



It all begins with a wild set of headlights.

2014 ACURA

RLX

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“**T**akaburi” is the word Acura’s project leader Yousuke Sekino uses in describing the 2014 RLX sedan. It means “exhilarating” in Japanese and if any car in Honda’s premium division fits that description, this is it.

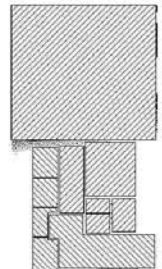
Acura has been noticeably bereft of a truly top-level flagship

model with takaburi for some time. The long-in-the-tooth RL sedan that resembled a slightly enlarged Accord from two generations ago never really cut it with those seeking flash and dash.

The replacement RLX, arriving by early spring, likely won’t pry anyone from their status-mobiles models displaying three-pointed stars, interconnected rings or airplane-propeller logos. But at least Acura offers some compelling reasons for having the valet gang park one for you in its assigned stall.

The first thing you notice about

the RLX is its handsome sheet-metal. The car’s Honda roots are definitely showing, but it easily beats the rest of Acura’s sedan fleet when it comes to appearance. Perhaps surprisingly, its overall dimensions — length, width and height — differ only slightly from the RL. However, a two-inch stretch between the front and rear wheels and both axles (in



addition to an equal reduction in the length of the snout) contributes to a significant visual impact. The RLX's more aggressively styled front fenders, smoothed-out grille and unique multi-reflector headlight pods also contribute to a distinctly premium look.

Much of the between-the-wheels increase gives the RLX an impressive amount of rear-seat legroom that puts its key Japanese and German competitors to shame. The rest of the interior also impresses, with an elegant dashboard and control-panel layout, inviting and supportive leather-covered seats and a floor console that can be opened from the driver, or passenger's side. The console features an electric parking brake (replacing the traditional handle) plus a hold feature that keeps the car from rolling back when stopped on an incline (helpful when switching to the gas pedal from the brake pedal when you're ready to take off).

The rigid body structure uses considerable amounts of high-strength steel that, combined with numerous aluminum body panels, helps keep the car below the 4,000-pound mark (roughly 100 pounds lighter than the RL).

The RLX clings to its engine roots by using a 310-horsepower 3.5-liter V6 that produces 272 pound-feet of torque. By comparison, the RL's 3.7-liter V6 made 300 horsepower and 271 pound-feet of torque. The engine prefers premium fuel, but the RLX is rated at 20 mpg in the city and 31 on the highway, which is up impressively from the RL's 16/22 rating. The sole transmission choice is a six-speed automatic with paddle-shift controls.

On the road and on the track at California's Sonoma Raceway (formerly Infineon), the new V6 gives the quiet-riding RLX plenty of spunk, although the engine sounds from the Mercedes-Benz E350 and BMW 5-series that Acura offered up for comparison testing were more appealing. Track driving also revealed the strengths of Acura's Precision All-Wheel Steer system. This standard technology reacts to steering and braking inputs for added control. When cornering,

the rear wheels point slightly in the direction of the turn, thus reducing the front-wheel-drive's tendency to continue in a straight line even with the steering wheel turned (called understeer). During braking, however, both rear wheels are automatically angled toward the center of the car for maximum control. Although not obvious in flat-out driving, the RLX certainly feels poised and precise in tight turns and provides a no-sweat experience when braking at high speeds.

The RLX arrives with an abundance of people-pampering content, but you will need to shell out more than the \$50,000 base price to add a number of collision-mitigating features, the navigation system, premium leather package and your choice of two high-end audio systems.

The RLX is a giant leap forward for Acura and is comparable to more established luxury brands in style and content, with more than a smidgen of takaburi tossed in for good measure.

What you should know 2014 Acura RLX

Type	Four-door, front-wheel-drive mid-luxury sedan
Engines (hp)	3.5-liter SOHC V6 (310)
Transmission	Six-speed automatic with paddle-shift controls
Market position	The RLX is the badly needed ingredient in Acura's vehicle mix that provides a choice for buyers who like the brand, but want something a bit bigger, more luxurious and more technically proficient than the TL sedan.
Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New RLX flagship puts Acura squarely back in the luxury-automobile game. • Attractive styling inside and out conveys premium look, feel. • Dimensionally similar to the outgoing RL, but with shorter overhangs. • All-wheel-steering helps offset front-wheel-drive drawbacks. • Gas-electric hybrid RLX with all-wheel-drive will arrive by year-end.
Safety	Front airbags; side-impact airbags; side-curtain airbags; driver-side knee airbag; anti-lock brakes; traction control; stability control.
MPG (city/hwy):	20/31
Base price (incl. destination):	\$50,000

BY COMPARISON

Lexus GS	Audi A6	BMW 5-series
<p>Base price: \$48,000</p> <p>Sharp-looking sedan gets high marks for sporty handling and Teutonic flavor.</p>	<p>Base price: \$43,000</p> <p>Well-priced A4-based car offers engine choices from 211 to 420 horses.</p>	<p>Base price: \$48,000</p> <p>Leader of the pack for its sports car reflexes and its 560-hp M5 option.</p>
		