

CR Quick Recommendations

For \$30,000 to \$40,000 there's a wide selection of good sedans, including some of the best performers in our testing. For overall excellence, it's hard to beat the well-rounded Acura TL. The Acura TSX is less costly than the TL and is a more affordable alternative to the sedans in this group. The Subaru Legacy GT, the Cadillac CTS, and the Infiniti G35 deliver a sporty, stimulating driving experience. The Nissan Maxima is quick and roomy.

The **Ratings** rank vehicles on how they scored in our tests, regardless of price or reliability. **Recommended models** (✓) not only tested well but also have shown average or better reliability and performed adequately if crash-tested or included in a government rollover test. Recommended models that performed especially well in both IIHS and government tests when available are designated with a ✓. **Quick Picks** are recommended models that in our judgment deserve special consideration based on your driving needs.

Ratings

sports sedans

Excellent Very good Good Fair Poor

In performance order. Blue key numbers indicate Quick Picks.

QUICK PICKS

For the most stimulating driving experience:

- 10 Subaru Legacy GT
- 11 Cadillac CTS
- 14 Infiniti G35

For a well-rounded blend of performance, luxury, and refinement:

- 1 Acura TL
- 3 Honda Accord Hybrid
- 4 Lexus IS 250

For the most interior room:

- 12 Nissan Maxima

For compact dimensions and sportiness:

- 6 Audi A4 2.0T
- 8 Acura TSX

Make & model	In this issue	Overall road-test score	Price as tested	Predicted reliability
1 Acura TL		90	\$33,670	⊖
2 Volkswagen Passat 3.6		89	33,315	New
3 Honda Accord Hybrid (V6)		87	31,540	⊕
4 Lexus IS 250	•	84	33,734	⊕
5 BMW 325i	•	78	36,720	New
6 Audi A4 2.0T	•	77	36,455	○
7 Ford Fusion SEL (V6)		77	26,025	New
8 Acura TSX		77	29,760	⊖
9 Lincoln Zephyr	•	77	32,250	New
10 Subaru Legacy 2.5 GT		75	30,370	⊖
11 Cadillac CTS 2.8	•	74	35,275	○
12 Nissan Maxima 3.5 SE		74	33,180	○
13 Mercedes-Benz C230	•	73	34,225	⊖
14 Infiniti G35		71	36,760	⊖
15 Jaguar X-Type 3.0		71	39,120	⊖
16 Saab 9-3 2.0T	•	65	31,615	⊖
17 Dodge Charger R/T (V8)		59	36,295	New
18 Volvo S60 2.5T		58	34,980	⊖

Cadillac has not addressed some niggling faults of the CTS that we noted in our initial test in July 2003. Fit and finish falls short in this class with a few pesky oversights. The optional stability control is slow to engage and allows too much tail slide. We also found it difficult to get some common options on the CTS.

Although the C230 is approaching a redesign, it's still a well-performing vehicle. It has a smooth engine, but it's not as quick as most others in this class. All C230s come with a sports suspension and summer-only performance tires. The interior has good fit and finish, but there are some awkward controls.

The 9-3 is less sporty and luxurious than the others here. It handles securely but lacks the agility and enjoyment found in the better cars here. Wind and road-noise levels are high. Interior quality is relatively unimpressive. We found the turbocharged four-cylinder engine sufficiently powerful and more refined than the one in the Audi. Braking and crash-test performance is impressive.

For more information

Talk to our experts about sports sedans. When: April 17-21, 2006. Where: www.ConsumerReports.org. Open to subscribers to ConsumerReports.org only. For more information, see the front cover.

Used-car alternatives to the models tested this month are available free at www.ConsumerReports.org April 4 through June 6. Click on the Cars tab; under "Buying a Car," click on "Used cars," then select Used-Car Alternatives.

closeup

SUMMER TIRES CAN LEAVE YOU OUT IN THE COLD

One of the most notable qualities that sets sports sedans apart from everyday sedans is superior handling performance, and the tires these cars ride on often play an important role in that.

Automakers work closely with tire companies to fit specific tires that work in conjunction with the vehicle's suspension to balance ride and handling characteristics. They often use high-performance summer tires to deliver improved grip and braking, which contributes to better agility, stopping distances, and steering response. However, these tires don't provide much traction for braking, cornering, and accelerating in the snow.

One of our test cars in this group, the Mercedes-Benz C230, came equipped with summer tires.

In winter conditions, we tested our C230 with its

original Continental tires and also with Bridgestone Blizzak winter tires in acceleration and braking. With winter tires the C230 took 123 feet to accelerate from 5 to 20 mph, and just over 44 feet to brake from 20 to 0 mph. With the summer tires the C230 struggled to crawl up to speed. It took 223 feet to accelerate and 81 feet to stop.

Summer tires are out of their element when it gets cold and slippery and shouldn't be driven on ice or snow because they are designed for dry and wet conditions. Their performance rubber compounds are stiff in cold temperatures, and their treads lack the sipes, called sipes, that bite into snow.

If you live in an area with seasonal wintry conditions, plan on buying an extra set of winter tires for the cold months.