The all-new Accord adds thousands of dollars worth of standard features and technologies with average pricing across the sedan lineup increasing by less than $300.

By Steve Schaefer

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The Honda Accord is a common sight these days. The midsize sedan (and coupe) is one of the top sellers year after year. Funny to think that it started out as a modest little hatchback in 1976, only becoming a sedan in 1979, and growing larger and larger ever since.

The new, ninth-generation Accord may be the best looking ever. It's taken some of its appearance from a car that folks all seem to admire — BMW. Just look at the "flame surfacing" along the sides, and the chrome trim around the grille. There's the Hofmeister "kink" in the side window line, too. You have to admit it's nice looking, but familiar, too.

The original Accord weighed about 2,000 pounds and was propelled by a 68-horsepower four-cylinder engine. Today's car has a four-cylinder or a V-6. The new four displaces 2.4 liters and generates a healthy 185 horsepower. The V6, like my top-of-the-line test car flaunted, generates 278 horsepower from its 3.5-liter powerplant. Of course, the car weighs 3,500 pounds, now, too.

The EPA gives the V6 Accord an average miles-per-gallon rating of 25 (21 City, 34 Highway). That's pretty good. I achieved 22.8 mpg. The EPA awards a 5 for Air Pollution and 6 for Greenhouse Gas. That's average.

Honda is calling their newest engines "Earth Dreams Technology." I haven't found out what this

means other than being a positive-sounding nomenclature, since the numbers these new engines generate are nothing sensational so far. Honda, as a company, does have a history of working towards cleaner and more efficient engine technology, so this will bear watching.

A plug-in hybrid version of the new Accord is due early next year as an early ’14. It will not be alone in the market when it arrives — a Ford C-Max and Toyota Prius version will challenge it for ecologically minded shoppers. But it is another step forward.

One easy and practical way to get people in non-hybrid cars to drive more ecologically is Honda’s Eco Assist technology. There are two “parentheses” around the central speedometer. They glow green when you’re driving responsibly and go white when you’re not. The goal — stay green! That means not stomping on the accelerator or the brakes. It’s more subtle than showing you a gauge or a number. It might even work.

As usual, Accords come in economical DX and well-equipped EX levels, with an SE sporty model, too. Now, there is the new Touring model, with enough content to push the Accord up to near luxury car status. Think leather seats, electronic helpers of every type, including safety and comfort/convenience features galore. It would be a very long list to name them all, but you can count on keyless locks and ignition, dual automatic climate control, top-drawer audio, seat heaters, rear camera, and so much more.

One new and kind of surprising safety feature is the LaneWatch system. You may have heard about blind-spot warning systems that flash a light if there's someone where your outside mirrors can't display, but this new item actually shows you! I noticed that every time I put on the right turn signal, I got a view of the right side of the car in the display screen at center dash. Then I discovered a camera in the right mirror and it switches on, with the aim of preventing a collision when you're turning right. Nice.

The Accord sails down the Interstate and zips around town effortlessly. I didn't hear or feel anything unpleasant, and the nicely proportioned dash, with its carefully rendered surfaces in a variety of textures, was pleasing and felt reasonably upscale. Recent Honda products have received some criticism about the quality of their interiors so this is an important point. I think prospective owners will find a lot to like here. Of course, the instrument panel takes cues from the aforementioned BMW, so that is already helpful. There were great expanses of black, but it was good quality "charcoal."

Honda Accords have been built in the U.S. for 30 years now. The Marysville, Ohio plant — the first "transplant" factory — continues to pump them out, including my test car. Although my tester's sticker showed 25 percent Japanese parts, the engine and transmission were made here. The Accord has been essentially an American product for a long time.

The original Accord cost just $3,995. Admittedly, that was 1976 dollars. Today's car starts at $22,000 for the LX sedan with nothing extra. My Touring model, with an incredible load of everything you could want, came to $34,220, including $790 for shipping charges. Yes, that sounds like a lot to me, too, for a car that is not an actual BMW, but you should sample the car yourself to see how much it offers.