

Mixed bag By Joe Sage

The size and style of the Acura MDX surprised us repeatedly—a study perhaps in relativity, or perhaps in clever and/or misleading packaging. It has the general bearing of a five-seater, to our eye, but seats seven.

What visually seems like limited volume in the rear, when all seats are in place—and seemed to be confirmed when using the rear cargo area for routine errands—reinforced the idea that we wouldn't find very competitive specs here. We went straight to the Dodge Durango, as an example of a high-value, high-capacity competitor, and were surprised at the similarity in cargo volumes. The Dodge beats the MDX by about 9 percent for rearmost cargo volume, when all seven seats are in use, but that's only 1.4 cubic feet. Dodge maintains a slight edge at middle capacity (five seats in place), but actually falls behind with only two seats up.

Nonetheless, the Acura costs just about twice what the Durango does—but that was

not the point of this drill, although it surely is a consideration. In fact, the MDX ranges about 35 to 80 percent pricier than its Honda Pilot first cousin.

We include a few logbook notes in the sidebar, but our list was actually quite long. Lights, locks and instrument panel interface details drove us nuts at an above-average pace. We went to the manuals more than average and found what we were looking for less than average. Electronic handling and warning systems would alert us frantically to such things as our own lane changes.

Its 290-horse V6 is strong, launching the two-ton MDX into aggressive urban freeway traffic at full tilt, with power to spare. We concluded that you not only don't see its size, you don't feel it, either. It does not feel high-centered, has a solid stance and corners smoothly. Ultimately, it does bear actual seven-seater dimensions. We noted in a parking lot that the only other vehicle of comparable size was a nearby Ford F-150. Based on measured and perceived size, we found the Acura MDX to be a conundrum. You'll have to try it on for size. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	3.5L 24-valve V6
POWER	290 hp, 267 lb-ft torque
TRANSMISSION	6-spd auto w/ sportshift and grade logic control
DRIVETRAIN	all-wheel drive
BRAKES.....	Front: 12.6" vented 2-piston Rear: 13.0" solid single-piston
TURNING CIRCLE.....	37.6 feet
GROUND CLEARANCE.....	Unladen: 7.3 inches Fully laden: 5.6 inches
WEIGHT.....	(dep. on options) 4025-4103 lbs
MPG.....	18/27/21 (city/hwy/comb)
CARGO VOLUME.....	with 7 seats: 15.8 cu.ft. with 5 seats: 45.1 cu.ft. with 2 seats: 90.9 cu.ft.

BASE PRICE.....	\$56,505
OPTIONS:	none
DESTINATION CHARGE:.....	895
TOTAL	\$57,400



LOGBOOK NOTES

It takes about six steps just to tune the radio to another station. The touchscreen has a fake haptic effect, which works okay on some brands, but this one feels more like you're getting mildly electrocuted, while not delivering that button feel. Audio sound quality, once equalized, was very good. Its lower screen interface, though, was just about invisible—dark on dark.

The side mirror has a wide-angle outer section—common enough, and in principle vitally useful. But this one has a nearly invisible separation, so it works differently for your two eyes. A car in the next lane is half wide-angle, half not, with no differentiation. Mirror-to-eye-to-brain fights this.

We couldn't even put in one roll of bubble-wrap and a package of paper from the office supply store in the rear cargo area without putting a third row seat down. Despite pretty good specs on paper, the MDX struck us as a little large for a 5-seater and a little tight for a 7-seater. The controls for putting those rear seats up and down are a dream, however—really easy.



Honda's luxury brand surprises us with a vehicle that is larger than it looks—yet looks larger than it is, at the same time.

