

# Road beat: Mazda CX-3 a worthy crossover



The Mazda CX-3 handles well making a name for itself.  
Photos/Larry Weitzman

**By Larry Weitzman**

Introduced about nine months ago, the new Mazda CX-3 is already proving itself as a best in class vehicle. Other than carrying a baby grand piano or an eight-man football team, this new Mazda demonstrates this unique company's purpose of building vehicles that outperform the competition in so many areas.

Starting with its KODO themed aggressive design (Mazda says "Soul of Motion") which starts with a simple, but sophisticated open cross-member grille that might look good on a 1960s Ferrari, to its edgy, curvaceous lines which flow

rearward, this Mazda (as with their entire line) speaks of forward movement almost like great airplane designs like the North American P-51 Mustang; when they look that good, they fly that good.



### **Specifications**

#### **Pricing**

\$19,960 to about \$29,500

#### **Engine**

2.0L DOHC 16 valve direct injection inline four 146 hp @ 6,000 rpm

146 lb.-ft. of torque @ 2,800 rpm

#### **Transmission**

Six-speed torque converter automatic

#### **Configuration**

Transverse front engine//FWD/AWD

#### **Dimensions**

Wheelbase 101.2 inches

Length 168.3 inches

Width 69.6 inches

Height 60.9 inches

Track (f/r) 60.0/59.9 inches

Ground Clearance 6.22 inches

Curb weight (FWD/AWD)

2,809/2,952 pounds  
Turning circle (curb to curb) 34.8 feet  
Fuel Tank capacity (FWD/AWD)  
12.7/11.9 gallons  
Cargo volume (second row down/up) 44.5/12.4 cubic feet  
Wheels (std/opt) 16X6 inch steel/16X6.5-inch alloy opt/18X7 inch alloy opt  
Tires (std/opt) 216/60X16/215/50X18

### **Performance**

0-60 mph 7.89 seconds  
50-70 mph 4.45 seconds  
50-70 uphill 6.86 seconds  
Top speed (according to Mazda) 119 mph  
Fuel economy EPA rated 29/35/31 mpg city/highway/combined.  
Expect 30.9 mpg in rural/suburban driving and 35 mpg at 70 mph on a level highway.

As a crossover SUV, the CX-3 is small with a length of 168 inches (about a foot shorter than your average compact). It is wide, however, at 70 inches and stands 61-inches tall, not exactly a giant. Wheelbase is a long 101 inches, which can be seen in the very short rear overhang. As a benefit of that width is a wide track of 60 inches.

Power comes from inline transverse mounted DOHC, 16 valve, Skyactiv four-cylinder engine that pumps out 146 hp engine at 6,000 rpm plus 146 pounds of twist at an extremely low 2,800

rpm. Skyactiv is an important part of this remarkable engine's equation as it adds direct injection plus the ability to Atkinson cycle which makes the engine more efficient, just wait until you see the real fuel economy numbers. The tranny is a six speed lockup torque converter automatic. Very quick shifting, it was sometimes reluctant to shift to a higher gear. While it has a sport mode, even when switched off it sometimes stayed in the lower gears too long. This might have been due to a memory function of modern trannies where they remember the driving habits of the hot-rodder before me.

Performance numbers reflect how remarkable this engine is. The CX-3 pops off 0-60 mph in 7.89 seconds. But the CX-3 really shows off its big mid-range torque in its 50-70 mph passing times of 4.45 seconds on a level highway and just 6.86 seconds blasting up a 6 percent grade. But adding to the CX-3 performance characteristics is its remarkable responsiveness. The throttle is linear, but get halfway into the go pedal and it feels like it has 246 horses working for you. Also while this was a front wheel drive CX-3, torque steer is almost non-existent. Performance is also helped by the light 2,809 pounds of curb weight. Being skinny also helps fuel economy and ride and handling.

Sipping gas is another attribute of the CX-3. In about 300 miles of driving with less than 15 percent on the highway and including my performance testing, this CX-3 averaged 30.9 mpg and on the highway with the engine spinning 2,400 rpm, it returned an average of 35 mpg. I'll bet with the addition of a seventh gear that number would go up by three mpg. The CX-3 is the most economical SUV ever tested by the Road Beat, quite remarkable considering its relatively excellent performance. One small item is the smallish fuel tank of 12.7 gallons. AWD will cost you about one mpg overall. The EPA says it should return 29/35/31 mpg city/highway/combined.

But it's not just straight line performance, it's also about when the road bends. In this category the CX-3 really can

strut. Suspension is fairly standard with MacPherson struts up front and a semi-independent torsion beam in the rear. Its wide track improves stability and its gorgeous 18 x 7 inch alloys are shod with 215/50 series rubber. And those numbers don't disappoint when changing directions, like it's a larger Miata. The electric power steering has great feedback and feel and assures confidence when dancing through a good set of twisties. Body roll is almost flat. With respect to this SUV, the operative letter is the S. It is a delight to drive. When it comes to looks, performance, handling and fuel economy not only is this CX-3 at the top of its class, so is the Mazda3, Mazda6, Mazda MX-5 and the CX-5 all ratings just bestowed as well by the New York Daily Auto News. No one has tested the new CX-9, but you can bet scribes have high hopes for this new mid-size SUV with three rows of seats.



Comfort is part of the package.

Ride quality is a bit firm, not harsh mind you, but firm. On smoother roads you will love the way it handles bumps and undulations, but sharper imperfections will be noticed. On the positive side large undulations don't upset the handling as there is no float in the ride. In fact, Mazda CX-3 handles those kind of road imperfections better than SUVs with a softer ride. Road noise is about average for this class and wind noise is quite subdued making the CX-3 a good road car. With AWD (a \$1,250 option) it would be a great all weather vehicle that could do well in the light bush.

Safety is second to none with an alphabet soup of electronic technology. Brakes are four wheel discs and in the AWD package the front discs grow by over half an inch for improved power. It stops in wet conditions in 46 feet from 40 mph under perfect control. You could feel all the systems working to make the stop in only about 6 feet longer if the surface was dry. Good stuff.

Not only are Mazda designers doing world class exteriors, but their interiors also deserve that nomenclature. Seats are superb in style and comfort, especially when done in black and parchment with a bit of red trim pieces which are done in a leather and a faux suede material. Instrumentation consists a central large tach with a digital speedo in its southeast quadrant and also on its heads-up display. Other info including the trip computer are done digitally left and right of the tach. Good stuff. But it's the audio/nav system that is a distraction as it is still difficult to master and operate. I know Mazdas are about driving, which they definitely are.

Cargo capacity with the rear seats folded is about 45 cubic feet. With them up it shrinks to about 12 cubic feet. Not exactly your average moving van, but it's a good way from blowing your budget when going to Home Depot.

Pricing starts at just below \$20 large for a FWD Sport CX-3. However, my fully loaded Grand Touring FWD is \$24,990, plus \$880 for the boat ride from Hiroshima, Japan. AWD will add \$1,250 and the option GT package is \$1,920 which is appropriate for the inattentive driver with its smart braking, radar cruise, lane departure, auto high beams and a couple of other items, your choice. My tester which had all these options plus Mazda mobile start stickered at \$28,340. Mazda makes driving fun as long as you don't have to change the radio station.

*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.*