

2004 Cadillac CTS-V
The V is for Velocity!
By David Ray, Hooked On Driving
For: The Wheel

The phone rang with yet another interruption. But wait, it was the GM Press Fleet manager calling – he had my full attention. It seems there was a cancellation by some very silly person who had reserved the much coveted CTS-V. Would I be willing to take it for a week? As the Cadillac commercial goes....”Ooh Yeah, Ooh Ooh Yeah. There was no hesitation and it was a done deal.

The entire auto journalism world has been set on its ear by this car. Cadillac has talked about changing its image since the days of the STS introduction and the hubbub around the Northstar engine program. There has been serious money invested in a failed Le Mans effort, and the Northstar engine that was a foundation to the early days of the IRL is now called a Chevrolet. I remember taking a test drive in the STS when it first came out and being devastated to discover a heavy, medium sized sedan with a choppy suspension, pretty good acceleration, but no sports feel whatsoever. Lately though, ever since Led Zeppelin got involved (do you think they traded their song for stock in GM?) There has been evidence that Cadillac really means that they would like to improve their image among the younger generation and the auto enthusiast world. The CTS-V is the proof in the pudding. This is an enthusiast car that will soon be developing a cult following, Saturday morning club breakfasts and, who knows, maybe even track days. The CTS-V is an amazing car. Yes, as an engineering and performance triumph, but even more as a marketing experiment. Bob Lutz’s love for cars must be reflected in the fact that they built this car. Taking a very pleasant, mid-sized luxury sedan and turning it in to a growling beast changes the demographics a bit. Who did they build this car for? I suspect that the lengthy focus group research was dispensed with on this one. Somebody just said, “Build it.” And what is it worth to build a car that completely changes the perspective of the automotive world toward this GM division? I call it priceless. Like the Viper not being profitable on a car by car basis to Chrysler – it put the company on the map as car guys, engineers and not just bean counters. And a successful racing program adds to the credibility.

The CTS is a mid-sized sedan by definition, but the tall beltline and boxy shape makes it feel just a bit bigger than it really is. It’s definitely a stretch to stuff it into a compact spot (careful to protect that cool grill), but you can in a pinch. The upside of this size is – room. The CTS is very spacious inside, with a very respectable back seat that is legitimate for three passengers, the front seat is prepared to accommodate an NBA star (well – maybe a point guard or shooting forward, but not Shaq). The front bucket seats in the V are excellent. They’ve accomplished a delicate task in providing a seat that will hold you while cornering but not pinch the portly. A very helpful touch is the Alcantara inserts in otherwise plush leather. These keep the derriere well placed when nearing .8+lateral G’s. With proper adjustment of the power seat bottom and back, and maximizing steering wheel tilt adjustments, an excellent performance driving position can easily be achieved for most drivers. The gauges are very clear to read, and the

combination of analog gauge with digital speed readout is excellent. The center console however leaves a great deal to be desired. It is obvious that a six-speed was not envisioned when the console was designed. First, there is a shortage of meaningful storage space, then no place for a cell phone (duh!), no hand brake, and lastly the cupholders are to the rear of the shifter, creating the need to shift with elbow bent at an unnatural angle to avoid spillage. In the center of the dash, there is an information center similar to many marques in this space. *Would someone please hire Apple to design the interfaces for these systems!!* We hated this system. While it may not be down to the standard set by BMW's iDrive, it's a royal pain in providing complicated ways to do simple things.

The CTS-V is priced, depending on options, between \$49,500 and about \$55,000. Relative to the competition, this makes the car a steal. However, with the competition being the M5, RS6 and the like (at least \$20-30K more), the difference in price is seen in fit and finish, and ride. The interior, quite frankly looks like a deluxe Chevrolet package. It's not bad – it just does not portray an image of a truly high-end car. The carpet tucks, quality of materials and trim are definitely more of a mass-produced persuasion than an exclusive sedan. Thank goodness. Because that means they could spend the money where it counts – on one of the greatest drivetrains ever to land in a sedan.

