

Editorial: Terrifying glimpse into California's future

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the July 27, 2018, Sacramento Bee.*

As we face yet another summer of towering firestorms and overmatched first responders, it is becoming clear that we must radically improve emergency preparation in California. Summer has been a death march and July isn't even done.

On Thursday evening, the wind-driven Carr Fire rushed into residential neighborhoods in Redding, bringing a one-two punch of thick smoke and unpredictable "firenados" that overwhelmed firefighters.

This is climate change, for real and in real time. We were warned that the atmospheric buildup of man-made greenhouse gas would eventually be an existential threat.

Still, it is sobering to witness how swiftly scientists' worst predictions have come true, from the lethal heat wave gripping Japan to the record temperatures in Europe to the flames exploding near the Arctic Circle. And it is terrifying to watch as ideologues in the Trump administration block action on this gathering crisis.

Read the whole story

LTWC to show off animals at

open house

On Aug. 4 from 10:30am-3pm, Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care, which has been serving the South Lake Tahoe community for 40 years, will once again open its doors to the public with its annual open house.

This is the one day of the year that people other than volunteers with the nonprofit organization are permitted on the grounds where the wild birds and animals are rehabilitated.

LTWC volunteers will guide visitors, describe the reasons the various wildlife are at the center, and relay the prognosis for their eventual release back to the wild.

Renderings of the new facility off Al Tahoe Boulevard, which is under construction now, will be on display.

Retail items will be available, including Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care T-shirts and hats, posters, license plate holders and magnets along with LTWC and Li'l Smokey lapel pins.

Most of the wildlife will be on the "Bear TV." There are 18 cameras so people may watch them as they play in their little world. Each cage will have a monitor outside to better see the wildlife inside.

LTWC is a non-profit, tax-deductible organization and donations are welcomed.

The address is 1485 Cherry Hills Circle off of Elks Club Drive in Meyers.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- Truckee is sponsoring a candidate filing night on July 31 at 5:30pm at council chambers.
 - Learn how to handle wildlife encounters, whether it be while camping, hiking or in your backyard during an Aug. 9, 7pm presentation at Spooner Lake State Park with the Nevada Department of Wildlife's urban wildlife coordinator. This family-friendly event is free, and park entrance fees will be waived for attendees. Sign-ups are encouraged, but not required, by calling 775.749.5980.
 - Here is the El Dorado-Tahoe roadwork schedule from Caltrans for the week.
 - *Travel + Leisure* magazine readers voted Edgewood Lodge in Stateline the best resort hotel in the United States as well as the best resort hotel in the West.
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Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe



Gretel

Gretel is a very sweet shepherd who is about 16 months old. She is a happy, playful girl, and very smart.

She likes other dogs though right now she seems to prefer other girls. Gretel chases birds in the shelter's yard, so she may not be the best with cats.

Gretel is spayed, microchipped, tested for heart worm, and vaccinated. She is at the El Dorado County Animal Services shelter in Meyers, along with many other dogs and cats who are waiting for their new homes. Go to the Tahoe animal shelter's Facebook page to see photos and descriptions of all pets at the shelter.

Call 530.573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information on adopting a pet. For spay-neuter assistance for South Tahoe residents, go **online**.

– Karen Kuentz

Road Beat: 2018 Toyota RAV4 Adventure AWD



Toyota continues to impress with the RAV4 Adventure AWD.
Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

When I last wrote about the Toyota RAV4, it was still trailing the Honda CRV in the very popular compact SUV/CUV category, where the CRV outsold the RAV4 by about 5,000 units in 2016. Bear in mind the CRV was a total redesign for 2016 and the RAV4 was in its third year of its current generation. Fast forward about 15 months and the tables have turned despite the RAV4 now being in its sixth year of this current generation four. And those numbers are as recent as March when the RAV4 outsold the CRV by 3,000 units nearly outselling Toyota's new fabulous Camry, falling short by just 300 units.

So how does Toyota do it? By making a super competent and capable, properly sized good-looking rig that does it all. My test ride for the week was the AWD Adventure model which came with some cosmetic paint touches like the blacked-out hood center line and heavy duty rubberized floor mats.

