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The Alternative Driving Machines

Luxury is still in style; it just needs to cost less now.

by **Ralph McGill Jr.**
September 9, 2008

Whether you're the CEO of a corporation or simply the chairwoman of your family finance committee, you've been going over the numbers these days and they haven't looked good. Fuel costs, stagflation and just plain bad news have made your choice of a personal automobile everybody's business. But hang in there. There is a way – several in fact – to drive in luxury, style and speed.

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The Cadillac CTS

Okay, it's a Cadillac, and some may still think of it as the ultimate in luxury. Most of those folks are long retired and can't remember much past the Eisenhower administration. Cadillac in the intervening decades fell into a sad state of senile insignificance. That was then.



Recently the marquee has reinvented itself with performance sedans that rival the best of Tokyo or Munich. The '08 CTS was Motor Trend's car of the year. A tad larger than the BMW 5 series sedan, the CTS is built on Cadillac's smallest platform, with 300 horses directly injected into a transversely mounted aluminum block V8. That means it will blow the doors off a 530i Beemer and, with a suspension setup similar to the BMW and the added advantage of four-wheel drive, the Caddy corners astoundingly flat and controlled for such a heavy car.

In addition, it is surprisingly smooth for a 21st century performance sedan. And with the state of Atlanta's roads, that ain't bad. Like the BMW, the CTS is swathed in leather, and burl wood veneer. Like all GM sedans, the CTS has OnStar, in case you prefer a human to guide you instead of a glowing map. (It has both.)

If you're thinking about getting good mileage (and who isn't), the Cadillac is surprisingly frugal. It gets 17 miles per gallon in the city; 26 on the highway.

Pontiac G8 GT

For even less money, you can get more power and more performance from the performance oriented-GM division. The new G8 GT is proportioned – hunched low, on big, grippy tires on the four corners – just like a BMW. But at 361 horsepower from a six-liter V8, it is one of the most powerful sedans on the market. In terms of miles per gallon, the car gets 15 in the city and 25 on the highway.



The G8 CT may remind one of the top-of-the-line BMW 550i, except it costs \$20,000 less. Driving the G8 on the twisty secondary highways between Peachtree City and Callaway Gardens, the G8 showed what it is made of – a solid block of performance. Hairpins, twisties and broad sweeping turns were handled with panache. It is confidence building. The only anxiety-producing aspect was constantly searching the rear view mirror for west Georgia county cops.

You also have to be careful with color choices – some are downright adolescent and unbecoming. The burnt orange comes to mind. And so does the electric-blue clear coat. If that one appeals, you may be going through a midlife crisis.

Honda Accord

It started life as an itty-bitty compact and has grown into an adult car that looks eerily like a BMW sedan. Only this one is priced at just \$30,000, and includes every bell and whistle, from satellite radio to satellite navigation to fancy leather interior. iPod interfaced HD radio, six CD changer – the works. The Environmental



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Protection Agency has saluted the car for its ultra low emissions standards. On the highway, it averages 29 miles per gallon; 19 in the city.



The 2008 Honda Accord maintains the car's traditional mix of both sporty handling and comfort. Handling is tight, with no-slack steering that provides a tremendous combination of feel and weight. Although other sporty midsize sedans tend to thrive on twisty roads or city streets, the Accord is an autobahn-burner as well. It manages the job of remaining consistently competent no matter the driving conditions.

"Well-rounded" is an adjective that applies to most Honda models, and the new Accord is no different. The wonderfully smooth and powerful 3.5-liter V6 is an excellent engine, producing strong acceleration and fuel economy; however, the 190-hp four-cylinder provides more than enough motivation. The new Accord is also quieter, thanks to additional sound-deadening materials and body-stiffening measures.

As the economy tightens, it is still encouraging to know that even if you're driving a car with a lower sticker value, you're still driving in luxury.

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