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PHOTOS COURTESY OF ACURA TLX

The Acura TLX gets a noticeable refresh for 2018 with new front end styling, including a fresh grille design, and an eye-catching A-Spec model with blacked-out trim.

## Acura Improves TLX

### New Look, Features, A-Spec Trim Make Sedan Sharper for 2018

By Derek Price  
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**D**riving through the bucolic hills of southern Indiana, the improvements to Acura's TLX for 2018 are subtle but immediately noticeable: sharper looks, faster digital tools and a classier feeling interior.

The most significant change may not be on the car itself, though, but on your TV screen at home. Acura is touting the TLX's connection to the stunning NSX hybrid supercar in high-energy ads that are, frankly, much cooler and more youth focused than this brand has attempted in recent years.

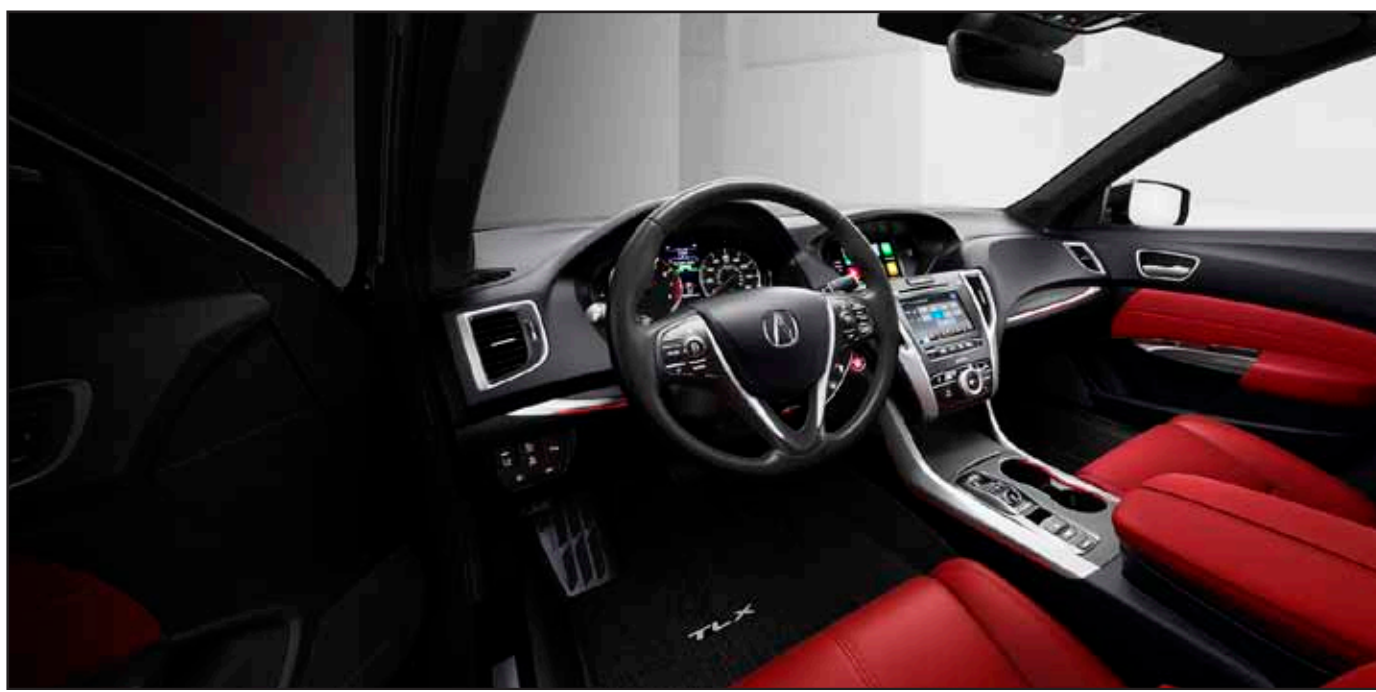
Acura is reaching out to millennials, with the snazzy visuals and buzzy music to prove it.

