

LISA COLLINS

Behind the Scenes



Party time: Undeniably the best parties thrown in the record industry all occur during Grammy week, when the industry comes together to celebrate the best and the brightest. This year's weekend kicked off

lights were the performances of many of those in attendance. Among those taking to



Wonder

the stage this year were Houston, Babyface, Brandy, Monica and Chaka Khan, who brought down the house with her rendition of "My Funny Valentine." Meanwhile, across town, the House of Blues was being rocked by MTV's annual pre-Grammy "Rock the Vote" benefit, which drew rapper Chuck D., Issac Hayes and Hootie and the Blowfish. If that wasn't partying enough, about 6,000 nominees and guests turned out to the Los Angeles Biltmore Hotel for the official post-Grammy party. However most of the biggest superstars attended parties thrown by their labels. Perhaps the most posh was the Polygram bash at Chasen's. Over 3,000 guests jammed into the famed Hollywood nightspot. Spotted among them were "Fresh Prince" star Will Smith with his 3-year-old son Trey, Russell Simmonds, Stevie Wonder, Montell Jordan, Ellen DeGeneres and Boyz II Men. Of course, the best fun was had by the night's big winners. TLC pocketed "Best R&B Album" ("CrazySexyCool") and "Best R&B Performance by a Duo or Group With Vocal" ("Creep"). Anita Baker was awarded Best Female R&B Vocal Performance ("I Apologize") and Stevie Wonder walked off with "Best Male R&B Vocal Performance" ("For Your Love"). Coolio topped off in rap with "Best Rap Solo" ("Gangsta's Paradise") while Naughty by Nature pocketed "Best Rap Album" for their release, "Poverty's Paradise." And Lena Horne's latest album, "Evening With Lena Horne" landed her a Grammy for "Best Jazz Vocal."



Jones

on Feb. 26 with a star-studded tribute to Quincy Jones, who honored as MusicCares' 1996 Person Of The Year that drew the likes of Bonnie Raitt, Coolio, Jon Secada, Gloria Estefan, Sinbad, and Jones' latest singing talent, Tamia. Stevie Wonder had double duty that night.

Not only did Wonder perform at the MusicCares Gala, but later that night, he became the center of attention as he was honored at a posh reception thrown by Motown on a sound stage at Taleigh Studios. Presumably the affair was to celebrate the National Association of Recording Arts and Sciences has bestowed upon him and the label spared no expense in making Wonder feel like a king right down to performances by Brian McKnight, Johnny Gill, Mary J Blige, Zhane, Take 6, D;Angelo, Coolio, and Jon Secada.

The most exclusive pre-Grammy party is thrown annually by Arista Records president Clive Davis. This year's, held at the Beverly Hilton, drew the record industry's biggest names, including Whitney Houston with hubby Bobby Brown, Natalie Cole, Quincy Jones, Tony Bennett, Boyz II Men, Dick Clark, Kenny G., Paula Abdul, Antonio "LA" Reid, Toni Braxton, Mary J. Blige and teen sensation Monica. One of the party's signature high-

Test Drive.....

Acura's RL gets high marks

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also very quiet and efficient.

The RL handled very well in the mountains, exhibiting the kind of sure-footed confidence that a luxury car should have.

Coming down was easier than going up. Rich Thomas, Acura's executive vice president, drove back. He had no trouble in surpassing double nickel speeds, guiding the car flawlessly through snake-like roads.

The ride was excellent on various road surfaces. The suspension soaks up bumps and keeps all kinds of bad stuff from getting to the passengers.

So do the seats, which have a sort of suspension system of their own. If the standard suspension misses something, the seats don't. They are very comfortable, coddling driver and passenger.

The RL's wheelbase isn't much different from the Legend it replaces, but there is much more room in the rear, nearly on par with the LS400.

Knee room is increased because the front seat backs are concave. The seat rails are moved further outward, allowing more room for rear passengers' feet. The underside of the seats are carpeted to prevent scuffing your shoes.

Passengers are treated to the most refined cabin ever offered on an Acura. The plastic used

in the Legend has been dropped for more expensive-looking material. Fake wood adorns the base model while real wood is used in the premium version.

The cabin is ultra quiet with very little wind, road or engine noise making their way in.

The RL, which stands for "refined luxury," breaks no new ground for styling, though. However, I do like the prominent formal grill, surrounded by a hood that widens into sculpted shoulders. But the rest of the exterior is generic. On a casual glance I mistook a 3.2 TL for the 3.5 RL. The rear ends are similar, but the RL is a much bigger car.

All RLs are comprehensively equipped with extremely soft leather seats, power windows, door locks, mirrors and moonroof. The driver's seat can be electronically adjusted in eight different directions.

A CD player is standard as well as an eight speaker stereo that's wonderfully balanced.

That will set you back \$41,000. Opt for the premium package and you get heated seats, traction control, Bose stereo upgrade, heated mirrors and real wood. That's \$44,000, some several thousand less than its competitors with much the same equipment.

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