

# Bipolar relationship By Joe Sage

The Acura TLX is a new model this year, or an evolutionary recombination of two expired models. Gone are the TL and the TSX. As the chart below shows, there has been considerable reduction in weight from midsize TL to TLX, with the new TLX falling between the TL and compact TSX. Fuel mileage is up, horsepower ratings have shifted and prices cover a wider range. The TSX may be considered to have been replaced by the compact ILX, whose production overlapped it by a year or two. Comparisons can be made among all four. All in all, it strikes us as an improved lineup, and once it sinks in, the nomenclature should be clearer, too. (A small TLC sticker, for Acura's Total Luxury Care program, is just there to make you crazy.)

The car we have here is tops in the lineup: the 3.5L V6 with Super Handling all-wheel-drive (SH-AWD) and Advance Package. Typical for Honda's refreshingly simple model and pricing schemes, at \$44,800 no further options are needed.

A front-drive 4-cylinder starts at just \$31,445, reasonable for a premium brand (and echoing the TSX). The front-drive four also gets 35 MPG highway, which only drops to 34 MPG with the V6 (or 31 MPG with V6 and AWD, 21 city, 25 combined).

The Acura TLX has won Kiplinger's award for Best New/Redesigned Car in the \$40,000-50,000 price range. It is also winner of *US News & World Report's* Best Car for the Money award in the Upscale Midsize Car category. This level of awesomeness was only sometimes evident to us.

**STRONG POINTS:** The TLX is smooth, quiet, comfortable and capable, with a solid, powerful and sporty feel. Give it a punch, and its V6 produces a satisfying sound. The 9-speed automatic gives strong and rapid delivery of its 290 horses.

The car's all-wheel-drive system, with recalibrated torque-vectoring, provides surefooted traction, handling, control and driver connectedness on a par with the best all-wheel-drivers.

Our TLX came in a Crystal Black Pearl finish that revealed rich brown tones in sunlight. The car's five-projector-beam headlight assembly is a successful combination of class and cutting edge tech, and rear sheetmetal and lights are relatively distinctive, in an era of massive lookalikes.

**WEAK POINTS:** We encountered annoyances and issues large to small. A medium-sized flaw with

the keyless locking system meant failure to lock and failure to open, several times each. Digging for a key is all the more annoying when you have your arms full and thought you had a system that worked. Surely this can be fixed, but it does not speak well for quality or the potential for ongoing issues. Ditto one instance of coming out to the car at night, to find all its lights on, inside and out.

The turning circle is huge, just shy of 40 feet.

The backup camera is weak, bordering on useless in a combination of nighttime and rain. The surround cameras gave us disturbing results in one parking lot instance, showing a truck two spaces away but without a trace of the car right next to us. We had several other minor-ish notes.

One of our most significant beefs is with the shift interface. Our referring to it as a 'shift interface,' rather than just a shifter, may be telling, in itself. As fate would have it, we came across a discussion about this on social media a couple of weeks later, spinning off a published commentary on "alternative" shifters (this is not the only one) from a safety hazard standpoint. It was spurred by someone who had driven in front of a train, purportedly shifting to D instead of R in a new vehicle with an unconventional shifter. Some were suggesting that any owner with half a brain can learn their car's oddest features in fifteen minutes. Others countered that it's not uncommon for someone else to drive a car, or that in a panic situation unusual learning may be replaced by old reflexes. It was discussed whether driver training or state license testing should address nonstandard controls. As a tech industry colleague said in the same time frame but a different discussion, "if you have to explain an interface, it's not right yet."

As shown above, the TLX shifter has five or six



separate buttons—one a round circle that says D, one an oddly contoured rectangle that says N, in front of that a depressed switch (somewhat in the form of many electronic parking brake switches) for R, above that a slightly curved flat rectangle with P, and at the other end of the array another P. Our notes about the challenges this posed were lengthy, detailed, specific and many.

It's unlike any conventional shifter, so experience works against you. Or even if it's your first, each function is like its own new idea out of left field. You will likely take your eyes off the road to shift from R to D, not good as you depart your driveway amid children and traffic. (Auto stop-start may kick in here unwelcomely, too.) When you stop and park, there are two things that say P, one that you push and one that you pull. When you're ready to go, there are the same two things that say P, one that you pull and one that you do not touch. It's all too easy to confuse the two buttons and four actions.

**AND THEREFORE:** Aside from our nitpicks, we liked driving the car. It handles beautifully. Our time with the 2015 Acura TLX, along with a new MDX not long ago, have started to transform our feel for a brand we've been lukewarm about in the past.

But the turning circle will never improve. Trouble with the locks and lights makes us uneasy. The nature of some issues is not that uncommon, as automakers seem compelled to try to become tech designers, whether they have the knack or not. The shifter was by far the worst. Its quirks are ultimately impossible to ignore. We could never live with it unless it gets some serious therapy. ■

COMPARISON:	2014 TSX	2014 TL	2016 ILX	2015 TLX
SEGMENT	compact	midsize	compact	midsize
LENGTH (IN)	185.6	194.0	181.9	190.3
WHEELBASE (IN)	106.4	109.3	105.1	109.3
WEIGHT (LB)	3400-3680	3726-4001	3093-3173	3483-3774
DRIVETRAINS	FWD	FWD,AWD	FWD	FWD,AWD
ENGINES	2.4L four, 3.5 V6	3.5L V6, 3.7L V6	2.4L four	2.4L four, 3.5L V6
HORSEPOWER (HP)	201-280	280-305	201	206-290
FUEL MILEAGE (MPG HWY)	28-31	25-29	36	31-35
PRICE RANGE	\$30,634-35,635	\$36,030-43,310	\$27,900-34,890	\$31,445-44,700



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