

WHEELS

The new Saturn Aura strikes a good balance of ride smoothness and crisp handling. The sedan offers upscale styling, a comfortable cabin and numerous safety features. It's a vehicle that can compete in the crowded midsize family sedan market.



Saturn

Aura a bold step for Saturn

Midsize sedan turns heads, sparks drivers' passions

By CLINT WILLIAMS
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Atlanta

The sporty Sky may have more sizzle, but the brand-new 2007 Aura can carry the whole family while still being fun to drive, making this midsize sedan a splendid addition to the suddenly sexy Saturn lineup. The Aura offers a first-in-class transmission and first-class good looks. Yes, we said good looks. About a Saturn.

In a no-kidding bit of life imitates art, neighbors walk up to the car and say, almost in disbelief, "That's a Saturn?" Just like the actors in the automaker's current TV ad campaign. The Aura's bold, clean look is based on a concept car that made the automobile show circuit two years ago.

The interior is as handsome as the exterior. The optional leather seats are complemented with a leather-wrapped steering wheel and shift knob. The dash and door panels are elegant looking; the LED-lit instru-



'07 Saturn Aura

Body style: four-door sedan
Trim lines: XE, XR
Price: MSRP on tester is \$26,919
Drive: front wheel
Seating: two in front, three in back
Engine: 3.5-liter V-6 in XE; 3.6-liter V-6 in XR
Transmission: four-speed automatic in XE; six-speed automatic in XR
Miles per gallon of fuel: EPA estimate 20 city/28 highway

ment panel is easy to read.

The upper-level XR trim boasts a six-speed automatic transmission, a GM first, coupled with a 3.6-liter V-6.

Harnessing 252 horsepower, the combination is powerful and smooth. No problem keeping pace on the interstate here. The less expensive XE version has a four-speed automatic and slightly smaller engine. The XR offers electronic stability control; the XE, traction control.

Back-seat passengers get separate sound system controls and wireless headphones. You can listen to a little bit of country while the kids listen to a little bit of rock 'n' roll. Everyone gets protection from head curtain side-impact air bags. There are also front seat-mounted chest protection air bags for driver and co-pilot.

What's lacking is a sporty stick shift. No manual transmission is available. Sport shift paddles on the steering wheel will have to do for driving enthusiasts who prefer a standard transmission.

The Aura Green Line, GM's first hybrid passenger car, will be offered in the coming months. It will use a powertrain similar to the one in the Saturn Vue Green Line SUV.

Feast on souped-up comfort in 2007 Chevrolet Suburban

The Chevrolet Suburban, revamped for 2007, is built for comfort.

The 12-way-power-adjustable, leather-trimmed driver's seat in the LT3 trim is a plush perch high above the traffic. The passenger's seat is similarly equipped, and the second row seat provides three passengers plenty of legroom, hip room and shoulder room. Not to mention their own controls to the climate-control system and sound system and the happy diversions provided by a rear-seat DVD entertainment system.

Even the third row seats are comfortable, although short of legroom for longer trips.

The wheelbase of 130 inches (that's nearly 11 feet) provides a smooth ride. The cabin is quiet, allowing full enjoyment of the Bose sound system.

Hit cruise control on an open stretch of freeway, and it's almost like riding in a living room to the next town.

There is another level of comfort — psychic comfort, if you will — that comes from riding in a tank with a bunch of air bags. The Suburban, in case you don't know, is huge. It has ground clearance of nearly 9 inches and weighs 5,613 pounds (or more, depending on the version). The LT3 trim has head curtain side air bags that provide protection for all three rows of passengers as standard



Chevrolet

The Chevrolet Suburban is revamped for 2007.

equipment. It's an option in less expensive trims.

A rearview camera system and ultrasonic rear parking-assist system that can detect stationary objects and send an audible warning as you draw closer ease parking lot anxiety.

A 5.3-liter V-8 provides more than enough power, and four of the eight cylinders shut down when cruising to get more from a gallon of gas. The EPA fuel economy estimate is 15 mpg in the city and 20 mpg on the highway. The sticker price of the Suburban LT3 tester was \$49,045.

If you need to haul more than six people and tow 8,200 pounds, the Suburban LT3 will do it in comfort.

Now if those folks at GM could just figure out the fold-flat third-row seat thing.

— Clint Williams, Cox News Service

Japanese make classic, A-list sedans

We learn early on — hopefully — the order of the alphabet. Any list, even the most esoteric, starts with the letter A. Over the years, Japan's automakers have produced several models that start with the letter A. Here are three popular cars from the land of the rising sun.

1. Honda Accord: Long one of the best-selling cars in America, the Honda Accord offers reliability, performance and value that makes it a perennial darling of Consumer Reports.

You have a choice of coupe or sedan and a variety of trim levels.

Powertrain options include a 2.4-liter four-cylinder with 166 horsepower connected to either a five-speed manual transmission or a five-speed automatic or a 3.0-liter V-6 with either a five-speed automatic or a six-speed manual.

2. Nissan Altima: An available 250-horsepower V-6 makes the Altima a somewhat sporty family sedan. The base engine is a 2.5-liter inline four-cylinder engine generating 175 horsepower.

In government crash tests, the Altima got a perfect five stars for driver and front-passenger protection in frontal impacts. Front side-impact air bags and full-length side curtain air bags are optional.

3. Toyota Avalon: A pleasing blend of comfort and performance, this overlooked sedan jumps from 0-60 mph in less than 7 seconds, thanks to a 3.5-liter V-6 that produces 268 horsepower.

The engine and five-speed automatic transmission also deliver good gas mileage with an EPA estimate of 22 mpg city, 31 mpg highway.

— Clint Williams, Cox News Service