Sized right at 184 inches long and 73 inches wide on a 105-inch wheelbase, the RAV4 sports a cavernous cargo capacity of over 73 cubic feet behind the first row and almost 40 cubes behind the second row of seats. It is a big compact CUV volume wise.

Besides the hybrid choice, there is only one powertrain, Toyota's 2.5L inline four bangers with DOHC and 16 valves pumping out 176 hp at 6,000 rpm and 172 pounds of twist at a low 4,100 rpm. It drives all four wheels via a six-speed torque converter auto cog swapper. Pretty conventional stuff. But it works well as it powers this RAV4 to 60 mph in a respectable 8.28 seconds. Passing numbers were equally capable with a 50-70 mph run taking 4.62 seconds and the same run up a steep (6-7 percent) grade slowing that time to 7.53 seconds. While not quite as good as the powerful hybrid version, it was marginally improved over my 2014 test which had numbers of 8.51, 4.57 and 7.73 seconds respectively. My hybrid test from a year ago had better numbers of 7.08, 4.09 and 5.95 seconds.



Specifications

Price \$ 32,990 all in

Engine

D0HC 16 valve Inline four-cylinder gasoline 176 hp @ 6,000 rpm
172 lb-ft of torque @ 4,100 rpm

Transmission

Six-speed automatic torque converter

Configuration

Transverse front mounted engine/AWD

Dimensions

Wheelbase 104.7 inches

Length 183.5 inches

Width 72.6 inches

Height 67.1 inches

Ground clearance 6.5 inches

Track (f/r) 61.4/61.4 inches

Weight 3,605 pounds

GVWR 4,640 pounds

Fuel capacity 15.9 gallons

Tow capacity 3,500 pounds

Cargo volume (rear seat down/up) 73.4/38.4 cubic feet

Wheels 7.5×18
steel/alloy/alloy

Tires P235/55×18

Turning circle 36.7 feet

Steering lock to lock 2.68 turns

Performance

0-60 mph 8.28 seconds

50-70 mph 4.62 seconds

50-70 mph uphill 7.53 seconds

Top speed Who cares?

Fuel Economy EPA rated at

22/28/25 mpg
city/highway/combined.
Expect 25 mpg overall in a
combination of all driving
and 32 mpg on the highway at
legal speeds.

Fuel economy as rated by the EPA test cycle is 22/28/25 city/highway/combined. Fuel economy was almost identical to my previous RAV4 with the same powertrain. This RAV4 averaged 32 mpg on a level highway at 70 mph and overall averaged between 24 and 25 mpg with no time spent on the highway except for the fuel economy run. Now this is where it gets interesting. The Hybrid RAV4 is rated at 34/30/32 and averaged 32 mpg overall and between 33-34 mpg on the highway with the big improvement coming in suburban driving, about 5-6 mpg. Not only did the hybrid perform better by a significant amount, get this, it cost about the same as this Adventure, stickering for an almost identical number, both about \$33 large.

Good handling is in the cards as the RAV4 has the credentials, 18 x 7.5-inch alloys, big 235/55 series tires, quick 2.68 lock to lock electric power steering rack, MacPherson struts up front and a double wishbone set up holding up the rear and stab bars at both ends. It devourers corners without a top-heavy feel, even with the high belt line and turn in is crisp. Handling is sporty with very good grip.

Ride quality is quite pleasant and the quiet is noticeable. Engine speed is a reasonably low 2,200 at 70 mph. There is no road, engine or wind noise. It has a ride like you would expect from a sporting sedan only it does much better on bigger bumps.

Headlights are very good in both low and high beam and auto high beam is standard, a great feature. Four-wheel disc brakes (front ventilated) are strong and of course all the acronyms are present with a complete compliment of Toyota Safety Sense.

Inside is a Toyota quality heavy duty cloth interior and the seats are comfortable. Rear seat legroom is spacious. Instrumentation is complete with a trip computer flanked by a speedo and tach. Sound system is fairly straight forward, no mouse to make you crazy. But there is one annoying issue with the instruments, they are hard to see unless it is night when they are backlit. Even with the panel lights on during the day, the panel is hard to read. Work on that Toyota.

As mentioned about, cargo space, shape and volume are huge. This ride would dangerous at a Lowe's or Home Depot.

