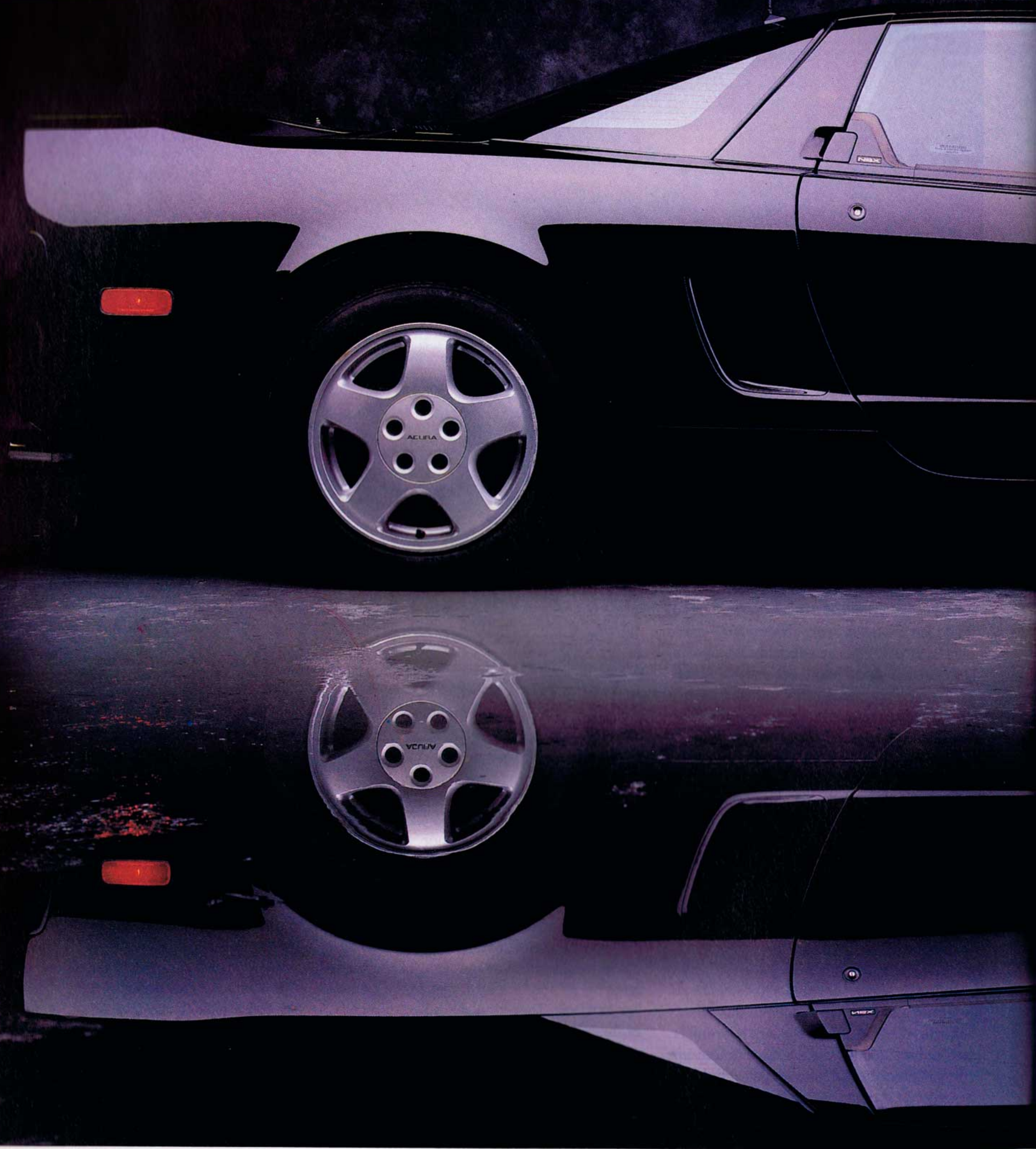


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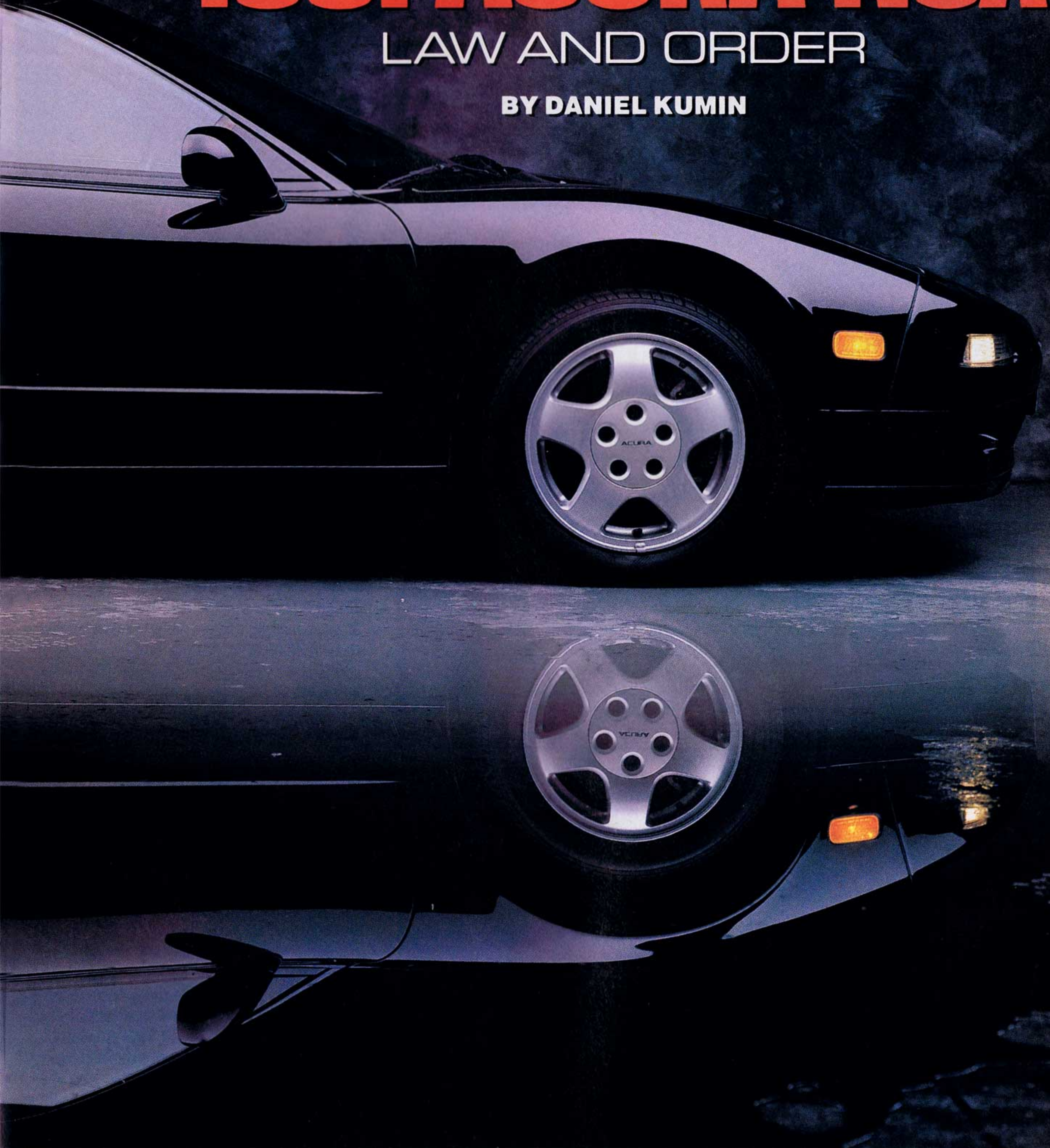


PHOTOS BY BILL ASHE

1991 ACURA NSX

LAW AND ORDER

BY DANIEL KUMIN





TO THE SHAKERS, simplicity was the chief virtue. The tools, forms, and architecture of this eccentric 19th-century sect retain to this day their makers' clear and obvious creed: Eliminate the extraneous, craft with love and care for the material, and let form follow function.

