

All American

New style and much innovation

By Bill Schaffer - photos by Joe Sage



It seems every time we talk to someone, the conversation leads around to the health of the American auto industry. We have always had an optimistic attitude about the situation, maintaining that when the manufacturers build a good product—meaning that it is an attractive design, well built with quality materials and is fairly priced—it will sell. Good fuel economy is probably an important factor now, too. We just had an opportunity to drive a very good example of the kind of car that fits these criteria—the GMC Terrain.

All new for 2010, the GMC Terrain has a distinctive bold design, innovative features, appears to be well built with quality materials, and the base SLE gets an impressive 22 mpg city and 32 mpg highway. The Terrain shares its platform with the Chevrolet Equinox and Cadillac SRX; however the three are very distinctive, not at all like some of the “badge engineering” done by General Motors in the past.

With exaggerated flared fenders, deep trapezoidal chrome grille and squared off edges, the Terrain shape reminds us of a customized Hummer H3—and that is a good thing. The stylish design is accented by attractive textured black plastic trim on the lower levels on the sides and the front and rear fascias. The trim itself is not new, but the texture adds sophistication.

The GMC Terrain is available in two trim levels, SLE and SLT, with two engine choices and with front-wheel drive or all-wheel drive. Pricing starts at \$24,995,

including destination charge, for a well-equipped front-wheel-drive four-cylinder SLE. An SLT with AWD and V6 starts at \$29,945. Take all the available option packages add rear seat entertainment, moonroof, navigation with hard drive and a handful of other goodies, and the price can flirt with \$38,000.

Soft perforated leather seats in the SLT-2 were some of the best-looking we’ve seen. The instrument panel has a distinctive large contrasting colored inset covering most of its surface area, giving the front seats a roomier feel. The high-mounted center stack is logically organized with large, well-marked buttons and knobs.

Terrain is loaded with innovative extras that enhance the driving experience. For example, a backup camera is standard on all models (on the screen of models with navigation and on the rear-view mirrors of all others). An available programmable power liftgate allows the driver to adjust how far the rear gate opens, very handy in a garage with limited clearance.

Many shoppers will choose the 182-hp 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine for its fuel economy, but will be pleased by its performance. However, someone who wants more power or needs to pull a trailer—up to 3500 pounds—needs to select the 264-hp, 3.0-liter V6, rated at 17/24 mpg city/highway, equipped with AWD and standard six-speed automatic transmission. Most of our drive time in the Terrain was on freeways and surface streets. Under those conditions it feels solid, corners flat, has strong acceleration and a smooth quiet ride. ■



TERRAIN LOGBOOK NOTES

- Audio interface and touchscreen controls are above average. Sound is just adequate.
- We note concern with brake strength.
- AWD, but could be better at holding a lane.
- Giant console and other storage spaces.
- Stylewise, we’re ambivalent, not taken with square flares around round wheels. We too see a nod to the departing Hummer DNA. Our memos are hard on shapes and excess chrome at first, but warm to it after a week.
- Power is good, too good? 10mph over the limit is too easy. Faster than it feels, sort of like the road-dominating Escalade phenomenon, but without the domination.
- We like the suspension. Handles well in general and does *very* well on speed bumps.
- Several demerits noted on the backup camera: put in “R” and there is a delay before the rear camera comes on. Image quality is not very good. Wet pavement or streetlight glare overpower vitals. Very susceptible to weather, fogging in rain and gushing over the lens after rain.
- Note: GM is recalling Chevy Equinox and GMC Terrain to fix faulty computer module for climate controls, radio, center stack illumination and defroster. NHTSA is most interested in the defroster for safety reasons. -JS

Big bang For the buck

Story and photos: Joe Sage



When BMW first conceived the X5, released amazingly back in 1999, it was anticipated with a large degree of skepticism. A performance brand producing an SUV? One dose heresy and one dose unlikely engineering. BMW of course proved the doubters wrong, building a vehicle that had the high body of an SUV with the ground-hugging athletics of a sports coupe, or close to it. That paved the way for Porsche, Acura, Audi and others to offer similarly successful vehicles. Offered with inline-6 and V8 gasoline engines for years, the X5 was introduced with a 6-cylinder diesel just over a year ago.

As with the two gasoline models, this vehicle is all-wheel-drive, and as with those two, is bears a fairly long and complete name: the BMW X5 xDrive35d Sports Activity Vehicle Advanced Diesel with BluePerformance. We’d be happy with X5d. (The gasoline models’ key identifiers are 30i and 48i, and although the diesel has a 3.0-liter engine, as does the gasoline 30i, its name is based on 35. Just because.)

Our first diesel SUV drives were the Mercedes-Benz BlueTEC trio (see Sept/Oct’08 issue). At that time, fuel costs were skyrocketing, and the emphasis was on economy, as well as clean emissions. The drives did include aggressive Vermont roads and trails, but diesel grunt took a back seat to straight-on comparisons with

the gasoline models. We also recently drove the Volkswagen Golf TDI for a week (see elsewhere, this issue), and that was our epiphany on the wonders of torque from a diesel powerplant.

So how does the BMW X5 diesel stack up? Let’s see:

MODEL	ENGINE	HP	LBFT	EPA	BASE
X5 35d	diesel I-6	265	425	19/26	\$52,175
X5 30i	gas I-6	260	225	15/21	\$48,475
X5 48i	gas V8	350	350	14/19	\$51,175
X5 M	gas V8	555	500	12/17	\$86,375

All are equipped with a 6-speed automatic. Torque, a stepchild to horsepower ratings for years, is finally getting its due, and as you can see, the amount of torque put out by the diesel does deliver a potent balance of quickness and economy. The 35d weighs 5225 pounds—about 300 pounds more than the 30i and just 20 less than the 48i—yet achieves 0-to-60 in 6.9 seconds. Despite how their horsepower ratings fall, the difference in torque compares the 35d’s 0-to-60 favorably against 7.8 for the 30i and 6.4 for the 48i. The 30i and 48i both require premium gasoline, closing any diesel price gap when diesel runs higher. The 35d delivers 85% of the torque the X5 M does, and 52-60% better fuel mileage, at 60% of the M’s price.

The numbers are all there to more than justify the X5 xDrive35d’s position in the lineup. On bang for the buck, it can’t be beat. To maximize the torque impact, we wish it had a manual transmission, but the manual function of the automatic nearly makes up for that. ■



X5 DIESEL LOGBOOK NOTES

- Electronic control switches, e.g. bright headlights, feel strong and substantial.
- Seat feels slightly off-center and angled.
- The shifter has conventional size and position. Shape and functions are unconventional but fun and very effective. Drive-by-wire disconnects feel from shift action.
- Wild backup camera graphics and beeps are like docking the lunar lander. Distance warnings seem excessive. The relentless chime upon entering is our least favorite.
- You notice little diesel noise driving, but from a start you notice a good growl, and man do you feel the torque performance.
- Climate interface is 100% graphic, with bars, colors, lines, graphs, plus-signs and little stick figures, but few solid clues.
- Sizable dashboard but no apparent glove box. Owner’s manual in the passenger door pocket, hard to reach as the driver.
- It has a surprisingly big turning circle, 42’. It does handle very well for an SUV.
- Electronics may drive you crazy or may be your favorite thing, once you master it all.
- Cornering and resuming speed delivers a downshift of noticeable sound, as well as some lag and lunge. We wish for a stick.