Pricing for this Adventure AWD is \$28,400 plus the train from its Woodstock, Ontario, Canada, assembly plant. Among the few options one, Premium Packaging is a deal as it has an effective price of \$1,550 and you get some great goodies such as NAV, Smart key, power lift gate, trick audio, blind spot detection and so much more. It's a no brainer. The \$1,080 Cold Weather package plus some other odds and end brought the price of admission to \$32,990. Not bad for a fairly serious AWD CUV. Remember the hybrid version is about the same price and that becomes a no brainer.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.

Lakeside gambling on workers for future success

By Kathryn Reed

Lakeside Inn has long been the favorite casino for locals. Now it wants to be the preferred employer.

The hotel-casino **a couple years ago** had designs of re-creating itself so it would be a focal point when driving in from the east. Those plans have been shelved and instead the owners are focusing on the locals and not just the tourists.

Yes, physical improvements are under way that are designed to modernize the property and appeal to the guests, but there is also a renewed emphasis on the employees.

"We want to be the preferred employer," Stacy Noyes, president of Lakeside, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We want a happy staff who feels supported and are given the tools to do their job. Then the guests are rewarded and it's profitable for the business. When you forget about the staff no one wins."

She sent out a memo to workers at the start of the summer season outlining Lakeside's goals. In part it said, "In the past we have explored the possibility of redeveloping our site to a newer hotel and casino, but last year, turned our energy and focus toward growing our business. We spent many years saving our way to success after the economic downturn. Now it is time to invest and improve."

For the employees it means rewarding them with things that are meaningful to them. While wages were increased in 2015-16, that did not bring in more applicants. It is doing things like resurrecting the "blue bucks" program that had been disbanded in 2008 that workers like. This gives them money on each check that can be spent at the casino. This in turn is increasing the camaraderie among coworkers as they hang out together in their off time.

Studies show that happy employees are more productive employees. *Harvard Business Review* says, "Close work friendships boost employee satisfaction by 50 percent." Multiple studies show that people want autonomy at work, to be

respected and to have an employer with a social conscience.

Noyes said her managers meet regularly to talk about employees' environment, what they value and what is important to them.

Still, many positions go unfilled. Lakeside is not alone in having difficulty filling job openings. Practically every employer in the Tahoe basin-Truckee area is having a hard time finding workers. Lakeside, Harrah's and Harveys no longer test for marijuana, which was a concession to realizing so many people today are inhaling. Today's worker doesn't want to work nights or weekends. When there is a powder day they opt for the slopes and call in sick or are a no-show. Lack of affordable housing is another hurdle.

While workers may be different today, in many ways the work is the same as it has been for decades. The benefits are what can change.

At Lakeside there are 50 employees in food and beverage with J1 visas, and more in housekeeping. These are people from other countries.

"They are a Band-Aid. They don't replace the full-time, local who lives here," Noyes said.

As she works to hire more locals, the owners are also investing in the physical aspects of the business. Consultants have been hired to "make our casino floor more modern and attractive and our marketing promotion more contemporary and fun for our guests." Technology had been improved, heating and cooling systems upgraded, new carpet installed. The parking lot will be resealed; a new roof is on the to-do list.

Noyes isn't releasing the dollar figure being invested.

Her memo said, "The goal with the investment in our buildings, property and technology is to improve our cash flow. As we

being operating at a higher level, we will then be able to reward you, the staff for supporting Lakeside thought the challenging years.”

Opinion: Defending USFS firefighting

By Vicki Christiansen

People sometimes tell me that the U.S. Forest Service isn't aggressive enough in fighting fires. As a wildland fire professional with more than 30 years of experience, I disagree.

Historically, wildland fire shaped the American landscape. Fires were once common, revitalizing and reinvigorating forests and grasslands. American Indians used fire for purposes ranging from shaping habitats for desired species to reducing fuels to protect communities.

Today, our nation has more than a billion acres of vegetated landscapes, most naturally adapted to periodic wildfire. In a backcountry area such as a wilderness, we might decide to monitor and manage a fire, using it as a land management tool to reduce hazardous fuels and restore fire's natural ecological role to the landscape. Our policy is to use every tool we have to improve landscape conditions, evaluating and managing the risks in conjunction with our state and other partners. Instead of waging a losing war on wildfire, we are learning to live with fire.

