

## CLASS ACT

## 2012 ACURA MDX

MSRP: \$42,930 · AS TESTED: \$55,340

**T**alk about the long and short of it? Last week's test drive was the Scion iQ, which measures 10 feet long and weighs a Twinkie over 2,000 lb.

This week, we drive the Acura MDX. It stretches almost 16 feet long and tips the scales at a little over 4,600 lb. On the surface, these two are about as similar as chalk and cheese. But, one thing both vehicles have in common is the "premium" label. In the case of the Acura, it competes in the premium crossover class, midsize division. Crossovers are parked somewhere between Station Wagon and SUV, with the people/cargo versatility of the former, and the snow-shrugging drivability of the latter.

MDX was last updated in 2010. The re-do included a new powertrain, revised chassis, freshened sheet metal and added technology and comfort features. The 2012 edition carries over with minor updates. MDX is monospec when it comes to powertrain. The Acura drive-line pairs a 3.7 liter V-6 engine with a six-speed automatic transmission. Acura's aluminum six is rated at an even, 300 horsepower and 270 lb. ft. of torque.

It's a smooth operator, comfortably powering the crossover and moving seamlessly from gear to gear. There's enough power to tow up to 5,000 lb. The EPA rates fuel economy at 16 city, 21 highway: Middling mileage numbers, but class competitive for midsize crossovers. Acura recommends premium fuel for the MDX.

The chassis that the V-6/6 combination is buckled into features Acura's Super Handling All-Wheel Drive system. The name always reminds me of Wile E. Coyote, Super Genius, but that's just a byproduct of too many childhood cartoons. In reality, the way that Acura's AWD setup improves traction and handling may have you calling it super, too. It's a sophisticated system, using torque vectoring to



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only downside to the nav system is that the controls for it are mounted well below it — a needless distraction while driving. Staying with distractions, a luxury ride like the MDX has a lots of bells and whistles on it. The controls for many of these are found on the center stack. The sheer number of buttons is daunting, and demands some study time by the driver, to minimize eyes-off-the-road time.

Notable among the many options are real time weather (with radar image maps), a rear entertainment system (with a VGA color screen) and a 10-speaker surround sound system (designed in cooperation with master music producer Eliot Scheiner).

MDX has three rows of available seating. Front seats fit most anyone comfortably. Row two holds a pair of adults (and a kid in between). Six-footers can fit (snugly) in back, unless the front seats are at full push-back. The third row is strictly kid size. Row three folds into a flat load floor.

So too for row two, though you may need to remove the headrests first, depending on the position of the front seats. Lifter height in the cargo bay is reasonably low, and the handy power lift gate is standard on all trim levels.

It's hard to overstate the importance of the MDX to the Acura lineup. This model alone accounts for over a third of all Acura sales. Drive one and it's easy to see the attraction.

Refined, versatile and tech savvy, it's a smart choice for a classy crossover.

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monitor and vary the amount of power that it pushes from front to back axles (and side to side), to maximize grip. SH-AWD actually overdrives the outside rear wheel faster than the front wheels to help the crossover rotate around corners. This is known as a "yaw moment," not to be confused with a "yawn moment," which many of my readers count on me for every week.

MDX's AWD system adds reassuring grip in snowy, sloppy conditions, as well as when roads are bone dry, but snake twisty. Vehicles with the Advance Package are also equipped with an active damping suspension. This system is capable of real-time shock absorber adjustments, to keep up with changing road conditions. MDX models so equipped have impressive road holding for the breed. But there's a giveback in impact harshness.

I think that most buyers shopping this segment would trade the extra handling of the sport suspension for a smoother ride, and for that reason, I'd recommend the base suspension.

Premium vehicles make their mark on the inside. That's just as true of crossovers like this Acura as it is in luxury sedans. The MDX interior looks and feels the part of the upscale transporter. The cabin is handsomely finished, and the list of standard and available content includes a bucket load of technology.

The driving position is good, as is visibility, with the exception of the  $\frac{3}{4}$  rear view. The combination of the roofline c-pillar and the rear seat headrests combine to create a blind spot. The available blind spot alert system, therefore, comes in very handy.

The dash display on the MDX has good visibility, and that's certainly true of the available navigation system, with its bright, 8-inch screen. The

