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NISSAN ALTIMA INCHESES PAST HONDA ACCORD TO BECOME *CONSUMER REPORTS'* TOP-RANKED, MIDPRICED SEDAN

**Very narrow, one-point difference in scores separates Altima and Accord in
CR's ratings of competitive midpriced sedan category**

YONKERS, NY — The newly-redesigned Honda Accord V6 lost its standing as *Consumer Reports'* top-rated midpriced sedan following testing of seven sedans for the February 2008 issue. The V6-powered Nissan Altima is now ranked first in *CR's* ratings of midpriced sedans, followed closely by the Accord, Toyota Camry and Volkswagen Passat in that order. A very narrow one-point difference in scores separates the Accord and Altima.

The Honda Accord, redesigned for 2008, has long been among *Consumer Reports'* top-rated family sedans. *Consumer Reports* has named the Accord a Top Pick in its closely-watched Annual April Auto Issue every year for the past five years. The new Top Picks for 2008 will be announced in the April 2008 issue.

For the February issue, *Consumer Reports* tested a mix of six family sedans from three categories—“Affordable Family Sedans,” “Midpriced Family Sedans,” and “Large Sedans.” *CR* tested the Accord in EX-L V6 and four-cylinder LX-P trim levels. It also tested the new Ford Taurus (formerly known as the Five Hundred), Dodge Avenger, Kia Amanti, and Subaru Legacy. The magazine had rated the four-cylinder and V6-powered Altimas as part of an earlier test group; results from those tests were reported in the March 2007 issue.

The V6 Accord easily outperformed all the other vehicles in this test group—and achieved an “Excellent” overall road test score. But its score of 88 points was one point less than the previous generation Accord. That one-point difference allowed the previously-tested Altima 3.5 SE (V6) to slip past the Accord and take the top spot in the rankings of 15 Midpriced Sedans. The Camry XLE and Passat 2.0T rank third and fourth respectively in that category.

The four-cylinder Altima also claimed the top spot in *CR's* ranking of 15 Affordable Family sedans, with a much wider, six-point margin over the Accord. The Kia Optima EX and Toyota Camry LE are ranked third and fourth in that category.

“The 2008 Accord is longer, wider and more powerful than the old model it replaces—and it remains an excellent, well-rounded sedan,” said David Champion, senior director of *Consumer Reports'* Auto Test Center in East Haddam, Connecticut. “But it’s not as quick and doesn’t get the fuel economy of either the previous generation Accord or the Altima in either the V6 or four-cylinder trim lines.”

The 2008 V6 Accord delivered 21 mpg in *Consumer Reports'* own fuel economy tests, down two mpg from the previous generation’s 23 mpg. The V6 Altima delivers 23 mpg in *CR's* tests.

Prices range from \$22,795 for the Accord LX to \$30,130 for the Amanti, though *CR* paid less than \$25,000 after discounts for the Kia. *Consumer Reports* buys all of its test vehicles from dealers to ensure that it doesn’t wind up with specially-prepared vehicles. Its staffers negotiate anonymously for the best possible price, just as consumers would do.

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Four of the six vehicles in this month's test group are Recommended by *Consumer Reports*. Because of a sterling reliability history for past Accords and for Honda overall, *CR* predicts better than average reliability for the 2008 Accord and is recommending it. Above average reliability also allows *CR* to recommend the Legacy. *CR* is predicting average reliability for the Taurus based on the record of the Ford Five Hundred, which is virtually the same car. The Amanti's reliability has been worse than average, so it cannot be Recommended. Reliability for the Avenger is unknown and it scored too low in *CR*'s tests for it to be Recommended.

Consumer Reports only Recommends vehicles that have performed well in its tests, have at least average predicted reliability based on *CR*'s Annual Car Reliability Survey of its more than seven million print and web subscribers, and performed at least adequately if crash-tested or included in a government rollover test.

Full tests and ratings of the test group appear in the February issue of *Consumer Reports*, which goes on sale January 8. The reports are also available to subscribers of www.ConsumerReports.org.

The new Accord has a generously-sized backseat and both four- and six-cylinder versions are more powerful than before. Electronic stability control is now standard in all trim levels and crash-test results impressive. The Accord EX-L (\$28,695 Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price as tested) is powered by a 3.5-liter, 268-hp V6 engine that delivers smooth and lively performance. It's mated to a five-speed automatic transmission that shifts quickly and smoothly. Braking is very good overall.

The renamed and freshened Ford Five Hundred is equipped with a more powerful engine that makes the vehicle quicker and more responsive—though not as fuel efficient. The Taurus offers a comfortable ride, ample interior room, easy access, and a huge trunk. It remains a solid, if unexciting contender in the segment. The Taurus Limited (\$28,985 MSRP as tested) is now equipped with a 3.5-liter, 263-hp, V6 that delivers good performance but isn't among the more refined powerplants in this class. The six-speed automatic is smooth and responsive. Braking is very good overall.

Kia's Amanti offers a well-appointed, spacious cabin and a quiet, comfortable ride. It was freshened for 2007 with a new engine and has a revised suspension to improve ride and handling. Fuel economy is not a strong suit. The Amanti (\$30,130 MSRP as tested) is equipped with a 3.8-liter, 264-hp, V6 engine that delivers strong performance. It's mated to a responsive five-speed automatic. Braking is good.

With impressive agility, decent fuel economy, standard all-wheel-drive and an affordable base, the Subaru Legacy has a lot going for it. But the interior is snug, which limits its appeal as a family car, and its handling was tricky in emergency avoidance maneuver tests. The 2.5i Special Edition Legacy tested by *CR* (\$22,835 MSRP as tested) is equipped with a 2.5-liter, 170-hp, four-cylinder engine that provides adequate acceleration but is not as responsive as most other four-cylinder engines in this class. The four-speed automatic shifts smoothly. Braking is very good.

Like its near-twin the Chrysler Sebring, the Dodge Avenger ranks at the bottom of its class. The car feels cheap and underdeveloped. It has a stiff ride, suspension noise, lack of agility, tight quarters, uncomfortable seats, and substandard interior fit and finish. The Avenger R/T (\$27,350 MSRP as tested) is powered by a 3.5-liter, V6 engine that delivers lively performance and is smoother than the 2.7-liter V6 that *CR* tested in the Sebring. But it is not as refined as many other V6 engines. It's mated to a very good six-speed automatic transmission. Braking on the Avenger is good overall.

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