AutoMedia.com

**2013 Cadillac XTS**

*Easily the best Cadillac big sedan ever*

by Gary Witzenburg

When Cadillac celebrated its centennial in 2002, it was just then embarking on a product design and image renaissance that some might have called a resurrection. This all-new 2013 Cadillac XTS is the latest step in that direction.

It began just before Christmas, 1997 when designers were called in from vacation to work through the holidays on a Cadillac show car that would be a new “icon” for the brand. “We wanted a modern high-tech design, our own unique, bold, breakthrough look," recalls lead designer Kip Wasenko, "blending Cadillac heritage with the aggressiveness of modern technology. We put together a lot of image boards, some with aircraft on them, like the Stealth fighter – flat black, carbon fiber, triangular shapes. We also had pictures of Bang and Olafson audio equipment and some modern architecture.”

**Art and science**

From that inspirational mix, Cadillac's “Art and Science” design philosophy was born. “For Cadillac to get off the traditional and into this bold, hard-edged design is one of the boldest strokes in modern design history," said then GM product vice chairman Bob Lutz. "It made a statement that was aesthetically very different from Mercedes, BMW and the rest.”

It was first demonstrated by the Evoq two-seat concept sports-car, which was unveiled at the 1998 Detroit North American International Auto show and later reached production as the XLR. But the first volume example was the 2003 CTS sedan, which -- now in second-generation sedan, coupe, wagon and high-performance "V" variations -- has earned multiple media kudos and has sold consistently well.

That was followed by the SRX “crossover" utility vehicle (CUV) and the size-up STS sedan, both sharing its then-new rear-wheel-drive architecture. And while the big Escalade truck-based SUV and the DTS large sedan (a long-in-the-tooth evolution of the old front-drive DeVille) soldiered on, the popular CTS and second-generation SRX have gone a long way toward reviving Cadillac's image sales and over the last several years.

But something of major importance has been missing: a state-of-the-art large sedan to replace both the aging STS and the ancient DTS, both of which ceased production in 2011. So say hello to this 2013 XTS -- easily the best Cadillac sedan ever built. Starting at about $44,000, it's priced to compete with "mid-price luxury" imports like the Audi A6, BMW 5 Series and Mercedes-Benz E-Class. Yet it's big and roomy, dynamically competent and richly- equipped enough to give the much more expensive Audi A8, BMW 7 and Mercedes S large luxury sedans some serious trouble.

**Exterior and interior**

The 2013 Cadillac XTS (the "TS" means "Touring Sedan") wears an "Art and Science" tuxedo, softer and more formal than the harder-edged CTS suit, yet it's no question a size-larger sibling. Cadillac says its look is "more nuanced" than the CTS, with "a new level of surface detail," and a "long, sleek proportion....with refined, graceful forms and surfaces working harmoniously with established Cadillac linear forms."

 The interior "extolls a multidimensional philosophy in a bold, elegant design that is also very efficient in the ways it encompasses passengers and cargo." It cleverly blends traditional simplicity, elegant luxury and high technology with premium materials and an unprecedented (for Cadillac) level of connectivity. In roominess, it's comparable to full-size sedans and well better than midsize rivals, especially the rear seat's 40 inches of legroom, and its 18-cu.-ft. trunk trumps even full-size competitors.

 Standard on all models is Cadillac-exclusive CUE (Cadillac User Experience), a customizable user interface using an eight-inch touch screen in the center stack, a faceplate below it and steering wheel controls. It's first in the auto industry to use capacitive-touch control -- the technology that lets you select, slide and expand icons and images on tablets and "smart" phones -- with proximity sensing, haptic feedback, natural voice recognition and gesture recognition that anticipates what you want on-screen even as your finger approaches.

 Yet it's easier and more intuitive to use than just about anything else available, especially the oft-frustrating twist-and-poke interface knobs in the German cars. And each new XTS comes with an iPad with an application that replicates CUE to help you learn it at home.

**Models and features**

 The 2013 Cadillac XTS offers four trim levels: Standard, Luxury Collection, Premium Collection and Platinum Collection. All feature standard Magnetic Ride Control (a segment exclusive), StabiliTrak electronic stability control, four-wheel disc brakes with Brembo fronts and four-channel antilock; variable-effort steering; HID headlamps with Twilight Sentinel; dual-zone automatic climate control; heated outside mirrors with auto-dimming, turn-signal indicators and puddle lamps; adaptive remote start; Bose premium 8-speaker audio with HD and SiriusXM Satellite Radio (with free trial period); leather and wood steering wheel with tap up/tap down transmission controls; a capless fuel-filler; GM OnStar and a full set of 10 airbags.

 The three "Collections" add an industry-exclusive Safety Alert Seat, a rearview camera with dynamic guidelines, illuminating door handles, automatic windshield wipers, interior accent lighting (including LED spotlights with light pipes), vented and heated front seats, heated outboard rear seats, a heated steering wheel and 19-inch polished aluminum wheels.

 On top of all that, Premium models get swiveling Adaptive Forward Lighting, Bose 14-speaker surround sound audio, tri-zone automatic climate control, a reconfigurable 12.3-inch gauge cluster with selectable graphic displays (ranging from minimal to extensive information) and a color head-up display. The top-of-the-line Platinum piles on a full Opus leather interior with premium wood and a microfiber sueded headliner, plus 20-inch polished alloy wheels**.** The available Haldex all-wheel-drive uses an electronically controlled limited-slip differential to transfer torque both side to side and front to rear.

**Driving impressions**

 The 2013 XTS is powered by the same 304-hp direct-injected 3.6L V-6 that has proven both popular and capable in the CTS, SRX and other models, driving through a smooth Hydra-Matic six-speed automatic with tap-shift control. We sampled it in city traffic and on hilly, twisty two-lanes and found it less than thrilling but more than adequate. We also found the XTS both smooth riding and surprisingly athletic, partly thanks to its standard HiPer Strut front suspension, rear air springs and Magnetic Ride Control real-time damping, which “reads” the road every millisecond and can adjust shock rates in five milliseconds.

 We had mixed feelings about the industry-first Safety Alert Seat, which is part of a Driver Awareness Packagethat's standard on the Premium and Platinum and available on the Luxury Collection. It gently vibrates its left or right side to alert you that you're drifting out of your lane or there's a vehicle in your blind spot, but it is subtle, can be helpful, and can be switched off. That package also includes Lane Departure Warning, Forward Collision Alert, Side Blind Zone Alert and Rear Cross Traffic Alert, and it will be part of a soon-to-come even more comprehensive Driver Assist Package that will add Adaptive Cruise Control, front and rear automatic brakes and Automatic Collision Preparation.

 So Cadillac finally has a fine-looking, fine-driving large sedan loaded with state-of-the-art features, some unavailable elsewhere. And it is at least as good as upscale imports in every way, maybe better in some. When the all-new compact ATS arrives later this year to battle Audi's A4, BMW's 3 and Mercedes' C, Cadillac's product renaissance will be complete.

# # #