

ONE- TRICK ROLLER

RATHER THAN saying what it is, the people of Cadillac are quick to note all the things the new 2013 Cadillac XTS is not. It's not their flagship; it's not a replacement for the DTS or the STS; it's not directly competing with any German luxury brand; and, most of all, the car is not finished, even though it will be going on sale in the fourth quarter of this year. I'll address all the above shortly, but first it's my duty to tell you what the XTS is. Namely, a surprisingly good, big car, if not a bit of a head-scratcher. Due to that whole bankruptcy thing, the XTS is the first new product Cadillac has launched in three years. That's nearly brandicide when you're dealing in a highly emotional

auto segment like luxury. And, due to the XTS initially being planned back in 2006, in the bad old days of GM, this new Cadillac shares a platform—Epsilon II, to be precise—with the Buick LaCrosse and the upcoming Chevrolet Impala. Then the whole project was put on hold for most of 2009. So, even though the XTS was conceived back in 2006, the car is still a bit of a rush job, coming to market both sooner and later than it should.

The car's exterior design is strong, despite certain "hard point" limitations it inherited from Buick. For example, the large, nearly swaggering Cadillac 16 Concept-like front end is cheated by a dash-to-axle ratio that just screams



A GOOD JOB ON A CAR THEY
NEVER SHOULD HAVE BUILT

● Words *Jonny Lieberman*

(First Drive) 2013 Cadillac XTS



front drive. Look at the puny amount of metal between the front wheel cut and the door. It's nearly identical to that of an Accord or a Passat. While all-wheel drive is available on three of the four XTS trim levels, the car is clearly, visibly based on FWD architecture.

I've long criticized Cadillacs for not being as luxurious on the inside as the German and (some of the) Japanese competition. No longer. Nearly every surface is made of high-quality, soft-touch materials—those that aren't are either wood or metal. And it actually

looks designed. When you drop the \$60K required to get into the XTS Platinum, you get trimmings like a perforated leather dashboard with purple contrast stitching, and a roof swathed in GM's most excellent faux-Alcantara, the same super-high-quality stuff that's wrapped around the steering wheel and shift knob in the CTS-V. It's almost impossible to overstate how deluxe the XTS' interior is.

Then there's CUE, Cadillac's new, much-needed, all-in-one iPad-like radio and navigation interface. I must mention that the cars I drove were all



BABY ME Sporting as much poshness as its high-end competitors, the XTS treats occupants to luxury and a cossetting ride. But for now, Cadillac offers only one body style, engine, and transmission.

(First Drive) 2013 Cadillac XTS



preproduction units and final CUE tuning might change. I give the system a B. It's not as good as BMW's iDrive or even Ford's always evolving Sync. The screen is dark, with an almost black background. Cadillac claims that's the way the CUE engineers wanted it to appear. When you're looking at a map, it's almost ominous. As for the haptic controls, there's a very minor—but annoying—delay. Your initial reaction is that your touch didn't register, so you tap it twice, but the screen has already changed and now you've selected something you didn't want, and now you're looking for a back button, which very well may have moved across the screen.

Still, CUE is a good solution to the in-car tech overload problem, and the voice commands work well. One bright spot: If the XTS detects someone is in the passenger seat (by using the already-in-place sensor for the airbag), CUE lets you enter addresses while the car is moving. *Hallelujah!* And it is a big screen at 8 inches, though smaller than BMW's latest. The instruments are also digital and configurable in multiple ways, though only when the vehicle is stationary.

When I asked why Cadillac stuck with a six-speed transmission when every single car it's competing with has more gears,

Caddy's answer was, "Just wait." When I asked if we'd see another engine beside the direct-injected, 3.6-liter V-6 with 304 hp and 264 lb-ft of torque, I was told, "Just wait." Will there be some sort of hybrid version? "Just wait." And what about other body styles? "Just wait." And while not available initially, the XTS will eventually come with a whole host of active safety features, like a driver alertness aid, radar cruise control, automatic braking, and a system that prepares the car for an impending collision.

The XTS, like the CTS-V, has GM's Magnetic Ride Control. I thought about it,

and, while I've experienced that system on the CTS-V, Camaro ZL1, various Corvettes, and even the Ferrari 458 Italia and Range Rover Evoque, I've never driven a car intended to be a luxury car fitted with magnetic dampers. Put another way, would a non-sports car work with Magnetic Ride Control? Oh, absolutely yes! I was pleasantly surprised by how well the XTS rode and handled, emphasis on surprised. The texture of the road surface is transmitted into the car. It's not harsh in any way; rather it's alive, active, engaging, dynamic, dare I say, fun. Most impressive, the XTS shrinks when you drive it hard.

Where does all the above leave the XTS? To recap, the car is mostly good-looking and has a posh interior, some suspect cabin controls, a carryover drivetrain, and a magic carpet ride, thanks to GM's Magnetic Ride Control and torque-steer-cancelling HiPer front struts. They even tossed air springs in the rear for load-leveling reasons. However, the XTS has but one body style, one engine, and one transmission. To be a serious player in the global luxury market, Cadillac needs to wean itself from the bean counters. Until that happens in a big way, the 2013 XTS is a very good stopgap of a car. ■

2013 Cadillac XTS

BASE PRICE	\$44,995-\$51,835
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, FWD/AWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan
ENGINE	3.6L/304-hp/264-lb-ft DOHC 24-valve V-6
TRANSMISSION	6-speed automatic
CURB WEIGHT	4000-4200 lb (mfr est)
WHEELBASE	111.7 in
LENGTH X WIDTH X HEIGHT	202.0 x 72.9 x 59.4 in
0-60 MPH	6.2-6.5 sec (MT est)
EPA CITY/HWY FUEL ECON	17/27-28 (mfr est)
ENERGY CONS, CITY/HWY	198/120-125 kW-hrs/100 mi
CO2 EMISSIONS	0.94-0.95 lb/mi
ON SALE IN U.S.	Fourth quarter 2012



THE NEW STANDARD OF THE WORLD

A SEA CHANGE. ON ASPHALT.



INTRODUCING THE ALL-NEW CADILLAC XTS *It breaks new ground at every turn. With revolutionary Magnetic Ride Control reading the road up to 1,000 times per second and legendary Brembo® front brakes commanding the corners, it's luxury performance that yields to no one. See how the all-new XTS is bringing the future forward at cadillac.com/xts*