

FORD GIVES ITSELF AN EDGE AND A FIGHTING CHANCE

By Barbara & Bill Schaffer



With Ford Motor Company hanging on the edge of a major crisis of finance and management (and in some cases product)—or at least that's the way much of the business news reads—the new Ford Edge comes galloping into the marketplace as a potential company savior. As the auto industry overall retreats from the SUV craze, the industry drumbeat pounds out C-R-O-S-S-O-V-E-R as the next big thing, but with no real definition of the word. Or too many definitions. Early leaders in the category have styles morphing the classic SUV boxy architecture into elegant wagons that look as if they have been props in futuristic movies.

If our first impressions are any indication, the Edge is exactly the right new vehicle at the right time. With wagon-like styling and a new interpretation of Ford's bold new family face, developed initially on the Fusion, the Edge is something of a head turner. Horizontal bodylines are topped with a sweeping roofline, which ends with a high-mounted rear spoiler, creating a strong muscular stance.

The steering wheel and instrument panel were borrowed from the Fusion, but the center console stack is larger and finished in contrasting color. The entire dash area is lowered to give a more spacious interior feeling. We were surprised

that the textured aluminum panel surrounding the LED screen, climate and audio controls appeared to really be aluminum and not plastic. The console holds a couple of drink holders, an auxiliary jack to hook up your MP3 player and a reconfigurable storage space with room enough for a purse or laptop computer.

Sun lovers will want to order the optional Vista Roof™, which includes a large glass moonroof in the front that opens or tilts, and another fixed glass rear panel. Twin power-operated cloth shades can cut the glare when needed.

With seating for five, the Edge lacks the seven-passenger advantage some manufacturers think is important, but we think those shoppers will opt for a larger SUV or minivan. This vehicle should be popular with empty nesters, small active families and active younger buyers who will appreciate the 32.1 cubic feet of cargo area. With the rear seats folded, the cargo area grows to nearly 70 cubic feet.

All three Edge models—SE, SEL and SEL Plus—are powered by Ford's all-new aluminum 3.5-liter V-6 engine and six-speed automatic transmission. The engine is rated at 265 horsepower and 250-lb.ft. of torque. The standard drivetrain is front-wheel, with all-wheel drive available for \$1,650 more.

Zero to 60 mph acceleration times are

in the 7.5 to 8.0 second range. Fuel economy is listed at 17 mpg for city driving and 24 mpg on the highway for the AWD, with the front-wheel-drive model rated one mpg better in both categories.

Driving over the winding roads in the Marin Headlands, north of the Golden Gate Bridge, we were impressed with the handling of the Edge. Despite its 4,283-pound weight and higher stance, the Edge felt agile and responsive, dancing through the corners more like a sport sedan than an SUV. The ride was comfortable but very controlled, so the driver still had a good feel of the road conditions.

Equally impressive was the smooth, quick-shifting transmission, though it lacked the extra control allowed by a manual shifting mechanism. The only forward transmission settings are "D" and "S," and when we tried to downshift to the "S" mode, we were never quite sure which gear it would give us. This made it difficult to shift down for engine braking on corners or for better control on the hills.

The Edge was available in Ford dealerships starting in December with prices ranging from \$25,995 (with destination charge) for the front drive SE to \$31,395 for the SEL Plus with AWD. Fully loaded the most expensive Edge is priced just shy of \$37,000. ■