Still, if a fire threatens lives, homes, property or natural resources, we put it out as fast as we can at the least

possible cost. We make that decision while the fire is still small, and our rate of suppression success is phenomenal: up to 98 percent. These fires number about 7,000 per year nationwide.

Two to 3 percent of the fires we fight escape our control. Some of them become huge conflagrations driven by winds through tinder-dry fuels. Such fires are impossible to stop until weather or fuel conditions change. They are bona fide natural disasters. So we evacuate areas at risk and use special techniques to steer the fires around homes and other points of value as best we can. And we put the fires out as soon as we can.

The Forest Service once tried to put out all fires, but we wasted taxpayer dollars by attacking backcountry fires where nothing was at risk but the lives of the firefighters themselves, some of whom paid the ultimate price. Today, we will commit firefighters only under conditions where firefighters can actually succeed in protecting important values at risk. The decisions we make are based on the safety of our firefighters: With our can-do culture, we expect our responders to fight fires aggressively, but we neither expect nor allow firefighters to risk their lives attempting the improbable.

Whether a fire is in the remote backcountry or close to homes, safety is our highest priority. No home is worth a human life. Any other policy would be unconscionable, irresponsible and unacceptable to the people we serve.

Vicki Christiansen is the interim chief of the U.S. Forest Service.

What's the value of a clean beach?

By Timothy Haab, *The Conversation*

Millions of Americans head outdoors in the summer, whether for a day at a nearby lake or a monthlong road trip. For environmental economists like me, decisions by vacationers and outdoor recreators offer clues to a challenging puzzle: estimating what environmental resources are worth.

In 1981 President Ronald Reagan issued an executive order that required federal agencies to weigh the costs and benefits of proposed major new regulations, and in most cases to adopt them only if the benefits to society outweighed the costs. Reagan's order was intended to promote environmental improvements without overburdening economic growth.

Cost-benefit analysis has been so successful as a tool for policy analysis that every administration since Reagan has endorsed using it. However, it requires measuring benefits that are not "priced" in typical markets. Fortunately, putting a price on non-market environmental outcomes, such as safer drinking water and fewer deaths from exposure to dirty air, has proved to be possible, and highly valuable. These estimates help to make the case for actions such as cleaning up beaches and protecting scenic areas as parks.

What's it worth to you?

According to a preliminary estimate from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, outdoor recreation adds \$373 billion to the U.S. economy yearly. That's 2 percent of our annual gross domestic product – more than agriculture, mining or utilities, and approaching the economic contribution of national defense.

Most policymakers and local communities measure the economic

value of outdoor recreation through estimates like this, which calculate how much money it adds to local economies through direct expenditures. For example, vacationers rent hotel rooms, and their spending pays employee salaries and funds local investments through hotel taxes. Visitors to national parks pay entrance fees for park upkeep, and augment local economies through employee wages and other expenditures on food and services around the park.

But recreation decisions also reveal the value that people place on the environment itself. Outdoor destinations provide services, such as opportunities to swim or hike in unspoiled settings. If high levels of harmful bacteria close a beach I was planning to visit, I may choose to drive a longer distance to a beach with clean water. By quantifying such increases in time and out-of-pocket expenditures, economists can measure people's willingness to pay for changes in environmental quality.

Funding beach cleanups

In one recent study, I worked with other researchers to estimate increased travel and time expenditures that people incurred to avoid trash and debris on 31 Southern California beaches. No one wants to go to a beach littered with hypodermic needles, plastic bottles and discarded fishing nets. But cleaning up marine debris is expensive, and it is hard for communities to recover the costs, particularly for public beaches with open access. Understanding the value of cleaner beaches can help build support for funding trash collection.

To measure the amount of debris, we hired workers to walk the beaches tallying quantities of trash. Then we surveyed Southern California residents about how often and where they went to the beach, which enabled us to correlate numbers of visitors at each beach with quantities of debris. Finally, using travel time and expenses for each visitor to visit each

beach, we modeled the relationship between where they chose to go to the beach, how much they spent to get there, and the cleanliness of the beach.

Using this model, we found that visitors to these beaches would be willing to incur \$12.91 in additional costs per trip if each of the beaches had 25 percent less debris. This translated into a total willingness to pay \$29.5 million for action to reduce marine debris by 25 percent on these beaches.

