

Road Beat: Mazda CX-5 AWD, an all-in-one



The Mazda CX-5 AWD handles well and gets good gas mileage.
Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

About a year ago, the Road Beat tested the new generation Mazda CX-5, a mid-size CUV. It was a FWD edition with the 2.5L Skyactiv DOHC, 16 valve inline four. But perhaps the more important model, especially to my readers, is the AWD issue of the same vehicle necessary for the weather and terrain we live in. Even flatlanders who frequent the Sierra should opt for this simple single speed AWD system.

There have been no significant changes from 2015 to 2016. The Takeri-themed body remains the best looking in its class, although it is getting some competition from the new Hyundai's in this compact CUV class. The marvelous, aggressive front end remains with its curvaceous lines ending in its tapering rear

end. The co-efficient of drag is a reasonable 0.33.

Its length of 179 inches with a generous width of 72 inches and height of 66 inches places the CX-5 directly into the aforementioned compact CUV class. Its sleek design hides its ability to hold 65 cubic feet of cargo behind the front seats.



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

185 ft-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 3,589 pounds
GVWR 4,566 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 15.3 gallons
Co-efficient of drag 0.33

Performance

0-60 mph 7.83 seconds
50-70 mph 4.26 seconds
50-70 mph uphill 6.75 seconds
Top speed (mfg) 127 mph
Fuel economy EPA rated 24/30/26 mpg city/highway/combined.
Expect 28-29 mpg in rural country driving. 31 mpg on a level highway at legal speeds.

As with my FWD test vehicle, the same 2.5L, 184 hp at a low 5,700 rpm and 185 pounds of twist at just 3,250 rpm, resides in the engine bay of my top of the line Grand Touring edition. This same powertrain is optional in the compact Mazda 3 and 6. With a weight increase of about 150 pounds for the AWD system

to 3,589 pounds, there is a small penalty in 0-60 mph time to 7.83 seconds or about six-tenths of a second when compared to the FWD CX5. Fifty to 70 mph passing times also increase insignificantly to 4.26 seconds on level ground and to 6.75 seconds up a steep grade (FWD times were 4.17 and 6.56 seconds, respectively). Performance is still at or near the top of the class.

EPA numbers show fuel economy losses of a couple of mpg, rating the AWD version at 24/30/26 mpg. But overall I averaged the same 28-29 mpg overall as I did in the FWD version in rural country driving, reflecting the efficiency of the Skyactiv system of direct injection and the use of the Atkinson cycle system of an extremely high compression ratio (13:1) and late closing intake valves.

Power is transmitted to all four wheels via a slick shifting six-speed torque converter tranny.

Handling is a forte in all Mazdas and as with FWD version, it only improves in the CX-5 with the addition of AWD. Suspension is state of the art fully independent in all four corners with MacPherson struts up front and a multi-link system holding up the rear. Both ends have stabilizer bars and coils are the springs of choice. The steering rack is electronically assisted that is a quick 2.7 turns lock to lock and the turning circle is a tight 36 feet. Standard 19 x 7 inch alloys are shod with lower profile, wide 225/55 tires. The results are handling feel and feedback of a sporting sedan, ripping through the twisties with aplomb as Mazda does emphasize handling qualities in all their vehicles with well controlled body roll, super accurate steering, mild understeer and a backend that stays planted.

But that doesn't necessarily mean a loss in ride quality. Strong, stiff construction enhances both ride and handling. While firm, it is still quite compliant that is a good balance as CX-5 handles both big and small bumps well. Wind noise at

speed is non-existent and the tires are quiet on all but the coarsest roads. Engine speed is a reasonably low 2,200 rpm at 70 mph, the same as the FWD model as it also uses the exact same gear ratios through the gears.

Braking is excellent, repeating the 41 foot stop of the FWD model from 40 mph. Safety is second to none with standard rear cross traffic alert, a rear view camera, available lane departure warning, radar cruise control, smart braking (I-Activsense package \$1,500), LED front headlights (and LED lights everywhere else) that are adaptive with auto high beam. CX-5 also has Smart city braking and more (Tech package \$1,155).

Inside are gorgeous standard leather seats that sit as good as they look. A precision, Swiss watch type instrument panel has all the appropriate gauges including a tach and speedo plus a trip computer. However, the center stack if you can call it that still uses a mouse like system that needs work, plus a screen that looks like an afterthought. It needs to be improved.

Rear seating is a pinch for three if the trip becomes more than an hour, but cargo volume is about average for the class, plenty for a Home Depot run.

Pricing for my top of the line CX-5 AWD Grand Touring model stickers for \$29,870 which includes the Nav system. The two option packages plus a few small items like \$300 for the Soul Red paint brought the total to \$33,685 plus \$800 for the boat from Hiroshima, Japan. CX-5 remains at the top of its class which has some pretty heady competition like the RAV4, CR-V, Rouge, Escape, Jeep Cherokee, Kia Sportage and more. However, the new Hyundai Santa Fe Sport 2.0T may be its equal and a bit more. Both were tested back to back, but you be the judge.

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.