

Road Beat: 2017 Mazda CX-3, mighty, but tidy



It's hard to find much to complain about with the Mazda CX-3. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Mazda is about the only auto manufacturer that has a real DNA in its entire product line. Every vehicle has killer style (Kodo-Soul in Motion), tight handling, incredible fuel economy coupled with outstanding performance, great build quality, an upscale, premium feel coupled with reasonable (low) pricing.

Mazda CX-3 is just another example of that DNA, design philosophy. Except for perhaps the entertainment system, Mazda's are some of the best all-around vehicles in production in their respective categories and class. You can't buy a bad Mazda, they are all great and once you master the

entertainment/GPS system they get even better. I took me a few weeks, but now I live with the process of changing radio stations. In some respects, there is a bonus where you can go to different media sources directly, i.e. AM to FM or XM with one click and be on the new source and channel selected without further ado. Perhaps that is the Mazda thinking behind it.

CX-3 is a small vehicle. It is only 168 inches long or a foot shorter than your average compact car. But it is wide at 70 inches while standing tall at 61 inches.

But when it comes to the actual drive quality, Mazda has the top spots. There might be equals (Honda Civic v. Mazda 3), but they are few and far between.

CX-3 for 2017 is virtually unchanged, following the philosophy of don't fix what isn't broken. Powering up the subcompact CUV is the fantastic Skyactiv DOHC, 16 valve, direct injection, Atkinson ability, long stroking inline four that in similar configuration powers the Mazda 3. Belting out 146 hp at 6,000 rpm and a bottom dwelling 146 pounds of twist at just 2,800 rpm means the in this configuration along with the six-speed auto cog swapper, responds beautifully at any speed or situation.



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) 215/60X16/215/50X18

Performance

0-60 mph 7.91 seconds

50-70 mph 4.27 seconds

50-70 uphill 6.89 seconds

Top speed (according to Mazda) 119 mph
Fuel economy EPA rated 29/34/31 mpg city/highway/combined.
Expect 31-32 mpg in rural /suburban driving and 38 mpg at 70 mph on a level highway.

Knocking off 0-60 mph in just 7.91 seconds and 50-70 mph passing times of 4.27 seconds and an uphill run of 6.89 seconds mirrors almost exactly the same numbers produced by my 2016 test (7.89, 4.45 6.86 seconds) demonstrates the incredible build consistency of Mazda as well as its very good performance. It is responsive at any speed and full tilt boogie is rarely required. In high altitude passes the CX-3 was impressive although for safety's sake full throttle was the rule.

Now here is where it gets even better, the CX-3 in my usual fuel economy test of about 210 miles was remarkable achieving an average of 37.6 mpg going over the Sierra with no freeway constant speed driving and passing at every opportunity which means about 18 applications of full tilt boogie for several seconds at a time. Economy compact cars don't fare as well. EPA numbers are 29/34/31 mpg city/highway/combined. Overall the CX-3 averaged between 31 and 32 mpg while achieving an average of 38 mpg on the highway at 70 mph. One negative is the small fuel tank of just 12.7 gallons limits the CX-3's range and in the AWD model which will cost you about an mpg the tank is even smaller at 11.9 gallons.

More positives relate to the superb handling of the CX-3. It simply goes where you point it. Eighteen-inch alloys shod with 215/50 series rubber hangs on like a vice grip with a hint of play left for the skilled operator to deal with and create the

smiles by the mile as the fun begins. CX-3 is a blast when the road bends. If you've had a bad day and need a confidence boost, the CX-3 will deliver in spades and it's a CUV, not a Miata, always ready for a quick run to the Depot. Turning circle is a scant 34.8 feet.

Ride quality can be described as firm, not harsh and on smoother roads it is remarkably smooth handling minor bumps and undulations perfectly with no float. Sharper and larger road defects are more noticeable. It's not a Rolls Royce, but I like a firmer more controlled ride like the CX-3. Engine spins 2,400 at 70 mph and is very quiet as is tire, wind and road noise.

In this class of vehicles, CX-3 offers a buffet of safety. Get the GT Activesense package for \$1,170 which Smart braking, lane departure warning, high beam control and more which compliments all the other safety acronyms including blind spot warning. LED head lights with AFS are fabulous. Night tennis anyone?

Mazda interiors are more like a premium done with the best materials, comfortable seats done in leather good for the long haul. Instrumentation is Mazda perfect, big center tach, heads up for speed and cruise as well as the south-east quadrant of the tach, trip computer in the right hole and other ancillary info in the left hole. Then there is the center stack as mentioned above, if there is a Mazda weakness, it is the entertainment system. Too many steps and not direct enough with too much complication. And I am not a fan on the screen simply stuck in the flat surface of the upper central IP. It's too distracting, although it has one simple step of going direct to your band/channel. But you have to be in a certain mode to do that. If you listen to your own medium, no problem, but I like AM/FM/XM.

Cargo capacity is not huge, 45 cubic feet with the rear seats down and 12 cubes with them up. A foursome with clubs won't

fit comfortable. You certainly don't want to be sitting on your driver (double entendre intended, and I was going to say driver's shafts). I could go on with the jokes but I'll stop here. And talk about wedges. Oy.

Pricing is relatively inexpensive with this premium Grand Touring stickering for \$24,990 plus \$940 for the luxury suite for the ship coming from Hiroshima, Japan. The aforementioned pack plus a couple of other hundred-dollar items brought the total to a reasonable \$27,300. AWD will bring that to about \$28,500. Base models start at about \$20 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.