

Road beat: Mazda sets the bar high with CX-5



The 2015 Mazda CX-5 excels in looks and performance.
Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

If there were a stealth car company in the world, look to Mazda. While their product line for the last 10 years has been at or near the top of their respective classes, until the last couple of years, you could say they have been flying under the radar. But they have been found out and sales are growing like bad weed in a rainstorm. And there is a reason; Mazda has proven itself as the best cars in the small sports car, compact and mid-size sedan class. Now they can claim best of class honors from the Road Beat in the small CUV/SUV class, which has been dominated in the past by the Subie Forester, especially since it went to a CVT.

For 2016, Takeri design philosophy has made the CX-5 by far the best looking small SUV, which has been so successful in the Mazda 3 and 6. It has a new aggressive look from its gorgeous front end to its clean rear end finish. It looks smaller than it is and its smooth lines are minimal yet purposeful. In the looks department alone, the CX-5 is the clear winner in this class.

Size wise, the CX-5 is true compact size with a length of 179 inches on a 106-inch wheelbase. Its beamy 72-inch width allows its wide track of 62.5 inches. While its sleek design disguises its height, it is 66-inches tall without the roof rack or shark fin antenna. It will swallow a mammoth 65-cubic-feet of cargo behind the front chairs. Its interior is definitely not compromised by its high style. Co-efficient of drag is 0.33.



Specifications

Price \$22,675 to about \$34,000

Engine

2.0L inline four 16 valve,
DOHC 155 hp @ 6,000 rpm
150 ft-lb of torque @ 4,000
rpm

2.5L inline four 16 valve,
DOHC 184 hp @ 5,700 rpm
185ft-lb of torque @ 3,250
rpm

Transmission

Six speed manual

Six speed torque converter
automatic

Configuration

Transverse front engine/
FWD/AWD

Dimensions

Wheelbase 106.3 inches

Length 178.7 inches

Width 72.4 inches

Height 65.7 inches

Track (f/r) 62.4/62.5 inches

Ground clearance 8.5 inches

Weight 3,433 pounds

GVWR 4,409 pounds

Steering lock to lock 2.7
turns

Turning circle (wall to
wall) 38.4 feet

Wheels 19X7 inch alloys

Tires 225/55X19

Cargo capacity (second row
up/down) 34.1/65.4 cubic
feet

Fuel capacity 14.8 gallons

Co-efficient of drag 0.33

Performance

0-60 mph 7.17 seconds

50-70 mph 4.17 seconds

50-70 mph uphill 6.56
seconds

Top speed (mfg) 127 mph

Fuel economy EPA rated
26/33/29 mpg
city/highway/combined.

Expect 28-29 mpg in rural

country driving. 32 mpg on a level highway at legal speeds.

Two engine choices are available, a spunky 2.0L Skyactiv inline direct injected super high compression (13:1) DOHC, 16 valve four knocking down 155 hp at 6,000 rpm and 150 pounds of twist at 4,000 rpm which engine is found in the Sport edition. Stepping up to the 2.5L inline four with the all the same Skyactiv bells and whistles improves its output to 185 hp at a low 5,700 rpm and 185 pounds of torque at a remarkably low 3,250 rpm which resides under the hood of the Touring and Grand Touring edition. These are the exact same powertrains used in the Mazda 3 and 6 right down the six-speed manual (Sport only) and six-speed auto cog-swapper (Sport, Touring and Grand Touring). As the numbers will reveal, both are among the most powerful and efficient powertrains in this market segment today.

Two drive systems are available with FWD (all models) and AWD Touring and Grand Touring only.

Getting to where the rubber meets the road, my FWD, 2.5L tester is a veritable rocket ship in this class. Zero-60 mph times splits the difference between a Mazda 3 and a Mazda 6 with times averaging 7.17 seconds (the 3 ran 7.1 and the 6 ran 7.3). Nothing else in this class ever broke into the sevens, let alone the low sevens. When I performed the two way runs, I didn't believe the chondex when it stopped at 6.97 seconds on the first run. The traction control was switched off requiring careful launches to prevent wheel spin at full tilt boogie launches. Phenomenal.

