

Road Beat: Chrysler Pacifica – a new type of minivan



The Chrysler Pacifica is redefining what a minivan should be.
Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

One could almost call the new Pacifica a CUV from where its namesake was pilfered when the prior Pacific model, a CUV, was discontinued, which was too bad as the later models of the prior Pacifica were great vehicles. The new Pacifica minivan has received plenty of fanfare and it is well deserved.

First, is its new innovative design, as it doesn't quite look like a minivan. It is sleeker, with clever and unique design features such as the tight, sloping window line that is truncated with a reverse flow making the mini look mini. The Pacifica does not look full size, but it is and then some with

a huge 122-inch wheelbase and a length of 204 inches. While it looks sleek and short, it isn't; standing 70-inches tall. Perhaps that is due to its massive width of 80 inches.

Pacific dimensions make it the largest of all the minivans by an inch or two. Its siblings the Dodge Caravan and Chrysler Town and Country, while almost sharing the same wheelbase (the Pacifica is still a half an inch longer there, too), lack the massive track of the Pacifica by 3 inches, as the Pacifica rides on one of the widest tracks in autodom at 68.3 inches. That pays dividends in handling.

Under its diminutive hood lies a transversely mounted familiar Chrysler 3.6L high tech, high output V-6 that knocks down 287 hp at 6,400 rpm together with 262 pounds of twist at 4,000 rpm. That engine is connected to a nine-speed auto tranny with a top gear that allows a cruise speed of 70 mph at just 1,600 rpm, meaning great road trip fuel economy.

Performance is outstanding with the Pacifica knocking off 0-60 mph in a quick 6.79 seconds. Passing performance is also stellar with simulated runs of 50-70 mph on a level highway of 3.86 seconds and the same run up a six percent grade only slowing that time to 5.77 seconds. Those are numbers usually found in your high performance mid-size V-6 sedan. Towing capacity is a generous 3,600 pounds and its interior payload including 19 gallons of gas (about 120 pounds) is almost 1,600 pounds. That's big.



Specifications

Price About \$30,000 to about \$45,000.

Engine

3.6L DOHC 24 valve V-6 287 hp @ 6,400 rpm

262 lb.-ft. of torque @ 4,000 rpm

Redline 6,400 rpm

Hybrid

3.6L DOHC 24 valve V-6 280 Est hp combined hp with the electric power

Battery

16 kWh Li-ion battery

Transmission

Nine-speed torque converter automatic

Configuration

Transverse mounted front engine/front wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 121.6 inches

Length 203.8 inches

Width 79.6 inches

Height 69.9 inches

Track (f/r) 68.3/68.3 inches

Ground clearance 5.1 inches

Cargo width at rear wheelhouse 48.8 inches

Maximum cargo height 47.6 inches

Total interior volume 197.3 cubic feet

Interior volume (behind first row, 2nd row, 3rd row)

140.5/87.5/32.3 cubic feet

Weight 4,330 pounds (hybrid
4,987 pounds)

GVWR 6005 pounds (hybrid
6,300 pounds)

Payload 1,675 pounds (hybrid
1,313 pounds)

Weight distribution (f/r)
55/45 percent

Tow capacity 3,600 pounds

Fuel capacity 19 Gallons
(hybrid 17 gallons)

Wheels (std/opt/opt)
17X7/18X7.5/20X7.5 inches

Tires (std//opt//opt)
235/65X17//235/60X18//245X50
X20 inches

Steering lock to lock 3.13
turns

Turning circle 39.7 feet

Drag coefficient 0.300

Performance

0-60 mph 6.79 seconds

50-70 mph 3.86 seconds

50-70 mph uphill (6%) 5.77
seconds

Top Speed Well into triple
digits

Fuel economy 18/28/22 mpg
city/highway/combined Expect
24-25 mpg overall in
rural/suburban country
driving. 35 mpg at legal
highway speeds.

For the most part, while the nine-speed unit delivered ultra-smooth shifts, a couple of times it was a bit jerky and jumpy when trying to select gears when being quick on and off the

throttle. Nail the throttle hard, even with traction control, it still will chirp the tires easily if not downright smoke them for a second. Lots of power here and it's very responsive. Sometimes you can easily forget your driving a minivan. Maybe that's a good thing as minivans, despite of their stigma, are the most practical vehicles ever made, especially with Chrysler and their stow and go seating giving you a flat floor in about 30 seconds and the cargo capacity of a small moving van. A Pacifica could be a costly and dangerous tool at Home Depot.