Reducing harmful algal blooms in Lake Erie

Trash on beaches is mainly an aesthetic nuisance, but some resource problems are more severe. For example, warm weather often triggers harmful algal blooms in Lake Erie's western basin. These outbreaks, which are caused by agricultural and urban phosphorous pollution, contain freshwater toxins that are dangerous to humans and animals. They can trigger beach closures, and sometimes even drinking water bans.

Using similar techniques to the California study, I worked with another group of economists to estimate the economic value of reducing outbreaks of harmful algal blooms in Lake Erie. To model the relationship between recreation and water quality, we combined satellite data on harmful algal outbreaks in the lake in the summer of 2016 with visit patterns from a survey of Lake Erie visitors. Once again, we used travel time to each visited site and out-of-pocket expenditures to get there to represent the price of a trip. Then we correlated the price of a trip with the location of the visit and the presence of harmful algal blooms.

Our results showed that reducing these outbreaks through a 40 percent reduction in phosphorous runoff to the Lake Erie Basin would save swimmers, boaters and fishermen \$800,000 to \$970,000 per year by reducing the need for them to travel extra distance to avoid algal blooms.

Just this spring, Ohio declared the western Lake Erie

watershed to be “impaired” by algal blooms, meaning it does not meet federal water quality standards. Our study provides one measurement of Ohio residents’ willingness to pay for a cleaner lake.

Avoiding a major oil spill

People can choose different destinations to avoid dirty beaches or algae outbreaks. But in the case of large-scale environmental disasters, such as the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, vacationers are more likely to cancel their trips altogether.

In a study using survey data on canceled vacation trips to Northwest Florida in the year following the BP oil spill, I worked with other economists to estimate the decrease in economic value to Northwest Florida coastal towns. We found that the spill caused a 9 percent drop in trips to Northwest Florida beaches, causing total economic losses of \$252 million to \$332 million across the Florida panhandle. Those losses represent decisions to spend vacation time and money in places where there was less risk of encountering polluted beaches.

The Gulf coast stretches from western Florida to Texas and has numerous beaches and fishing towns, so this sum is probably just a small fraction of economic harm caused by the spill due to canceled travel.

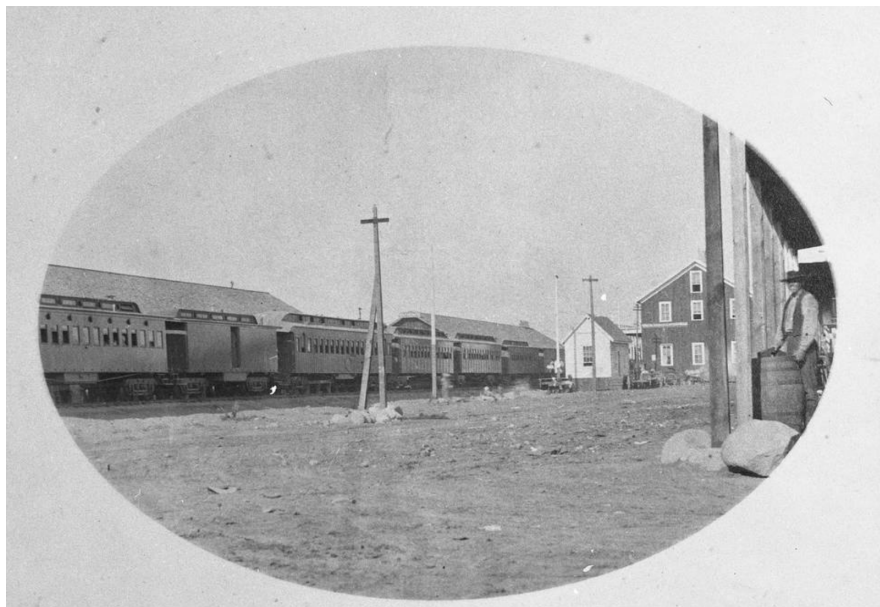
The value of pricing nature

Contrary to some environmentalists’ fears, putting a price on natural resources has encouraged decision-makers to recognize that natural capital is finite. Before, it was easy to assume that they were free to exploit. Now economic valuation research can help decision makers answer questions such as how much damage the BP spill did to natural resources, and whether the benefits of the EPA’s Acid Rain Program exceeded the costs. Assigning dollar values to natural resources makes it possible to use the power of markets to design policies and

regulations that benefit all.