If modern-day Shakers decided to go into the supercar business, the result might be the Acura NSX—unlikely as it may seem to term a \$70,000, 250-horsepower mid-engined grand-touring two-seater “simple.” The NSX meets all the above criteria, however. It's meticulously crafted from top-grade components, its design is dedicated purely to its appointed task—that is, moving two people from point A to point B with maximum velocity and safety and minimum fuss and fatigue—and its form arises purely from what the car is all about.

So when Doug Strauss, an attorney in Fairfield County, Connecticut, became the proud owner of one of the East's first NSX's—an understated black-on-black beauty—he wanted an audio system equally austere, clean-lined, and thoughtfully conceived. While some might feel the Bose factory system meets these standards, its absolute audio performance wasn't quite up to the owner's requirements. So Strauss turned to Fairfield autosound specialist Audio Coupe and its owner, Micah Sheveloff.

The system, designed by Sheveloff and installed by Paul Silva, is nothing if not simple. The team deduced the layout only after inspecting and partially breaking down the unfamiliar car: “Doug Strauss bought a sound and a concept, not a system,” Sheveloff says. The design comprises only twelve—count 'em—components from but two marques: A Nakamichi TD-700 cassette tuner and, from a/d/s/, an AX2e active crossover, one PQ10 and one PQ8 amp, S6.2i 6½-inch woofers and the 1-inch dome tweeters from the Model 320i/s component set up front, and a complete 320i/s set in back. Despite the seemingly uncomplicated design, Silva still needed to put in more than 60 hours on the job.

According to Sheveloff, the almost Spartan setup was dictated by both the customer's specs and the car's personality, which together form the crux of the installer's design philosophy. “Strauss listens all but exclusively to modern jazz,” says Sheveloff, “from tapes he painstakingly dubs himself from CD's. Period. He had neither need nor desire for a CD player, and in particular he didn't want to clutter up the NSX unnecessarily. So it made no sense to put [a CD head]



in; Strauss is a piano player and has a high standard for reproduced sound on his instrument—and the TD-700 meets it.”

The Nakamichi deck, which doesn't have an autoreverse transport, fits the bill perfectly: It offers quality, simplicity, and performance—just like the car in which it resides. (The Nak came from Strauss's previous wheels; Audio Coupe sent it back to the manufacturer for a tune-up and it came back, in Sheveloff's words, better than new.) The deck slid in the dash easily enough, but the installer sent the entire dashboard fascia to a local machine shop for custom fabrication and fitting. Mating the NSX's nickel-over-plastic panel to the Nak proved a challenge, but one well worth the effort. The result was a perfect factory look.

While the new setup doesn't utilize the NSX's stock diversity FM antenna system, Sheveloff and Silva managed to find a clever use for the factory wiring that runs to the rear-window antenna: It now carries signals from a Hirschmann ON-2a rear-light cellular antenna, which feeds the Fujitsu Commander II cellular phone nestled in the center console. (The removable transceiver is mounted in the trunk.) Running new phone wiring would have involved a difficult path through the mid-engined tourer's power bay, so Silva instead reworked a stock eight-conductor cable—included by Acura for

an optional CD changer—already routed through the frame. The Audio Coupe team further exploited the NSX's factory-system accoutrements: What was formerly a center-channel driver low in the dash now functions as the cellular phone's hands-free speaker.

The balance of the hi-fi chain was selected on similar grounds of simplicity and quality. Working within Strauss's stringent demands for uncompromised performance with minimum intervention and maximum invisibility, Sheveloff and Silva shoehorned the four-channel amplifiers and the crossover into a narrow compartment just above the passenger footwell, replacing the factory system's compact subwoofer. Snuggled between the carpeting and the front bulkhead, the electronics are cooled by a fan that is set to run whenever the system is lit up, keeping things comfortable in the tight, enclosed space.

The front woofers, cannibalized from the Model S6.2i subwoofer plate, were selected in place of the standard 320i/s 5-inch woofers because Sheveloff wanted more low end and detail. The subs were located low in the doors, in spaces that originally accommodated the NSX's factory 4-inch drivers. Knowing they were critical to the system's front image, Silva used laminated MDF to fabricate open-back enclosures that he sealed to the door's sheet metal; the woofers protrude almost 3 inches from the door panels but still

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Doug Strauss's NSX holds only twelve components, including a/d/s/ speakers and Nakamichi's TD-700.



