

Suburban Automotive Showcase

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Quality-driven Cadillac STS wins points for innovation

By Anne Fracassa
Avanti NewsFeatures

When I started doing test drives for newspapers, I hated Cadillacs. All of them. Not one of them pleased me. The used to be clunky boats, as far as I was concerned. They were cars only an elderly person would buy.

But that perception started to change about five years ago. Softer lines, sportier and more contemporary styling, better technology and stronger engines crept into most of the brand's lineup, which gave it a shot in the arm and made people take notice that Cadillac wasn't just for older folks any more.

The 1996 Cadillac Seville Touring Sedan — STS — is no exception in the Cadillac brand's new image.

It's been updated for a fresher interior, sportier styling a better ride and an even stronger (if that's possible) Northstar system.

Let's talk about the Northstar system first. You can't buy a Cadillac without the Northstar and that's the best news to come out of this luxury carmaker ever.



ROAD TEST
By
Anna
Fracassa

The Northstar system is comprised of the 32-valve dual overhead cam 4.6-liter V8 engine mated to an electronically controlled transaxle, road-sensing suspension, speed-sensitive steering, anti-lock brakes and full-speed traction control.

The quick-responding V8 powertrain is world-class, providing 300 quiet horses to get you where you need to go — fast. No other car in the STS's class has a higher-powered engine, by the way. Performance is the key to the

Northstar and perform it does. The zero-to-60 time is 7.3 seconds. There's perfect control of that power as well.

The Northstar has been around now for around three years, so its reliability, durability and efficiency has been proven. It's what Cadillac, down the road, will be known for.

The ride and comfort of the STS, is, well, Cadillac quality. The STS glides through the road like a fine yacht — no pun intended. It's smooth ride and wonderfully comfortable heated eight-way power seats makes you feel at ease and in control — one with the road. This year, Cadillac added something called Magnasteer and a variable-assist power steering system to the STS to optimize ride and handling over a wide variety of road conditions.

Inside, the instrumentation has been moved around for better use of analog gauges. You'll find the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC)

controls located under the stereo system. The HVAC system now allows you to manually operate the controls, rather than setting them.

The only thing I didn't like about the new placement is that when in the park position, the shifter is nearly right up against those controls. It makes it hard to operate the controls with this huge shifter right in front.

The analog cluster is widened and provides a better view of the larger speedometer and tachometer.

Everything in the instrument panel flows around the driver and passenger, making it look complete in form and function. The STS is outfitted with a superb AM/FM cassette stereo and an optional 12-disc trunk-mounted CD changer. I don't know if I'm right, but it seems the controls on the stereo are a little bigger this year, giving you a little better control.

The steering wheel controls are now illuminated. Radio and

climate controls, located on opposite sides of the steering wheel, can be operated easily without taking your eyes off the road.

As with most General Motors products, daytime running lamps are standard, as are the passenger and driver air bags. Another new feature on the STS has safety in mind. If the air bag is deployed, the interior lights come on within a second and stay on for 25 minutes or until the driver turns them off manually. The automatic door locks will also unlock within 15 seconds after deployment. A true safety issue resolved effectively.

There's something new on the STS that's really cool: A Rainsense Wiper System. This sensor activates the windshield wipers during inclement weather. On the wiper stalk, there's an "auto delay mode" — much like the intermittent wiper control of old — that allows it to automatically turn on your wipers when it starts to rain.

There's a small module located on the windshield next to the inside rearview mirrors that sense moisture on the windshield. It analyzes the number and frequency of raindrops falling and automatically determines the speed of the wipers. This is a really neat feature that's not only standard on STS, but also exclusive to the Cadillac brand.

There are a couple of buttons located in the glove box that can disable traction control, and a valet lockout button that allows you to deactivate the trunk, fuel door and garage door opener functions. I think I could go on and on about the STS and the Cadillac brand. This is a good, strong premium luxury car with great styling, innovation and comfort. My mind's been changed. This is truly an outstanding automobile.

Anne Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti NewsFeature.

1996 Cadillac Seville Touring Sedan

Vehicle class: Large luxury sedan.
Power: 4.6-liter V8 engine.
Mileage: 10 city/25 highway.
Where built: Hamtramck, MI.
Base price: \$42,995



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If you'd like to see a particular model tested or if you have a car question, send Anne Fracassa a message at AVANTI1054, Avanti's America Online mailbox...

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Anne Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti News Features.

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