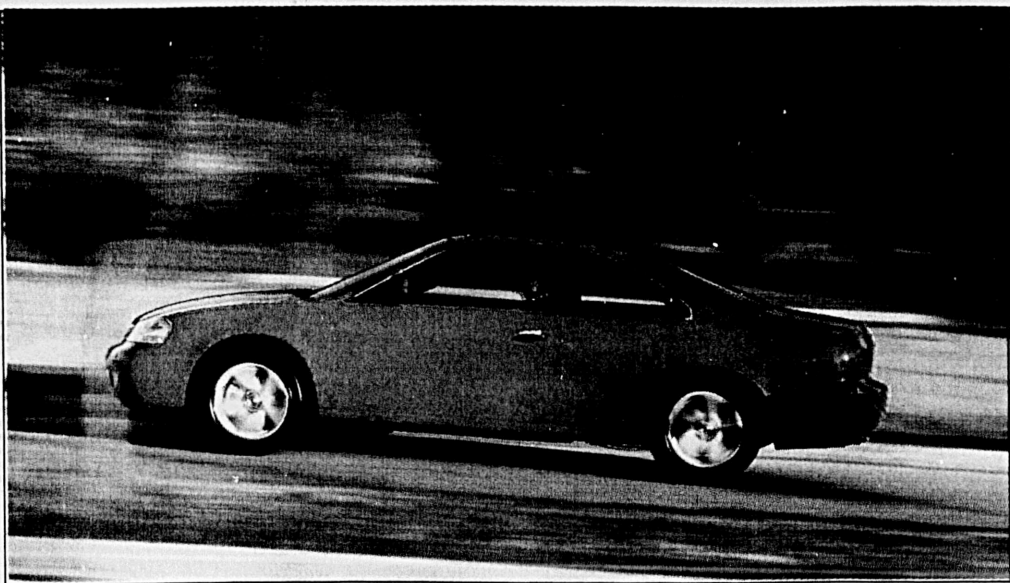


Motoring Trends



The Acura 3.23 CL Type S has a slightly cab-forward design that imparts a muscular elegance to this sporty coupe.

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Second generation Acura looks a lot like a classic

by DOUG SWEET
 Southam Newspapers

MONTREAL - It usually takes a while to make your mark. With the possible exception of teenage millionaire athletes, most notable and lasting accomplishments are the product of years of talent, trial and error, hard work, risks and, often, luck.

It's called the long haul. And it means, in the automotive world, that you just can't create a new brand overnight and expect instant consumer recognition, let alone loyalty.

You recognize a Mercedes-Benz instantly today, because its distinctive appearance and its easily recognizable logo/badge have been that way forever.

But as model year builds upon model year, and as the designers take existing shapes and modify and resculpt them, gradually a distinctive style, those essential constants, will emerge.

The second-generation version of the Acura CL is a case in point.

This is the sporty coupe that is the kissing cousin of the more sedate Acura TL, which itself, at a little more than \$35,000, remains one of the great automotive buys out there.

In its first incarnation, the CL offered some rather distinctive rear-end styling, with a dramatic, swept-away look. For some reason, it reminded me a bit of the Studebaker Avanti, only backward.

In the latest CL, some of that design drama has been toned down a bit, but a distinctive line — that first showed up with the precociously named Acura Legend along the car's rear quarter — has been retained. And the slightly cab-forward design, which imparts a muscular elegance enhanced by the massive 17-inch tires (S-model only), is also reminiscent of earlier Acuras.

The fundamentals are beginning to show. This car is beginning to take on the trappings of a classic.

There are two engines available in the CL line, both V-6s of 3.2 litres displacement, both assisted by Honda's nearly ubiquitous VTEC variable valve-timing system that operates as if there were a "hot cam" available over a certain rpm level.

Both powerplants are smooth and powerful, proving that even Honda engineers understand the value of torque in real-world driving conditions.

The base engine, which is the same as that offered in the 3.2 TL, produces 225 horsepower at 5,600 rpm and 216 pounds-feet of torque at 4,700 rpm.

But the engine in the S model CL delivers an impressive 260 horsepower at 6,100 rpm and 232 pounds-feet of torque in the range between 3,500 and 5,500 rpm.

Beetle an emotional buy

by ROB MACGREGOR
 and JEREMY CATO
 Southam Newspapers

VANCOUVER - Dear Car Guys: AutoTalk, what a great idea! I'm sure he doesn't remember me, but I once donated a (Toyota) Tercel to Rob's department at BCIT (nobody else would take it).