It sounds like a set of Stax Lambda-Pro headphones on wheels—with an incredible middle.”

Strauss can call in objections using Fujitsu's Commander II phone, which is hidden between the NSX's seats.

utilize the doors' volume, and they play through the factory grilles.

The 320i/s tweeters were positioned at either end of the dash. Sheveloff copped the look from the Ferrari 328; the rationale for the elevated placement is enhanced, tightly focused imaging. To protect the dashboard leather, the tweeter cutouts were first “star-bursted,” and thanks to a/d/s/ adaptors the end product is flush with the top surface and blends in to virtual invisibility.

The rear of the NSX offers a minimal package area—“barely room for my briefcase,” according to Strauss. Its perimeter is a collection of leather-clad panels that conceal three electronic automotive-control units. Where these panels angle out to meet the trailing edge of each door, a small “cave” results. Audio Coupe crafted hand-carved, compound-curved leather-covered inserts built up of laminated MDF and birch to bridge the panels, forming a pair of enclosures that are covered and routed to accommodate the rear 320i/s woofers. The rear tweeters are flushed into the factory panels and carefully angled inward to enhance stereo imaging at the driver and passenger seats.

The finished system is more than inconspicuous—it is all but entirely invisible. And the untrained eye that does notice it is more likely to take it for a stock system than a high-performance retrofit, which is precisely the effect that Strauss wanted.

The NSX's wiring scheme is, once again, as simple as possible. The TD-700 feeds the AX-2e via Esoteric Streetwires Easy-Link cabling; the two-way crossover is set at 2,532 Hz via the processor's unusually sophisticated 24-dB-per-octave Linkwitz-Riley topology. In turn, the AX-2e feeds the two amplifi-

ers (also connected via Easy-Link cabling). The PQ10 drives all four woofers with 40 watts each, the PQ8 the four tweeters at 20 watts per. Speaker wiring is Streetwires 12-gauge throughout.

Audio Coupe and owner Strauss found no need to improve on the Acura's excellent factory security system. In addition, DC power for the hi-fi and other aftermarket gear is supplied by the NSX's stock alternator and battery, with power flowing through Esoteric Ultra-Flow 8-gauge cabling and connectors. There are three discrete power lines—each routed through an industrial thermal circuit breaker rather than fuses.

Since the battery is just on the other side of the firewall from the audio system and the amps and crossover are only inches from the head unit, power and line-level cable runs were wonderfully short. The TD-700's 12-volt power and turn-on pickups were both wired direct to the battery to minimize noise—the latter via a relay controlled by the ignition switch, a trick Sheveloff and Silva employ routinely. All of which contributes to the system's impressive lack of electrical noise—a bit surprising when you recall that the NSX is, after all, a Honda, a name notorious for audible noise-induction. Sheveloff also credits the AX-2e's optically decoupled design. “They [a/d/s/] promised me there'd be zero noise at the crossover,” he says, “and by God, they were right.”

Continuing to muse about the finished product's performance, Sheveloff says, “Overall, it's the smoothest system I've heard in eleven years of car audio. It sounds like a set of Stax Lambda-Pro headphones on wheels—an incredible middle, and everything seems to be coming from exactly the right place.

“The NSX is no megawatt burner, but it sounds fabulous and goes *plenty* loud. We spent a couple of days just tuning the thing—crossover, driver levels, and so on—and I think it paid off big time. It's really a beautiful car, and though it's a toughie, it was a lot of fun to work on.”

The car's owner concurs. “Due to the lack of space in the NSX, there's no full sub-woofer system—so I wasn't sure at first. But it turns out that you get fine bass, with phenomenal presence that's beautifully clear. Music simply sounds tremendously *alive*.” Strauss also has praise for Audio Coupe. “Their workmanship is beautiful. These are extremely careful people who do a first-class job and really care about follow-up—no questions asked.” High praise indeed—from a lawyer. ■