

Upstream/downstream benefits

Biggest Acura has NSX supercar hybrid technology at far smaller price BY JOE SAGE

Most manufacturers with a high-powered halo car use it to add glory to the brand, but Acura is using the highly innovative drivetrain technology in its NSX mid-engine supercar as an active laboratory for other vehicles in the lineup.

The current NSX (a Sport Hybrid SH-AWD model only) came to market in 2016, a long-anticipated gen-two of the legendary two-seater after a decade's hiatus. A version of its advanced hybrid drivetrain had already hit in 2014, in a special Sport Hybrid SH-AWD model of the RLX sedan.

Now a special Sport Hybrid SH-AWD model of the big MDX three-row, seven-passenger SUV (the best-selling luxury three-row SUV) adapts the system for another 31 horsepower, also getting a 28 percent bump in fuel mileage, all for just \$1500 more than a regular MDX, clearly a triple win.

The Super Handling AWD and Sport Hybrid systems become one to a high degree, with one front electric motor built into the transmission and two inboard rear electric motors contributing to torque and power. The motors are also a big part of the braking system, using their own rapid slow-down to bring the vehicle to a stop, while regenerating the hybrid battery, as well—for very direct stopping power in most normal driving, with connected

deceleration almost like a manual transmission.

The interior of the MDX (new in 2017) is spacious and comfortable, with one of the more intuitive user interfaces we've seen—and for 2018, with a 30 percent faster response time, refreshed menu structure and Android/Apple now standard. The MDX Sport Hybrid uses Acura's pushbutton electronic shift interface. We're not the world's biggest fans of alternative shifters (which could confuse a driver given duties in an unfamiliar vehicle), but we're starting to warm up to this one. At first, it may require looking away from the windshield, but its differentiated shapes and actions let you adapt to blind operations pretty quickly.

A look at our comparative chart below gives you an idea of what you get with this package on the MDX. Here's a vehicle that's not much heavier than the RLX sedan, yet turns notably tighter and, despite the lowest horsepower of the Sport Hybrid trio, can tow 5000 pounds (with an available towing package). And, of course, it's the one that can seat seven and/or haul up to almost 70 cubic feet of cargo (though not at the same time, although even with seven butts in seats, it has 25 percent more cargo volume than the RLX. And one more thing: it's a third the price of the NSX. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE / DRIVETRAIN3.0L SOHC V6 / AWD
HP/TORQUE(6300 rpm) 257 hp / (5000 rpm) 218 lb-ft

3-MOTOR SPORT HYBRID SYSTEM: 47 hp front elec motor built into 7DCT trans; 72 hp rear inboard Twin Motor Unit (2 36 hp motors); 1.3 kWh Li-ion battery pack.

ENGINE/HYBRID OUTPUT:321 hp / (instant) 289 lb-ft

TRANSMISSION: 7-spd dual clutch (DCT) w electronic shift control, advanced shift-hold on upshifts in aggressive driving, grade logic reducing hunting on steep hills

SUSPENSIONF: MacPherson; R: multi-link, actv damp

STEERINGmotion-adaptive elec power

BRAKES ..Electronically controlled hydraulic system, regen from front/rear motors slows vehicle in most cases

WHEELS / TIRES20x8.0 alloy / 245/50R20 all-season

LENGTH / WB / TURN CIRC196.2 / 111.0 / 37.6 ft

CARGO CAPACITY15.0 / 38.4 / 68.4 cu.ft

WEIGHT / TOW CAPACITY4484 lb / (avail) 5000 lb

FUEL / MPGprem unl / 26/27/27 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE w Advance Package\$58,150

ALL INCLUSIVE: Vehicle stability assist, ABS, EBD, handling assist dynamic braking, multi-use touchscreen, SiriusXM, Bluetooth hands-free link, keyless entry & start, push button shift, driver 10-way power seat w memory, heated front seats, HomeLink, stainless steel sport pedals, power tailgate, power moonroof w tilt, jewel eye LED headlights, auto-dim heated power mirrors w turn indicators.

INCL TECH PACKAGE: Nav w voice recog, AcuraLink w real time traffic/street/fwy conditions, ELS Studio premium audio, HD radio, GPS-linked tri-zone climate w filtration, remote start, blind spot info, rear cross traffic monitor, rain sense wipers, LED puddle lights.

INCL ADVANCE PACKAGE: Surround view cameras, sport seats w perforated leather trim, 2nd row captains' chairs, vented front seats, wood trim, heated steering wheel, 10-way front passenger power seat, heated 2nd row seats, LED fogs, park sensors, rear door sunshades, roof rails.

DESTINATION CHARGE995

TOTAL\$59,145

	TYPE	SEATS	ENGINE	HP/TORQUE	CARGO	TURN CIRCLE	WEIGHT	MPG (c/h/c)	TOW	BASE PRICE
NSX (Sport Hybrid SH-AWD)	supercar	2	twin turbo 3.5L V6	573/476	4.4	39.7	3803	21/22/21	--	\$156,000
RLX Sport Hybrid SH-AWD	4dr sedan	5	3.5L V6	377/341	12.0	40.5	4380	28/29/28	--	61,900
MDX Sport Hybrid SH-AWD	7p SUV	7	3.0L V6	321/289	15.0-68.4	37.6	4484	26/27/27	5000	52,100



Nevada ghost town sampler

Invigorating expanses of the southern Nevada desert are home to a number of Wild West towns that survive as great road trip destinations, set among rally-worthy two-lane highways. **STORY AND PHOTOS BY TYSON HUGIE**

It takes a workhorse to travel back to an 1800s mining town, and Acura has just the right vehicle for the job. This marks the fourth time I've put a third-generation MDX through its paces. After completing over 1,000 miles in the latest iteration of its three-row SUV, I can say with certainty that the latest MDX is a capable, fun-to-drive machine that offers up first class comfort for a trip of that distance. Do I have to give it back?