The V has been blessed with the LS6 aluminum block version of the Corvette engine. At 5.7 liters, it pumps out 400HP and 395 ft lbs of torque. Trust me, 395 pulling through a 3.73 rear end is enough to come just short of whiplash. At 3847 lbs, the V is 668lbs heftier than the C6 Corvette. In the 0-60 category, the V makes it in 5.0 seconds, the same as the standard Carrera, and .7 seconds behind the new Vette. This is not bad company. Brembo brakes are also part of the V equation. The rotors are huge, and the ABS brakes will NOT fade unless you are really at race pace on a track. Remember, we're talking a potential realtor's car here. The gearbox is a Tremec T56 6 speed, the only one available in the V. It features a dual mass flywheel to smooth things out, and offers a reasonable clutch spring for such a powerful package. However, this is not a car to commute in stop and go traffic – the clutch will catch up with you after any substantial stop and go time. The gearbox itself is excellent when driven briskly. Throws are a bit farther than we'd like, yet reasonable, but we had frequent major issues while shifting at lazy street driving pace. These issues were created by the ever-popular "skip-shift." Some Corvette drivers will know what we're talking about here, but it's just sad that they had to stick this in the car to pump up the "possible" fuel mileage. This technological wonder detects low speed driving and short shifting and throws a gate out to prevent a shift from first to second, forcing a shift to fourth. I'm not kidding. This is the problem: If you actually drove this car slowly and got used to shifting from 1st to 4th on a regular basis, you'd save gas and money. But this simply is unreasonable. The obvious result is the driver stays on the gas to higher RPM's before shifting to avoid the skip-shift, using more gas on virtually every rev up! We have to talk with someone about this bad idea.

Driving this car was a joy. To have the comfort and elbow room combined with what is nearly a supercar in performance is a rare treat. Around town it is quite civilized, with an excellent trunk, and did I mention the great torque for the trips to pickup Junior? The

exhaust note is also a real treat – the rumble is just right. You probably won't be late to very many appointments with this car. In daily driving, there is one hitch. You can't have lateral G's and a smooth ride (at least at this price point). The V spring rates are 27% higher than the CTS, with sport tuned shocks and monster sway bars. Thus the formerly smooth and firm CTS has been converted into a four door sports car that rides pretty rough. Not a big problem unless you have choppy freeway on your daily route. Its stiff enough be a significant annoyance hitting potholes and cracks that are prevalent on California roads. Don't get me wrong here. Any enthusiast will put up with this minor sacrifice for the obvious benefits in handling. But a regular CTS shopper should beware to do a thorough test drive before jumping into this different level of ride.



We had the good fortune of catching a track day with the good guys at Northern California Racing Club. Running Thunderhill in reverse, I was initially worried that my gearing was all wrong, but then I realized they were driving forward – just in the opposite direction than normal. This was a hoot and we'll try it with Hooked On Driving soon. Thanks to Dave and Troy for taking me in for the morning. The CTS-V was the biggest car and only four door present among the traditional track day cars and race cars at well. But the V did us proud. In fact, we had to wake up the flaggers to realize that the Cadillac was actually waiting for passing flags to be given to some pretty quick rides. They got the message real quick. This car turns, rotates, is predictable, stops and pulls like a tractor. It carries Goodyear Formula One tires that stick well for their size, but on the track the car wanted more and stickier rubber. And of course, with a 3800 lb sedan, we have to mention that body roll was a bit of an issue in transitions like the esses at Thunderhill. It took a tick or two or a left foot tap of the brake to settle the car down from one turn to get ready for the next. But that became a minor issue as driving the V on the track was a blast. The StabiliTrak traction control system has been dramatically

improved since my last track run with a C5 Corvette. With the C5, it was impossible to go fast with this system on in any mode, including “competition driving”. It would just stop the momentum of the car any time it was tempted to slide. The V’s system, in the competitive mode, worked very nicely for those who would like to avoid calling their insurance agent with a tall tale. I could feel the system catch me just at the edge, but it did not kill the car’s momentum. I could stay with the line and the throttle and not slow down. And with the system completely off, the car can be driven like a loose kart. It is VERY tossable – especially for a sedan! This car is NOT out of place on the track. You might have to have a tire sponsor, but I’d encourage any CTS-V owner to try this car out in a controlled environment like a track day.



This is not a hard review to wrap up. Simply put, the CTS-V is a great car, and will gain a substantial following if Cadillac can convince the enthusiasts to cross into their showrooms. It will be important that the Cadillac sales team who is used to selling STS’s and Deville’s to senior citizens do their homework so they can compete with the sellers of those German marques that represent the competition. The Cadillac CTS-V officially begins a whole new ball game.