

## DRIVEN: CADILLAC CTS VSPORT

Cadillac Closes the Gap

Jan Tegler  
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A quick scan of the press materials Cadillac provides on the new 2014 CTS leaves no doubt - America's only healthy upscale brand (Lincoln is in the doldrums) is aiming its redesigned contender at the top of the luxury midsize sedan market. A step up from the standard CTS - available in Europe and the U.S. with a 276 horsepower 2.0 litre turbo four cylinder - the Vsport raises its game another notch for North American customers.

BMW's 535i and 550i are both mentioned directly in Vsport literature, described as having engines with less "power density" than the new 3.6 litre V6 Twin-Turbo powering this more performance-oriented variant. "Power density" is a vague term but it makes more sense when you consider that the CTS has been on a diet, shedding crucial grams via extensive use of aluminium and new, weight-saving manufacturing techniques.

In fact, the Vsport weighs 110 kilograms less than its prime target, the 550i. With an eight-speed automatic well matched to the Twin-Turbo V6's 420 horsepower and 583 Nm of torque, the lighter CTS Vsport runs neck and neck with the 445 horsepower twin-turbo V8-powered BMW to 100 km/h in about 4.6 seconds.

The Vsport also feels lighter on its feet than the 550i, slicing up the two-lane roads through Maryland's wine-country with great body control in its most aggressive 'Track-mode' suspension setting. Higher damping rates, larger front and rear stabilizer bars, and GM's Corvette-standard 'magnetic ride control' distinguish the Vsport from the basic CTS, offering great ride comfort and sharp handling.

Turn-in and steering feedback aren't razor sharp but they do better the BMW's more isolating feel. Braking is world-class courtesy of the meaty Brembo rotors and pads slowing the Vsport's front wheels.

Solid dynamics are good news in any performance sedan but even more welcome given the growth of the new CTS. Now that Cadillac's smaller ATS has arrived to do battle with BMW's 3-Series and Audi's A4, the CTS has become longer and lower to compete with

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Cadillac stuck with its 'art and science' design theme, though the latest CTS's sharp creases have been softened. We're not as enthusiastic about the look as others are; one real demerit is the lack of visibility from the cabin. The car's high beltline and large pillars restrict three-quarter and side views while its large rump and low roofline severely hamper rear visibility. The rear view camera that is part of the Cadillac's CUE infotainment system is not just a nicety, it's a necessity.

The CUE system itself has been improved, offering all the connectivity and entertainment options one expects of a luxury chariot. That said, it's still not always easy to use, particularly while driving. We found our fingers fumbling to activate functions on the Vsport's 20 cm full colour touch display more than once.

Interior fit and finish and front-seat comfort are excellent. Likewise, the Bose stereo in our Premium-edition test car was first-rate, but we found rear-seat comfort lacking due to an awkward angle between seatbacks and seat cushions. More bothersome is the 'Driver Awareness Package' which comes standard in the Vsport Premium and is optional on the standard CTS.

Cadillac is not alone in fielding such systems but we find them more distracting than helpful. The package's combination of seat vibrations to warn of lane deviations, flashing vehicle/object collision and blind zone alerts via the instrument cluster, and heads-up display alerts are annoying. The car's "automatic collision preparation with brake prefill" is downright irritating.

Some functions can be disabled but we'd simply recommend omitting this feature. Further, our preference would be the Performance edition Vsport which eschews options we'd argue are unnecessary, yielding an even leaner and more poised challenger to the competition - a Cadillac that has truly closed the gap.

See more on the Cadillac webpages



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