



Cadillac CTS-V

Four-Door Supercar For the Enthusiast Driver

BY CRAIG PETERSON

Much as they may lust after the whiplash-inducing acceleration capability and race-car-like handling qualities of a Corvette, a two-seater isn't the answer to everyone's transportation needs. Sometimes only four doors will do.

But the tiny pool of candidates offering mid-sized proportions, supercar handling and V-8 power decreased by one for model year 2005. BMW's redesigned 5-Series won't appear in hotrod M5 trim until next year, as a 2006 model.

Fortunately for those in serious need of speed, a contender from a most unlikely source has filled the void, the Cadillac CTS-V. Remember your father's Cadillac? This isn't it.

Instead, think Mercedes C55 AMG with a tad less refinement. Twist the key and a 400-horsepower Corvette all-alloy V-8 barks into life via throaty dual

exhausts. Switch off the traction control, floor the throttle in first gear, snap a shift into second and 60 mph is yours in well under five seconds, accompanied by a cloud of tire smoke. And there are four more gears available. The quarter-mile rolls past in 13.2 seconds at 110 mph and a top speed of 162 mph is attainable in remarkably little additional time achieved in fifth gear.

The CTS-V rides on the excellent Sigma platform, blessed with vault-like chassis rigidity. It has front control arms and a multi-link rear suspension, fitted with performance-oriented shocks, thick anti-roll bars and meaty 18-inch low-profile footwear on handsome 7-spoke alloy wheels.

Although it shares its body with the V-6-powered CTS, knowledgeable observers will spot it instantly, courtesy of the lowered ride height, mesh grille, deep front air dam with extra air intakes to feed the 5.7-liter V-8, lowered rocker sills and other aero tweaks, not to mention Brembo front brake discs bigger than the wheels of some imports.

Inside is a pair of front leather buckets that will accommodate a size 56 regular without protest. To

assist those not quite so dimensionally-challenged, suede-like inserts for bottom cushions and a beefy dead pedal help smaller drivers keep themselves anchored during hard cornering.

And that's something this car can deliver. Standard equipment is a driver information center that includes a lateral G meter, the measure of a vehicle's cornering grip. For reference' sake, on a skidpad, a circle generally 200 or 300 feet in diameter, supercars like the 'Vette will register around 1.0 G. After a day spent hammering over the narrow, mountainous switchbacks of the Angeles Crest Highway north of Pasadena, California, sports car heaven to the in-crowd, our test car's meter registered 1.23 peak lateral Gs, a number more commonly encountered in race cars than in any Cadillac we've ever driven. On the skidpad we suspect it would trail the Corvette by a negligible amount.

Accurate steering and superb suspension tuning account for the CTS-V's laser-like tracking and flat cornering attitude. At moderate speeds its ride comfort is only slightly more choppy than the more sedate CTS model's although the Goodyear F1 Supercar tires generate noticeable rumble over textured pavement.

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So what's all this translate to on the street? The CTS-V exudes a sense of raw power. The clutch is heavy, shifter action is stiff, the ride is noticeably firm—although not harsh—and at wide-open throttle this hotrod Caddy wails like a NASCAR stocker. Clearly intended to please the enthusiast driver, the threshold of the Stabilitrak electronic stability control system is high enough that a skilled pilot can coax the car into a tail-out drift without the powertrain computer stepping in to wrest away control, something that can't be said of the C55 AMG Mercedes' annoyingly intrusive stability-control system.

And that's what the CTS-V is all about. It's a driver's car intended for those who hanker for something different. The Cadillac's styling is of the love-hate variety; no one seems ambivalent about it. The interior is pleasant if somewhat monochromatic, the expanses of black dash, door panels and seats offset with flashes of stainless steel-hued trim for door pull handles, center stack, console surround, shifter knob and other areas.

Rear headroom is on the short side—no one over about five-foot-10 need apply—although three-abreast seating is possible for moderate-length jaunts. But there are bins, cup holders and storage cubby holes aplenty. One annoying glitch is an ash tray-mounted power point that causes your knuckles to center-punch a power plug during every shift into fifth and reverse. And the six-speed has GM's supremely irritating first-to-fourth shift-skip, encouraging drivers to toe deeply into the throttle to circumvent it, thus defeating the intended gas-saving measure.

Base-priced at \$49,300, the total tab for our test car was \$52,495 including \$1,200 for a sunroof and \$1,300 for the gas-guzzler tax, plus destination charge. Although rated by the EPA at 15 city, 23 highway, the double-overdrive sixth gear at freeway speeds delivered 25 mpg during testing. Still, with 400 hp and world-class handling, we suspect that the EPA's numbers may be more realistic. To which we'd reply: In a car this much fun, who cares?

What's Hot

Supercar performance
World-class handling
Classic 400 hp V-8 grunt

What's Not

Limited rear headroom
Love-hate styling