



CREATIVE SYNDICATE

The XTS is sold in three trim levels with front- or all-wheel drive, XTS starting prices range from \$44,995 to \$61,305.

The Cadillac XTS kicked my butt — and I laughed.

Really. It has a built-in butt kicker as a safety feature. First it was the right bun, then the left, and then both got a good shaking. It's an unnerving event the first time it happens, but it's a smart safety feature to get the driver's attention.

In this case, Cadillac's Safety Alert Seat alerts to potential entanglements from the side, front and rear. The system, called "directional tactile sensation," vibrates the seat bottom on the left or right sides or both when danger is detected front and rear. Once you are accustomed to them, the seat-bottom vibrations are the least intrusive and most helpful of these driverassist systems. The seat alert is part of the Driver Assistance package, which includes radarbased adaptive cruise control, automatic collision preparation and automatic braking systems. There are layers of technology applied to this car. Most are friendly.

The XTS is the largest Cadillac now offered, replacing the DTS and STS. It shares architecture with the Buick LaCrosse and 2014 Chevrolet Impala. It is comparable in size mainly to the Audi A6, BMW 5-Series and Mercedes-Benz E-Class.

But the XTS is about nine inches longer than most in that group and a couple inches taller. The cabin is roomy — 40.1 inches of headroom (with the ultraview sunroof), 40 inches of rear legroom and an 18 cubic-foot trunk. But a tall transmission tunnel restricts rear-center legroom,

so this is still fourplus- one seating.

There's a shifter on the console and a commanding view of the road. The interior is contemporary, even striking, with electricpurple stitching in the black leather dash top and upholstery, part of the Platinum collection.

But among the real wood trim and full leather is still too much Chevrolet-grade plastics in the lower areas of the interior. And as dramatic as the ultraviolet roof appears, the open sunroof isn't comfortable much above 40 mph. Sold in three trim levels with rear- or all-wheel drive, starting prices range from about \$45,000 (\$51,835 for AWD) to \$61,305.

The loaded test car was \$62,300 with just one option for the gorgeous Red Tintcoat paint (\$995).

Warranty coverage is also significant, which will be inviting to returning owners. Among the coverage are 4-years/50,000- miles of free scheduled maintenance. The only engine-transmission package is a 304-horsepower, direct-injection, 3.6-liter V-6 (264 foot-pounds of torque at 5,200 rpm) and a six-speed automatic transmission with sport-manual mode. The power is adequate, but another 50- horsepower would make a more demonstrative first impression, particularly with AWD.

Throttle response seems focused on fuel economy, which is competitive for a 4,200- pound car: 17 mpg city and 28 highway (17/26 AWD) on regular unleaded.

But put this big Caddy on a curvy road and the drive experience is more BMW than Mercedes or Lexus. All-wheel drive models have an electronic limited-slip differential that keeps traction flowing front-to-rear and side-to-side as needed.

All models use Magnetic Ride Control, which electronically and instantly adjusts suspension stiffness. Hi-Per front struts help keep the tires planted and control torque-steer on hard acceleration. But there still is unsettling body heave when rolling over speed bumps or pulling into angled driveways.

Braking is confident from a Brembo system at the front with 13.6-inch vented discs and vented 12.4-inch discs rear. Nicely finished calipers can be seen behind 19- or 20-inch alloy wheels.

There is a "reconfigurable" electronic gauge display and touch-sensitive controls for all cabin functions. It is part of the Cadillac User Experience — CUE — to set individual preferences, from music, voice recognition and more.

There isn't a knob or external switch to be found on the center instrument-panel display, which will be new school for many, though it is familiar from smartphones and tablets. But the function is not entirely intuitive. When struggling, press the voice-control button for help from friendly female voice. Then you can yell at her, not your passenger.

There also are simpler electronic enhancements, such as the keyless access (with a button on the door handle to activate locking), push-button start, electric parking brake and multiple power adjustments for both front seats. There is much artistic style and creativity to this Caddy, making it unique as an American expression of comfort, convenience and drivability.

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