

Conservative cousin By Joe Sage

We moved to the Acura ILX straight from a bright orange Honda Civic Si sedan with manual transmission and rear deck spoiler. We had had a ball with that Civic Si, so we anticipated a change to a very similar but luxury-outfitted Acura. Primos. Cousins. One that shows up in an aloha shirt, and one that shows up in a suit.

A number of brands offer two top models, luxury or sport, from Chrysler to Mercedes-Benz to Hyundai. What if you want both? Those others do deliver plenty of both, in either trim, just with a different overall balance. With the Acura versus Honda, the comparison seems more clear cut.

Honda and Acura are apples and oranges, but there is a wild card here—the Honda was a 2015 and this Acura is a 2016, and the 2016 and 2015 Acura ILX are also apples and oranges. An example: the 2016 ILX has a 2.4L engine, which for 2015 came only with a manual transmission, while the automatic in 2015 had a 2.0-liter. For 2016, there is just one setup: the 2.4L with an 8-speed dual-clutch transmission (the 2015 2.0L had a 5-speed auto). Horsepower has stayed at 201 on the ILX, while torque is up by 10 lb-ft (180 vs 170). The 2015

Civic Si, on the other hand, gets 205 out of its 2.4L and rates 174 lb-ft against the 2015 Acura's at 170. The differentials are small, but the implications are clear: trim level is not the only comparative.

Many details are exactly the same between the Honda and Acura (the inside trunk release is the first we noticed). But the cut of the door jambs is a dead giveaway that the two represent more than a reskin and rebadging. The two years of Acura and the 2015 Honda all have the same wheelbase, but while body lengths matched last year, the 2016 ILX has grown by 2.5 inches overall. Perhaps the 2016 Civic will do the same.

The main takeaway is that despite similarities, it's quickly clear that they are different beasts.

The new ILX moves from an emissions rating of ULEV-2 to ULEV-3, and the 8-speed transmission is one reason. With both D and S (sport) settings, you can remap your shift points a bit, and we thought we heard a throatier growl with it in sport, but neither give us the pleasing output of the Civic with manual. On the plus side, the ILX has a conventional shift lever, not the odd mix of buttons and toggles in an Acura TLX we tested recently.



Our logbook was full of difficulties encountered with locks, lights, trunk release and audio.

This ILX with Tech Package is fifth up the scale of six trims total (the lowest is \$27,900). As with any Acura, everything is included at each level.

You could get that Civic Si in a sedate grey, but the Acura ILX does not come in wild colors. You can get a Civic (not an Si) without the manual transmission, but its automatic is then a CVT.

Ultimately we had a hard time forgetting our fun-filled week with the Civic Si, at 75 percent of the Acura's price. ■

2016 Acura ILX w Tech Plus Package

BASE PRICE	\$32,900
DESTINATION CHARGE:	920
TOTAL	\$33,820