Timothy Haab is a professor of environmental economics, the Ohio State University.

Historical railroad car finds new life in N. Nev.



The Central Pacific's directors car, far left, now known as V&T Coach No. 17, is seen in Reno on June 9, 1870. Photo/Nevada State Railroad

By John M. Glionna, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY — Wendell Huffman recalls the first time he saw the old train passenger car he considers one of the most significant artifacts in American railroad history.

Known as Coach 17, it was sitting in a storage shed at the

Nevada State Railroad Museum, collecting dust as it had once picked up passengers. It was a cruel twist of fate for this venerable vehicle, once the very symbol of streamlined movement, to become so stationary and so forgotten.

Huffman, then a museum volunteer, had read about the train car and knew of its freighted history. In its infancy, the private coach had ferried officials from the Central Pacific Railroad to Promontory, Utah, where they met their business brethren from the Union Pacific on May 10, 1869.

Read the whole story

Road Beat: 2018 Acura RLX a Tahoe car with AWD



The 2018 Acura RLX sport hybrid SH-AWD delivers the goods.
Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Acura's RLX has been in production for about four years, entering the 2018 model year with a significant face lift giving it an all-new model look. A new front end, hood, sheet metal and rear end has given it a new life and certainly an improved appearance. Most of the mechanicals remain the same and that is all good.

This is my second go round with an AWD Acura, the first being a new generation 2018 TLX SH-AWD super sedan from about a year ago, which I gave nearly unlimited accolades for its performance, handling, ride, fuel economy and value (bang for the buck quotient). RLX ups the anti with more performance, a smoother and quieter ride without giving up much in handling and size.

RLX is still a mid-sized ride, a big mid-size if you will at

198-inches-long with a beam of 74 inches on a 112-inch wheelbase. It's total interior volume in the Hybrid edition is 114 cubic feet, which falls in the middle of the EPA mid-size classification. It's styling is understated with a much-improved mesh grille, new trick jeweled headlights and a sculptured hood with sharply raised left and right power bulges. It's the design's best feature.

Under that trick hood resides Acura's 3.5L direct injected, SOHC, 24 valve VTEC V-6 that cranks out 310 hp at a high 6,500 rpm and 273 pounds of twist at 4,700 rpm. Interestingly, the numbers are almost identical for the non-hybrid model except of a pound of torque. But the hybrid gets the addition of three electric motors, one 47 hp unit integrated into the seven speed DCT automated manual tranny and two 36 hp motors connected to each rear axle which allows electric motor torque vectoring to each respective rear axle half-shaft. In fact, the rear wheels are electrically powered only. Total vehicle torque is 341 pounds. No power from the V-6 is sent to the rear wheels, hence no center drive shaft.

However, total hp rating for the RLX is rated at 377 as the 1.3 kWh, 66-pound L-I battery pack behind the rear seat limits total hp because of battery output is limited to 67 hp. Don't fret as this RLX offers World Class performance knocking off a 0-60 mph time in an average of 5.15 seconds. It will scamper from 50-70 mph in an extremely quick time of 2.60 seconds and that time only slows to 3.38 seconds up a 6-7 percent grade. Those passing numbers correspond to a low five second vehicle so there is no question the RLX has World Class performance.



Specifications

Price \$62,865 all in.

Engine

3.5L DOHC, 24 valve, direct injected VTEC V-6 310 hp @ 6,500 rpm

273 lb.-ft. of torque @ 4,700 rpm

Three electric motors: Front 47 hp @ 3,000 rpm

109 lb.-ft. of torque @ 500-2,000 rpm

Rear (X2) 36 hp @ 4,000 rpm

54 lb.-ft. @ 0-2,000 rpm

Battery

Lithium-ion 1.3 kWh

Transmission

Seven-speed dual clutch automated manual

Configuration

Transverse mounted front engine/front wheel drive/two 36 hp electric motors drive rear wheels

