

THE ALL-NEW SRX: BRAND EMPHASIS IN A SMALLER PACKAGE



BY JOE SAGE WITH BARBARA AND BILL SCHAFER

We recently drove the new SRX Turbo for a week, while our colleagues Barbara and Bill Schaffer had driven the regular V6 model shortly before. Bill and Barbara loved their SRX.

"Cadillac's second generation SRX has it all," they noted. "This new smaller crossover is a major head turner with a striking adaption of the signature Cadillac design language, and that's just the start." Barbara and Bill gave the Cadillac SRX high marks across the board. "The SRX is truly luxurious and unique for a midsize crossover," they continue. "What we appreciate is the effort Cadillac engineers have put into making these cars perform and handle so well."

We received the top-of-the-line SRX Turbo in Premium trim level, with high expectations. Our take was mixed.

The SRX came to market in 2004 as one of the first vehicles to wear Cadillac's distinctive Art and Science design threads. But unique styling with good performance and handling were not enough, as sales figures for this early crossover were modest. For 2010, the SRX is all new and smaller than the original, but with more dramatic styling atop a new platform and drivetrain.

We could suggest that the DNA of the prior SRX has split into two: the new SRX and the CTS wagon.

The previous-generation SRX was rear-wheel drive, using the same platform as the CTS. The new SRX platform has a front-wheel-drive basis, four-wheel independent suspension with a continuously variable real-time damping system, StabiliTrak electronic stability control, and optional all-wheel drive on most models. It shares its platform and some elements with the Chevrolet Equinox and GMC Terrain, but there is no confusing the three. The SRX has a dramatic wedge shape accented by its vertical headlights and almost fin-like taillights that pay homage to Cadillac heritage. Exterior design elements include a slim spoiler on the rear deck, the vent on the front fenders and a sweptback roofline.

The SRX comes in four trim levels, with a Turbo option on the top two. Most versions are available in both front-wheel and all-wheel drive, with the base model in FWD only and the Turbo in AWD only. The basic version, FWD-only, starts at \$34,655. AWD versions of the other trim levels start at \$39,905 for the Luxury Collection, \$45,495 for Performance and \$48,040 for Premium (FWD versions are about \$2400-\$3600 less). The Turbo Performance model (AWD only) stickers at \$49,315, while the Turbo Premium model (AWD) stickers at \$51,860. Our test Turbo AWD Premium showed a slightly lower base, added a \$1295 rear-seat entertainment system, and with delivery stickered at \$53,480.

Standard power for all but the Turbo SRX is a 265-hp, direct injection DOHC 3.0-liter V6 (a smaller version of the award-winning 3.6-liter used in the CTS) with a six-speed automatic transmission. "While we were a bit disappointed by the acceleration of the standard V6 SRX, it was by no means slow," noted Barbara and Bill. Enter the optional 2.8-liter V6 Turbo. Horsepower increases to 300, and torque takes a bigger jump, from 223 to 295 lb-ft.

EPA fuel economy ratings for the standard 3.0-liter engine are 18/25 mpg city/highway (FWD) and 17/23 (AWD). The Turbo AWD rates 15/23 mpg city/highway.

The interior's horizontal lines are punctuated by a



badge-like center stack trimmed in brushed aluminum. Elegant Sapele wood trim graces the steering wheel and upper doors. French stitching accents the dash, door panels and seats of the hand-cut-and-sewn interior. The seats, with available heat and ventilation, are firm, comfortable and supportive during spirited driving. Luxury touches can include leather seating, tilt and telescoping steering wheel, XM radio and navigation with voice recognition and eight-inch touch screen, rear-view camera, 20-inch wheels, sunroof, Bluetooth, adaptive remote start and Adaptive Forward Lighting that turns with steering. The top entertainment system has a 40-gig hard drive that integrates with the navigation system to provide real-time traffic and weather data.

While Bill and Barbara's impressions of the non-turbo SRX were all tops, we found ourselves on more of a rollercoaster relationship with the SRX Turbo.

We had started out asking ourselves, what makes this a Cadillac? It does have decent fitments, and we have a Cadillac crest staring at us, but are form and function much different in a Kia Sorento, at less than half the price? Conversely, if you want Cadillac luxury, the Escalade starts at \$63,445 versus \$34,655 for the SRX, but our deluxe SRX was \$53,480. Then again, when gas hits \$4 again, the SRX gains advantage.

We also found ourselves at first thinking the old SRX may have been preferable, a little larger and with rear-wheel drive. But that didn't last long. Each time we saw one drive by, we reminded ourselves of one thing GM's pretty good at: when they update styling, e.g. when they've completely redone the Suburban, in no time at all you realize they've hit the nail on the head, and the past model quickly shows its age. The more we compared, the more we acknowledged that with the new SRX, they've definitely made a big improvement.

Parked next to a 15-year-old Jeep Grand Cherokee, the SRX was a study in evolution. Its size is visually comparable while its style is lightyears advanced. From a 3/4 rear view, if it didn't have a spoiler, it would be close to the form-function of the BMW X6 and Acura ZDX.

Ultimately, we did discover the new SRX's charm. \$53,000 is a lot to spend, and it's not hard to work up to that price. Conversely, there are lots of SRX models at considerably less cost. But if you want the Cadillac of midsize crossovers, with the new SRX, you will get it. Even if some of it amounts to badging, brand image is important, and you will appreciate your Cadillac. ■

SRX TURBO LOGBOOK

STYLE

- We started out thinking that without its badges the SRX might be equivalent to a Kia Sorento, and we started out thinking the old SRX was more of a Cadillac. We ended up, however, thinking the old SRX was notably dated, the new size will prove more and more desirable, and the badging does represent something. Final logbook entry calls the SRX "a nicely-carved little nugget."

- There seem to be too many teams working on too many interior details: the integration of materials and finishes is lacking.

PERFORMANCE

- Six-speed automatic shifts incessantly; seemed uneven at low speeds, straining through the first couple of gears; then it passed through four gears in a block.

- Front-drive feel dominated. We often had a tough time putting this car where we pointed it. On corners, it wanted another lane several times.

- Shifter repeatedly seems to only go to neutral, when we're sure we'd gone two clicks from reverse to drive. We conclude it takes an unrefined, extra heavy touch.

FEATURES

- Closed the shield on the glass roof. Still only 70° out, but glad of that option for summer. But it makes the interior more claustrophobic, which is probably why it's there.

- Rearview mirror's image area is so small but its OnStar frame is so big, it blocks significant upper front view.

- Backup camera slow to rise to upright position; likely you'll proceed without it.

- Audio: too few radio presets; requires a teeny thumb for buttons at edge of screen, takes attention off the road; the interface is a circle with many labeled buttons all around, so you have to read it to work it; sound quality not too great, no comparison with rockin' CTS-V also in this issue.

- HVAC: hard to get comfortable, needed it at 64° (in 70s weather). Turn it up a degree or two and it shuts off. Couldn't find temp/airflow comfort during our week. Needed to turn it on manually to 'auto' every time.

- Headlight switch is a cheezy little rubbery knob; on auto, to turn it off, you swing it all the way then it bounces back.

- Keyless lock upon entering takes a double yank, unlike most one-touch keyless handles; exiting always left us uncertain.

- Something makes a racket over a speed bump, like the back seat isn't secured.

- Parked briefly with foot on the brake and vehicle in D produces a strange noise like slipping bands in an old automatic.

- Some issues with locks, shifter and A/C were noted as inconsistent, a half-plus, but making things harder to resolve. —JS

