

Acura brings its A-game by Joe Sage

We drove this vehicle a couple of months ago in NWAPA's Run to the Sun, an open road sequential comparo with an emphasis on performance. Vehicles in that event are typically a model with a bigger engine and brakes, sport suspension and such.

An Acura A-Spec Package is not a performance build in that sense, but rather basically an up-trimmed model—mostly adding technology, style and comfort—though content such as its 20-inch wheels, sport pedals, gloss black spoiler and A-Spec exhaust outlets give it a performance look and feel.

On our RDX—Acura's first SUV to have an A-Spec option—the package also bundles a Tech Package that's optional on lower builds.

Add SH-AWD (Super Handling All-Wheel-Drive, for four-wheel grip plus electronic cornering and handling control), and our A-Spec runs \$8,200 higher than the \$37,600 rear-drive base RDX. (An Advance Package option, not on ours, ups content and price further still.)

But all models have the same powertrain. A-Spec may not add any performance, but the RDX is not begging for it—it's pretty hot as is. It nails aggressive surface street, ramp and freeway driving without our even thinking about its drive modes, though we gave those a workout on Bartlett Lake Road's twisties.

A-Spec's add-ons do knock one MPG off

the fuel economy rates, across the board.

Downsides? We are already not fans of the current dominant Acura shift interface, with circles, rectangles and trapezoids you push or pull, like a three-year-old's IQ test, and in this iteration it's almost lost amid a sea of other knobs and switches in the center stack. Any vehicle might be driven by the unfamiliar, say a teen getting tipsy friends home, and shifting should not require special orientation.

And the screen: we make voice memos about pros, cons, highlights and experiences with our vehicles, the first few usually about basic settings, most a few seconds long, even a couple of minutes for something of particular note. Our first two on this were 14 and then seven minutes long, before even getting into the manual (which proved essential, i.e. it is not intuitive). It turns out the screen is gesture-, swipe- and "flick"-dependent, the type of system even the big guys have backed off. A few years ago, the smartphone giants tried to expand device control via the subtle differences among touching, sliding, squeezing or pressing, with one finger, two fingers, more fingers and combinations thereof. Besides being too many user options, the underlying technology was just too irregular, and they have abandoned this. That was while standing still with a phone. In motion in a two-ton

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE.....	2.0L alum-alloy 4-cyl turbo
HP / TORQUE.....	272 hp / 280 lb-ft
DRIVETRAIN.....	AWD
TRANSMISSION.....	10-spd auto / paddles
SUSPENSION.....	F: MacPherson strut; R: multi-link
STEERING.....	dual-pinion variable-ratio elec power
MODES.....	snow, comfort, sport, sport-plus
BRAKES.....	F: 12.4 vented; R: 12.2 solid disc
WHEELS.....	20x8.0 shark gray split 5-spoke
TIRES.....	255/40 R20 high-perf all-season
LENGTH / WHEELBASE.....	186.8 / 108.3 in
TURNING CIRCLE.....	38.0 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE.....	8.2 in
HEADROOM (F/R).....	40 / 38 in
LEGROOM (F/R).....	42 / 38 in
CARGO CAPACITY.....	29.5 / 58.9 cu.ft
WEIGHT.....	(A-Spec, AWD) 4015 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY.....	91 octane premium / 17.1 gal
MPG.....	21/26/23 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE\$45,800

INCL: heated 12-way power front seats w memory, high-res touchpad display, multi-view rear camera, AcuraLink, HD radio, SiriusXM, USB audio, Bluetooth, Apple CarPlay, dual-zone filtered auto climate, rear vents, keyless entry/start, pano moonroof, power liftgate, LED DRLs and taillights, heated power mirrors, voice-recog nav and more.

A-SPEC INCL: styling package, leather sport seats w suede inserts, vented seats, Acura ELS Studio 3D 16-sprk premium audio, 20-in alloy wheels, black headliner.

DESTINATION CHARGE.....995

TOTAL\$46,795

machine? No thanks.

Upsides: as a member of the greater Honda family, Acura has a high reliability rating, and its prices are all-inclusive: no haggles, no surprises, no add-ons. The brand's fans are among the most loyal in the business. ■

