



Quiet sporty & dynamic

From solid driving aids to impressive backseat fun, Acura MDX takes the SUV to the next level



Kathy Renwald

There are only two good sounds a car should make: a sensational V8 wail or no sound at all.

The 2017 Acura MDX is just a whisper away from being as silent as an electric vehicle. You don't hear the road, the wind or the engine.

Utility vehicles have come a long way from their origins as pickup trucks in disguise, and now the newly spruced up MDX is here, quiet as a cave and plush as a boutique hotel.

The MDX has always been a stylish member of the mid-size premium SUV segment. For 2017, it leaves stylish behind for swagger. The front end is where the MDX breaks out the bold moves with a diamond pentagon grille acting as an anchor for a bunch of angular lines that laser over the hood and around the headlights.

It's futuristic, modern and brash without being obnoxious. The side profile is quieter, tapered and dynamic-looking with a pleasing balance of glass to body. Cool people don't want to drive around in SUVs that look like service vehicles, and the MDX looks as frisky as it does purposeful.

My test vehicle was the top-of-the-line MDX Elite, priced at \$65,790. Go in at entry level and you'll pay \$12,000 less.

For the extra money, it feels extra glamorous. The leather seats have contrasting piping, wood trims are exotic and the premium music system is tuned for concert-hall sound. The rear-seat entertainment system features a wide screen that drops down from overhead, ready to captivate second-row passengers with short attention spans. The overflow crowd seated in the third-row bench seats shares the view.

2017 ACURA MDX

Base price: \$53,690

Price as tested: \$65,790

Engine type: 3.5-litre, V6

Power: 290 hp

Torque: 276 lb.-ft.

Fuel consumption

City: 12.2 L/100 km

Highway: 9 L/100 km

What's best: Drives smaller than it is, good ergonomics and visibility

What's worst: Nine-speed transmission can be jerky

What's interesting: acoustic glass, active noise and sound control make MDX as quiet as an electric car

The VIP in the MDX is in the driver's seat, and it's a pretty good place to be. Visibility is a strong point, forward, of course, but also to the sides, where the positioning of the A pillar – the one that supports the sides of the windshield – and the placement of the mirrors do not block the view when turning into intersections.

Action central is the middle console. The navigation screen is stacked above another display where climate and radio controls live. Though the 2017 MDX has been restyled, it is not new from the ground up and some features, such as the on-screen graphics, look dated.

"Unfussing" some of the computer

functions would be welcome. Touch-screen controls for climate settings need to move off the display and back to buttons where they belong. Poking through menus while driving is too distracting.

Just below the command centre, a deep storage bin holds incidentals, and Acura's generous AC and USB hookups keep our devices powered and connected.

When the MDX gets a thorough rebuild, I hope they rethink the gear shift design. It's too quirky. Park and Drive are push buttons, but Reverse requires a pull to engage. It's not an improvement on the traditional setup.

Once you're button savvy, it's time to drive. The MDX feels like a pretty big vehicle, but the 290-horsepower V6 engine is a capable performer. It's lively and smooth and changes character depending on the choice of Comfort, Normal or Sport driving modes.

Most of the time I kept it in Normal, where the drive setup was better matched to our rough roads. The feel is sporty enough but manages potholes with more grace. The nine-speed automatic transmission is pretty slick but occasionally it hunts for the right gear, particularly at lower speeds where once in a while it would hesitate or thump into second gear. It was a rare hiccup in an otherwise proficient drive train.

Best of all, the MDX feels more nimble and agile than you might expect from a seven-passenger vehicle. It is easy to prowl through parking lots and parallel park. On the open road the driving experience is as confident and solid as many sedans.

All-wheel drive is standard, but it just lays the groundwork for a whole bunch of driving aids, including Lane Departure Warning, Lane Keeping Assist System, Blind Spot alert and Cross Traffic Monitor system.

We know the Acura MDX to be solid and reliable but now style and sportiness are part of its pedigree, along with that lovely silence that enhances the driving pleasure. 🍏

Kathy Renwald is an award-winning automotive writer, photographer and videographer.

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