Here's my question: I'm thinking about buying a VW (Volkswagen) New Beetle, but I'm not sure about the availability of parts and qualified mechanics. What can you tell me?

- Maureen

Dear Maureen:

Jeremy: Maureen sounds like she's expecting trouble and she hasn't even bought the Beetle, yet? Kinda looking at the glass half-empty, don't you think, Rob?

Rob: That's odd, because the Tercel she donated was in pretty good shape when we got it! It's clear to me she takes care of her cars. But anyway, we need to focus and not fool around here, because if we treat Maureen right, I might be looking at another donation down the road. Something for the students to practice on!

Jeremy: So let's start with what we know about Beetle quality. That's an indication of how often she's going to need a qualified mechanic — uh, technician, I mean.

Rob: Exactly. We ARE technicians. The days of grease monkeys are over. I'd like to remind you that there's more computing power in the average new car than there was managing the

moon launch of Apollo 13. A top notch technician today is almost doing rocket science. So yes, you may address me as Dr. MacGregor — the Car Doctor.

Jeremy: Oh, gimme a break! All that physics you've studied hasn't helped the trajectory of your golf ball one bit. That slice is alive and well. And you can't predict it. Anyway, as for quality, in the most recent J.D. Power & Associates study of initial quality "the number of owner reported problems in the first 90 days" the Beetle came in just below average with a score of 172. The industry average was 154. So overall quality was okay, but not great.

Rob: Study, schmuddy. A car like this is bought more on emotion than fact. And the Beetle is a real heart-grabber. That's what it's selling on. Also, I haven't seen anything yet that indicates any major concerns with the New Beetle. As for mechanics...

Jeremy: Technicians, Rob, technicians.

Rob: Right! Uh, where was I? Oh, mechanics...uh, technicians. There's no trouble finding qualified technicians to work on the Beetle. It's really just a VW Golf with a great looking body and Golfs have been around forever. So any qualified technician can work on a New Beetle. Except warranty repairs. They need to be done at a VW dealer. That way they're recorded with the manufacturer.

Parts are available from any good or big supplier and of course, the dealers have access to, in most cases, 24-hour delivery from anywhere in the world.

A number of tweaks, including a higher compression ratio and a freer-flowing exhaust system, are responsible for the extra ponies obtained from what is essentially the same engine.

Much as I would love to try that S-version engine with a five-speed manual gearbox, I must grudgingly admit that the five-speed, sequential-shifting automatic transmission (the only gearbox available in both the CL and TL) is an utter delight.

You can play with this slush box three ways: leave it in D5 and let it do all the work all by itself, which it does smoothly and almost quickly enough; use the sequential slot to flip up and down the gears the way you would on a motorcycle or in a Formula One racer; or grab the ergonomically friendly leather shift knob and slide the lever through the gates for each different gear.

Any way you do it, the car responds eagerly, delivering a pleasant surge of acceleration when the revs are in the heart of the power curve and a delightful combination of scream and moan from the engine. For once, thank heaven, Honda didn't dial out all the exhaust noise.

The ease with which this car leaps ahead on the highway makes it far too easy to attract the attention of the Surete, now that they're paying attention again.

Our test vehicle had a six-disc, in-dash CD player to go with a good-quality sound system, there was an electric sunroof and the usual assortment of power accessories.

And, wonder of wonders, the front seats actually kept their seat-back angles after they'd been flipped forward to allow access to the rear.

In fact, those seats moved forward and back electrically when the seat back was tilted forward or back.

Praise be.

Other differences between the base-model CL and the Type S include a vehicle stability control system on the latter, which is a little more sophisticated than the standard-issue traction-control system.

The Type S gets perforated leather seating surfaces, a dark simulated woodgrain trim, and the larger wheels (the base-model CL has 16-inch rubber).

At \$40,000, it's a bit difficult to describe the CL Type S as a "bargain" in the sense that the \$36,000 TL is, but it does provide a lot of bang for the buck, not only in terms of performance and taut handling, but in creature comforts as well.



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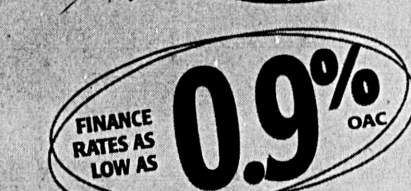


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