Now to its excellent fuel economy. EPA rates the Pacifica at 18/28/22 mpg city/highway/combined but the numbers achieved in my test of over 800 miles were much higher. At 70 mph on cruise control on a level highway in two directions for 30 miles the Pacifica averaged an amazing 35.4 mpg and the fuel computer is dead nuts on, I checked it. In a round trip to Los Angeles and back it averaged 28.5 mpg. But this wasn't run at 70 mph, as if you don't run at least 80 mph on Interstate 5, you'll get run over by traffic. My average speed on the return which was non-stop for 391 miles achieved in 5 hours and 10 minutes was 76 mph, which means mostly driving at 80 mph and slowing for big trucks going into the passing lanes. Fuel economy was 28.6 mpg by the computer and by the fill-up (13.68 gallons). Part of that is due to the Pacifica's wind cheating design which has a drag coefficient of 0.300.

So how does a big vehicle like this handle? Better than you would expect. Suspenders are four corner independent. Standard wheels and tires are decent with 17 x 7 inch alloys shod with 235/65 rubber but 18 x 7.5 inch alloys and lower profile 60 series tires are optional, something I might consider depending on price. Chrysler does offer a 20 x 7.5-inch wheel with 245/50 rubber, but I would stick with the 18's for a better ride and quiet. The reality is the Pacifica is decent handling even when pushed thanks to its well sorted out suspenders and super wide and stable track. There is some body

roll, but that's to be expected when you get this kind of luxu ride quality. And making a 4,300-pound vehicle change directions is no easy feat (weight distribution is good at 55/45 percent front and rear) and Pacifica does it feeling a bit lighter on its feet.

When you consider its super compliant ride qualities and high comfort levels, Pacifica will surprise you again. And steering is reasonably quick at 3.1 turns lock to lock and its turning circle is under 40 feet. Did I mention there is no engine, wind or tire noise and if that isn't enough it comes with Active Noise Cancellation.

Pacifica also comes with some serious disc brakes with large 13 inch rotors (fronts are ventilated). Of course, it has all the electronic wizardry including a 360-degree Surround View camera, forward collision warning plus, blind spot warning and all the other acronyms. Projector headlights were very good. HID's are optional see below.

Now to the massive interior which has over 32 cubic feet behind the three place third row rear bench seat and a cargo volume of 140 cubic feet behind the first row very comfortable buckets. Second row is a choice of two buckets or a three-place bench. Either way, second row leg room is bigger than most limos. I would go with the bench unless you need separation with your children. Materials are first rate and the instrumentation complete. The cabin is extremely spacious with shoulder and hip room galore (even the third-row shoulder room is 61 inches), but it drives like it's a mid-size car, feeling much smaller and lighter on its feet. How did they do that?

But I am not a fan of using a touch screen for all the functions of the radio, Nav, phone, climate and other media hookups. However, while the A/C info is pictured on the large 8.4-inch color screen (good for us Mr. Magoo types), the A/C system controls are easy with buttons and knobs and you don't

have to select the climate icon to operate. Thank Chrysler for small favors. I am sure any 10-year-old could operate the system better than moi.

Pricing for Pacifica starts for the LX at \$28,995 to \$42,895 for the super loaded Limited with four models in between, the Touring at \$30,995, the Touring Plus at \$32,360, the Touring-L at \$34,995 and the Touring-L-Plus at \$38,295. You will have to add \$1,095 for destination to those numbers for the train and truck ride from Windsor, Ontario which is located across the Detroit River/Lake St. Clair from Detroit. I'll make this easy. My driver was the Touring-L which had everything you want including leather seating, fronts heated, a comprehensive safety package and more. If an entertainment package, movies and stuff are necessary then you will have to step it up to the L-Plus. If you want Nappa leather, HID headlights and the stow and vac system and more then it's the Limited. I'll buy a good garage vacuum that could probably suck the interior right out of the van, never mind the dirt and dust and still go with the Touring-L. The Pacifica PHEV starts at \$41,995 to \$44,995.

If you are only driving to work and back with an under 40-mile round trip, then it might make sense as the battery is good for about 33 miles. But if you are making long road trips over 50 miles, go with the conventional model. The hybrid adds about 650 pounds to the weight of the Pacifica as well. Performance should be about the same as will highway fuel economy.

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.