Dimensions

Wheelbase 112.2 inches

Length 198.1 inches

Width 74.4 inches

Height 57.7 inches

Ground clearance 4.5 inches
Track (f/r) 64.3/64.2 inches
Fuel capacity 15.1 gallons
Trunk capacity 12 cubic feet
Passenger cabin volume 102.1
cubic feet
Turning circle 40.5 feet
Wheels 19X8 inch alloys
Tires 245/40X19
Weight 4,380 pounds
Weight distribution (f/r)
57/43 percent

Performance

0-60 mph 5.15 seconds
50-70 mph 2.60 seconds
50-70 mph uphill 3.38
seconds
Top speed way faster than
sanity on public roads.
Fuel economy EPA rated
28/29/28 mpg
city/highway/combined.
Expect 31 mpg on the highway
at legal speeds, 27-28 mpg
in rural and suburban
driving.

Throttle response is instantaneous, especially during part throttle operation.

Fuel economy as a hybrid should be improved and it is. But it demonstrates that hybrids main advantage is in city stop and go driving. EPA numbers are 28/29/28 mpg city/highway/combined. The conventional RLX model with the same 310 hp V-6 driving the front wheels only via a 10-speed torque converter automatic has EPA numbers of 20/29/23 mpg. In other words, in the city cycle the hybrid fuel economy

improves by eight mpg, but zero mpg in the highway cycle, demonstrating there is no highway benefit. At times in a 250-mile round trip with 95 percent on Interstate 80 to the Bay Area the RLX hybrid averaged 31 mpg and many times in heavy traffic, where the hybrid operated electric only up to about 58 mph for stints of perhaps a mile, but perhaps the extra 400 pounds of curb weight (a portly 4,380 pounds), reduces any highway benefit. In my 200-mile Carson City round trip, the RLX averaged 31.1 mpg and overall in 600 miles the RLX returned 28.2 mpg. The Hybrid picks up in mixed driving an estimated 3-4 mpg plus a huge performance advantage and the security of AWD.

One drawback for the hybrid version is a reduction in fuel tank size from 18.5 gallons to a smallish 15.1 gallons. If the average highway fuel economy was 35-40 mpg, ok, but not with a highway mileage of 31 mpg. It means a max range of about 450 miles until you are pushing.

But in comparison, the smaller Acura TLX SH-AWD with a normally aspirated 290 hp version of the Acura 3.5L V-6 actually returned about five more mpg on the highway but an mpg less overall at 27 mpg while offering almost the same level of performance with 0-60 mph and 50-70 mph times of 5.43/3.00/4.09 seconds respectively at a savings of about \$15,000 less. It doesn't deliver, however, quite the comfort and quiet of the RLX which is more of a pure luxo car.

Speaking of rides, this RLX delivers quiet and smoothness of the best luxo rides. It is exceptionally quiet and the ride is an excellent compromise of soft and sharp handling demonstrating a special softness and very tight handling when necessary, especially in sports mode. It has superb creds, state of the art independent suspension, a quick electric power steering rack, a wide track of 64 inches and 19X8 inch alloys shod with meaty 245/40 series high performance tires. The only knock is a wide 40.5 foot turning circle.

RLX does the twisties with cornering power and confidence that even the ham-fisted driver will think himself a pro. While it weighs in at over two tons and 400 pounds more than the standard RLX, weight distribution is improved from 61/39 percent front to rear to an improved 57/43 percent in the hybrid. Agile handling is relatively flat and tight, holding its line as if guided by rails. It does have Agile Handling Assist standard which helps correct understeer and oversteer by braking, usually an inside tire.

Safety means all the bells and whistles, lane departure warning and assist and some more. A 360 degree display and heads up display are added pluses. Headlights are spectacular low and high beam.

Inside is the best Acura interior with soft leather and soft touch everywhere. Seats are the best encountered in any Acura with long haul backside comfort and rear leg room is huge. Instruments include a big tach and speedo with an information/trip computer. Not as bad as a Lexus, but the radio system is still a bit cumbersome to use as there are two screens involved, one touch and one not. Its confusing, but I am sure after a week or two it would become second nature. While there is no mouse, the outer control ring was still a bit difficult.

Trunk capacity in the hybrid is also 20 percent smaller than the conventional RLX at 12 cubic feet.

Pricing starts and ends at \$62,865 including \$965 for the luxo suite for the boat accommodations from Japan. There are no factory options, everything you need and then some is standard. It's a great luxury/sporty ride.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.