



CROSSING INTO *Luxury*

SUGAR LAND'S SOPHISTICATED CROSSOVER SUV'S

By Don Armstrong

Acura RDX



Infiniti EX35



Lexus RX 350



THIS YEAR'S RX IS SLIGHTLY LONGER AND TALLER THAN ITS PREDECESSOR, BUT DESPITE A WIDER APPEARANCE, WIDTH REMAINS ALMOST IDENTICAL.

Chrysler Town and Country



Quality, dependability, attention to detail, pleasure to drive; these are just a few of the things you hear about Japan's luxury brands, and for a reason. In this edition of Sugar Land Magazine, we compare Asia's finest crossover SUV's, so you can decide which one to put on your New Year wish list.

LUXURY LEADER

The third generation of the original crossover, the Lexus RX 350 continues to lead the way over all the others. Introduced a year ago, the 2010 RX manages to refine what was already one of the finest examples of Japanese craftsmanship.

This year's RX is slightly longer and taller than its predecessor, but despite a wider appearance, width remains almost identical. The extra wide look comes from clever sculpting techniques and nothing else. One noticeable difference is the extended slope of the rear gate glass, giving it a more car-like, aerodynamic appeal.

The interior is nothing short of the luxury we have come to expect from Lexus. Replacing the touch screen is a multi-information switch on the steering wheel and a new Remote Touch console-mounted navigation controller. The navigation system can also be voice controlled.

The RX 350 is powered by a 3.5-liter V-6 that delivers 275-horsepower to the front wheels through a smooth six-speed automatic transmission. All-wheel drive and hybrid models are also available. The 2010 RX 350 starts at \$37,250.

INNOVATIVE DESIGN

For those Sugar Land families that prefer sports car-like agility with their luxury, no other SUV does it better than the Infiniti EX35.

Front-end styling is a direct descendant of Infiniti's G sedan, while the passenger cocoon is uniquely EX, a five-place crossover. Infiniti defined the sloping rear hatch glass look and is sticking to it as part of the heritage.

Technology enhancements abound on the 2010 model including an available 2.0GB Music Box hard drive,

Cadillac SRX



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Advanced Climate Control System, streaming audio via Bluetooth, and Zagat restaurant guide that is built into the navigation system.

Options are a trademark of the luxury class of crossovers and the EX has a list that will delight the most demanding of drivers. A 3.5-liter, 297-horsepower V-6 is coupled to a five-speed automatic transmission that includes a manual shift mode with downshift rev matching, similar to those found on high-priced exotic sports cars. Like others in this segment, all-wheel drive is optional. The Infinity EX35 begins at \$33,800.

REFINED STYLING

Honda's luxury brand continues to be a player in this segment despite its more timid approach to consumer awareness. However, for die-hard Honda fans, the RDX is positioned to be a logical step up toward the world of leather and wood.

Although the Acura RDX is a close relative of its Honda sibling CR-V, both in size and underpinnings, its exterior design is unique to the brand. Perhaps the most identifiable feature is the grille, a polarizing Acura statement that you either like or dislike.

Interior design cues lean toward a more conservative approach with clean, orderly lines, a three-pod instrument cluster, and a tidy center stack. Leather seating for five helps add to the premium environment with a 60/40 split fold-down second row that doubles rear cargo space.

Instead of the typical V-6, Acura engineers decided to fit the RDX with a turbocharged 2.3-liter four-cylinder power plant, thereby saving weight and increasing maneuverability. The little engine that could, does, with 240-horsepower. The Acura RDX is the least expensive of our comparison group, starting at \$32,520.

AMERICAN COMPETITORS

Cadillac SRX

Sales of this retro-styled wagon have steadily climbed as more folks realize its versatility, build quality, and fuel economy. Two models, three engines, seating for five with inside hauling capacity makes this do-all a must see. Starts at \$16,730.

Lincoln MKT

Based on the Ford Flex, the all-new MKT may be the sleeper in the segment. Stunning good looks inside and out, handling and optional 355-horsepower engine should put this seven passenger hot rod on the must see list. MSRP starts at \$44,200.

Chrysler Town and Country

Since Chrysler doesn't have a vehicle to go head-to-head in our comparison, we think that if you can get over the stigma associated with minivans, the Town and Country has a lot to offer, if not more, than a crossover. The Town and Country starts at \$25,175 SLM

DON ARMSTRONG'S knowledge and life-long love affair with motorsports has earned him the reputation of being one of the area's most respected automotive journalists. He's a member of the Texas Auto Writer's Association.



Lincoln MKT

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