Passing rimes are also top of the class with 50-70 mph runs lasting just 4.17 seconds on level ground and 6.56 seconds up a 6 percent grade. Nothing else in this class comes close unless you opt for a Subie Forester Turbo which is an absolute flyer.

Fuel economy is also excellent as with the Mazda 3 and 6. EPA rates the 2.5L FWD at 26/33/29 mpg city highway combined. The 2.0L will net you 2 more mpg on the highway with the manual, but the combined mpg prediction is the same at 29 mpg as with the 2.0L auto. There is no mpg benefit according to the EPA. AWD is predicted to cost you a couple of mpg. But what about real life? My 2.5L AT FWD averaged about 28.8 mpg mostly in hilly country driving with max speeds of about 60 mph. In a two way level highway run fuel economy 70 mph run settled in at 31.8 mpg. But it's the overall mpg number that is so good, a real 28.8 mpg.

But it is not just performance and fuel economy that shines. CX-5 is a bright star in all aspects. Besides the CX-5's wide track, everything else is state of the art. Suspension is fully independent with coils in all four corners and stab bars at both ends. Steering is an electric rack that is very quick at 2.7 turns lock to lock. Wheels in the GT model are 19X7 inch trick alloys and they are shod with 225/55 lower profile tires. Consequently this extraordinarily tuned design has predictable super quick turn-in and minimal body roll when pushed hard with moderate understeer. It is extremely well balanced allowing for very sporty, aggressive driving. Mazda's new ad campaign "Driving Matters" is so appropriate to this brand as it is obviously evident in the five models tested recently by the Road Beat. These are driver's automobiles.

Ride quality doesn't suffer as a result. It is quiet, very smooth with a firm, but supple and compliant ride that handle big bumps well with no head tossing. Yeah, sure it's a small crossover SUV, but it acts like a sport sedan. The engine spins at 2,200 rpm at 70 mph with no noise except for some tire noise on coarse roads, but remember this thing is shod with some semi-performance tires (225/55). That shorter top gear (2,200 rpm at 70 mph instead of 2,000 rpm at 70 mph) may answer the question of why the CX-5 is so quick and its highway mileage is not a Mazda sedan like 40 mpg. But then

again, no conventional compact SUV comes close to 40-mpg highway. Even though its CD is a low 0.33, it still is taller and that adds to drag overall.

Those wide tires plus good size four-wheel discs with the fronts being ventilated do an excellent job at arresting forward progress from 40 mph in 41 feet. As with most other (if not all other passenger vehicles in production), it has every electronic safety system in autodom like stability control, ABS and BA plus enough airbags to float the Titanic. It also has the aforementioned superb handling which equates to good accident avoidance.



The interior looks like it belongs in a higher-end model.

In another surprise, the CX-5 comes with an interior that looks like it came right out of the top of the line Mazda 6. Done in a contrasting sporty off white and black leather trim, the design is almost identical (if not identical) to the Mazda 3 and 6. It is beautiful to look at and even better on the backside. Well done. The IP (instrument panel) is a simple three-hole binnacle with the appropriate tach, speedo, ancillary gauges plus complete trip computer. If there is a downfall with the CX-5, it is the radio, too confusing and difficult to use. It could be done better, but maybe after some time one could become adept. Maybe I am old fashioned as I bang this story out on my IBM Selectric that just replaced a

Smith Corona manual.

Rear seating is excellent for three reasonable sized adults, while cargo room is good at 34-cubic-feet behind the second row (about twice the volume of a Lincoln Town Car trunk) and 65-cubic-feet of volume with the second row folded flat. If you want a third row, you will need a trailer.

Pricing starts for a FWD Sport with a manual cog swapper at \$21,795. The six-speed auto unit adds \$1,400. An AWD Sport auto stickers for \$24,445. My FWD Grand Touring was \$28,220. AWD only adds \$1,250, a bargain and probably fully recoverable on resale. My tester had a few options bringing to total to \$32,010 plus \$880 for the cruise ship from Hiroshima, Japan.

Two of the packages were the GT-I-Activesense pack that includes radar cruise, smart braking, lane departure warning and a high beam control for the excellent headlights, \$1,500. The Grand Touring Tech pack at \$1,505 offers Nav, LED headlights that are adaptive, plus LED running lights, fogs and more. And then there were the fabulous seats. Mazda is looming large.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.