In April, Las Vegas, Nevada will once again play home to a regional Acura NSX club meetup called WestFest. Last year, the event brought out over 50 cars and 80 people. As part of the planning committee, my role is to establish and plan out the logistics of a scenic group drive to be held on Saturday, April 28. It's not easy to come up with drives for a caravan of that size.

Considerations include finding somewhere we have not yet been; likely traffic and weather patterns on the day and time of our trip; road conditions appropriate for a group of supercars; whether there are any tolls or park fees; whether the group can run all together or whether it makes

more sense to split the group; and places for fuel and snack stops along the way.

As one can imagine, it takes a great deal of effort to coordinate such an activity. I partnered up with my friends Dane and Brandon, both Las Vegas locals, to take the MDX out on a Saturday morning and scout the terrain. It was the perfect vehicle for our expedition to the desert: second-row accommodations are posh, with captains' chairs and plenty of space all around. There are of course independent climate controls for passengers in all areas. Meanwhile, I pampered myself up front with a heated seat, heated steering wheel and convenient cup holder for my iced caramel macchiato.

You'd think we were going to the local shopping mall and not to the middle of nowhere.

Our drive route for the day was about 160 miles and took us four hours from start to finish, including our sightseeing and lunch stops.

Nelson, Nevada is one of many ghost towns in the vast expanses of land around the southwest. It's nestled in El Dorado Canyon, about 12 miles off Highway 95 to the east. If you blink, you might

miss the turnoff, so it's a good thing Dane was coaching me from the passenger seat on where to make my exit at Highway 165. We passed only one other vehicle on the way into Nelson from there.

The two-laner got a little more narrow, a little more rough and more curvy as we dipped down in elevation toward the Colorado River. Soon the buildings of the old mining town came into view, along with dozens of old cars left out to the elements with windows down (or broken out) and interiors rotting away. I parked the MDX in a dirt lot, and we got out to wander around a little, noting how silent it was outside aside from the scuffling sound of our shoes on the gravel.

We must have been the first tourists in town that day, as a resident desert rat came out of what appeared to be the main general store and put away the "closed" sign while inviting us inside. The wooden building doubles as his home, but he sells all sorts of remnants of the Wild West in there. My favorite display was an exhibit of some of the various films the town of Nelson has appeared in, including the Kurt Russell classic *Breakdown*.

Luckily for us (and unlike Kurt Russell's red Jeep Grand Cherokee in that movie), the MDX didn't give us any check-engine lights or troubles of any nature. We snapped a few photos in Nelson before continuing eastward another few miles to where we could drive nearly to the banks of the

mighty Colorado River on a dirt road. There was a nice paved turnaround spot that will be a perfect photo-op for the group of NSXs at the April event.

Our next destination on the drive loop was Searchlight, Nevada, a teeny spot on the map that (like most small towns in that area) got its start as a mining community in the late 1800s but mostly dried up by the mid-1950s. The name came from one of its original prospectors who said, "It would take a searchlight to find gold out here."

We rolled onward toward Highway 164 westbound and then over to Interstate 15 northbound. I hit the gas on the onramp. For a full-size SUV that's loaded down with technology and comfort niceties, the MDX still scoots down the road with more than ample power. I observed an overall combined MPG of about 26 despite going heavy on the throttle a few times. Range on a full tank is in the high 400s.

The Country Club Buffet at Primm Valley Casino, right along the California-Nevada state line, satisfied our hunger before we made our last stop of the day. Stacked along the east side of I-15 are seven columns of vividly painted boulders, referred to as "Seven Magic Mountains." The massive rocks were cut from a nearby quarry and painted fluorescent colors by Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone. The art installation was opened in 2016 and will be removed sometime this year, so I was glad to get a chance to see it.

The MDX stickers at \$58,000 as tested, including Tech and Advance packages with a full suite of

Nelson, Nevada (below left) was pretty much closed when we arrived, but opened for business as soon as we pulled in. Our Acura MDX Sport Hybrid took us to Nevada in 21st century style, where we found 20th century motoring relics kept fresh in the high and dry desert air. The Seven Magic Mountains art installation along I-15 is a sight to see, if you hurry.

AcuraWatch driver-assistance aids. The Lane Keeping Assist System (LKAS) is helpful but I could do without ACC (Adaptive Cruise Control). I much prefer to set a cruise speed and have it be maintained—with ACC engaged, the vehicle starts slowing down well in advance of approaching a vehicle ahead, so you have to change lanes very early, which isn't always possible or convenient, though it's something I could learn to live with.

There's a lot to love about the MDX. Those captivating jewel eye headlights with LED turn signals are just as much function as form. ELS Studio Premium audio system will knock your socks off. I set the bass and the subwoofer to maximum levels for optimal punch, and it retained crisp clarity all the way up to max volume level 40. Sirius XM never sounded so good. If it's solitude you want, a quiet cabin is easy to achieve, too. I sailed along at 75 mph with minimal wind, road or engine noise. The MDX's 7-speed dual-clutch transmission keeps the revs low at those speeds. It was tough to give the keys back after being pampered for seven days.

The region has great options for our NSX event, but just 4.5 hours from Phoenix, we've also discovered Nelson, Nevada is an easy weekend trip. ■

