dimensions are tidy, and Acura has the package wrapped in handsome, understated sheet metal.

Stretching 189 inches long, the Acura fits easily into parking slots and passing lanes. The four-wheel independent suspension is tuned with an ear towards balancing ride comfort and handling, and the car has a nimble feel, cornering with con-



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fidence. The front-wheel-drive TSX has a standard stability control system for added assurance when roads are sloppy.

Entry luxury brands walk a fine line when it comes to engine choices, torn between the competing interests of power, prestige and economy. The usual

solution is to offer both a smaller and larger option and let buyers make the choice.

That's the strategy that Acura employs with TDX — but only on the sedan side. The 280 horsepower, 3.5 litre V-6 is available on the four doors. It's joined by a four-cylinder that's the base motor in Sedans, and the sole choice on Sport Wagon, where it's linked to a five-speed automatic transmission. The 2.4 liter inline four checks in with 201 horsepower and 170 lb. ft. of torque. Those horses peak at 7,000 rpm, which tips off even a driving dullard such as myself that the engine needs to stretch its legs to run well. While that's true, there is enough torque on tap to be comfortable at low speeds.

And while you'll hear the engine when you mat the pedal for a redline rendezvous, the four cruises quietly at 60 mph, turning 2,000 rpm. My feeling is that unless you need to tow, or you just plain want more power, the Acura four is fine all around, and it benefits from respectable gas mileage, too. The EPA says the TSX wagon will get 22 mpg's city, 30 highway. I logged 25, in a week spent mostly around town. Acura recommends Premium for the TSX.

The interior has a well put-together look and feel, though the all black color scheme in my test car struck me as too somber. Visibility is good in all directions and with six-footers up front, there's enough room for a pair of six-footers to fit (snugly) behind them. Most controls are housed in the center stack. With all the features in a premium car, the amount of switchgear in the TSX is a lot to take in, though the array is logically laid out.

Cargo capacity is generous, ranging from 31.5 - 66.2 cubic feet, depending on seat configuration.

New for 2012 are three covered bins below the load floor. Their presence is permitted by the absence of a spare tire. Acura replaced the spare with a tire repair kit, netting an additional, 5.7 cubic feet of cargo space. The liftover height is comfortably low and the liftgate (optionally power) swings high out of the way. The sole ding on the storage space is that the load floor narrows to wrap around the wheel wells.

TSX is well equipped and Acura's option sheet is well stocked. Standard features include a power moon roof, leather covered seats (heated in front), automatic climate control and wireless cell phone capability. A popular grouping is the

Technology Package. Stacking \$3,650 onto the sticker price adds a voice controlled navigation system, with real-time weather and traffic information, solar-sensing, dual-zone automatic climate control, and a remote tailgate. The LCD nav screen is big, bright and nestled far enough into the dash to avoid sun washout. Save tire noise on coarse pavement, the TSX interior is quiet. However, when you want to add

some noise, the last entry in the Technology Package can help: the Acura/ELS sound system. For many people, one of the perks of buying a premium car is fitting it with fine, audio equipment. With 10 speakers and 415 watts of surround sound, AM/FM/XM/CD/DVD capability, hard drive storage and Dolby Pro Logic II, this system is easy on the ears.

The TSX Sport Wagon is cleanly styled, and functional as a wagons should be. And while it's not fast, it's enough fun to drive that the "sport" name is fitting.

A regular contributor to the Times Union for the past 20 years, Dan Lyons is the award-winning author of six books, and photographer of 135 calendars. Read Dan's recent reviews on line anytime at www.timesunion.com/cars.