In a perfect world, buyers wouldn't need a reminder that the TLX is related to something special. But in reality, this mid-size Acura has long struggled for attention when compared with a silky Lexus, an inspiring BMW or a prestigious Mercedes-Benz.

Other than flashy commercials, what is the TLX offering to young luxury shoppers?

The most obvious answer is a new A-Spec trim package that turns heads and makes it look sportier. It's an aggressive A-Spec, combining a matte black grille, sinister wheels, a black spoiler on the lip of the trunk and — my favorite change — a blacked-out air diffuser in back that looks spectacular as it speeds by you in the passing lane. Compared to the subdued, watered-down A-Spec look of Acura's recent vintage, it marks a wild change of direction for the brand.

To drive home the point, Acura is making the A-Spec available



A red leather interior is optional on the A-Spec trim level, making the inside look as sporty and aggressive as the outside.

with a full red leather interior. Extroverts, take note.

Not quite as obvious, but perhaps even more important to millennial buyers, is what's under the hood of its digital interface.

Unlike some brands (ahem, Lexus) that have been slow to embrace Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, the TLX does a brilliant job working hand-in-hand with the world's most popular smartphones. It uses two big digital screens on the center stack so you can devote one to your phone

while the other stays dedicated to your car's most often-used functions.

As an iPhone junkie, I'm in love with it. When I connect my phone, the top 8-inch screen switches to the familiar Apple interface with apps optimized for use while driving. The bottom 7-inch screen can still be used to control a range of functions, like changing radio stations.

It's also faster than before thanks to two changes: a capacitive touchscreen, as opposed to

the resistive screen used previously, and more efficient programming that makes it respond about 30 percent quicker. Interestingly, it has the same "brain" as before — the processor hardware is the same as the 2017 model — but the code that runs on it has been improved to make it work faster. That's just smart engineering, a Honda and Acura hallmark.

While the new A-Spec is the most eye-catching version by far, all the trim levels look more

handsome thanks to an improved grille and more sculpted front end.

As a whole, though, the TLX remains the same value-oriented luxury ride as before. It's perfect for people who do math before they buy.

The V6-powered versions in particular are among the best bang-for-your-buck luxury cars in this class. At a time when normally aspirated V6s are being dumped in favor of eco-conscious turbo fours by many competitors, the healthy lump of torque and turbine-like smoothness of the TLX's optional 3.5-liter V6 make it a refreshing outlier. Its 290-horsepower output provides enough thrills — and enough overkill on highway on-ramps — to give it the air of a premium-priced performance machine on a budget.

As a meaningful mid-cycle refresh, the improved 2018 TLX offers some insight into the direction Acura is heading. Its refinements and styling, and especially the more outgoing look of the A-Spec, all point to a more exciting and emotion-producing future from this ever-logical brand.

Pricing for the 2018 TLX starts at \$33,000 with the four-cylinder engine or \$36,200 with the V6.

Is that enough to woo millennial buyers into today's least trendy driving format, the four-door sedan? Time will tell.

#### A CLOSER LOOK



## AT A GLANCE: FACTS, FIGURES AND RATINGS

### What was tested?

2018 Acura TLX 3.5L SH-AWD with Advance Package (\$45,750). Price as tested (including \$950 destination charge): \$46,700

**Wheelbase:** 109.3 in.

**Length:** 191.5 in.

**Width:** 73 in.

**Height:** 57 in.

**Engine:** 3.5-liter V6 (290 hp, 267xxx lbs-ft)

**Transmission:** Nine-speed automatic

**Fuel economy:** 20 city, 30 highway

### RATINGS

Style: 7  
Performance: 9  
Price: 9  
Handling: 8  
Ride: 7  
Comfort: 7  
Quality: 9  
Overall: 8

### Why buy it?

With updated styling and new features, the TLX gets more appealing as a 2018 model. Its faster digital interface with two screens is one of the best on.

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