

# BURLY AND BEAUTIFUL

By Joe Sage

The GMC Terrain has been on the market since 2010 (which is the last time we drove one), but the upscale Denali is new for 2013. It's one more sign that midsize SUVs have reached the big time. With a standard Terrain starting just over \$26,000 and the Denali version at just about \$35,000 (or above \$36,000 for our all-wheel-drive test version), Denali trim takes the Terrain straight to GMC Acadia territory: a base Acadia starts at \$34,000 (although the Acadia Denali of course tops them all, starting at about \$46,000).

The key statistical difference is that the Terrain is a five-passenger SUV, while an Acadia is good for seven or eight, depending upon configuration.

A more subjective difference may be styling. In this category, we must admit the Acadia has long caught our eye in a good way, while the Terrain has tended to catch our eye in an awkward way. At least until this time around.

When we drove the Terrain in 2010, not only was it not the Denali version—which changes a few visual details—but it was delivered in white. We had noted we weren't big fans of its square flares around round wheels, and it still has those. But paint can always make a difference. Our white 2010 Terrain had looked to us like a freezer chest. This 2013 Terrain Denali, in lustrous dark Iridium Metallic over a Jet Black leather interior, is a whole different animal.

## TERRAIN VARIABLES

Both the standard Terrain and the Terrain Denali offer a choice of two engines: a 182-hp 2.4L four-cylinder or a 301-hp 3.6L V6. Each is also available with either front- or all-wheel drive. The V6—which generates 272 lb-ft of torque—achieves the same fuel economy as its 3.0-liter predecessor: 16/23/19 MPG (city/highway/combined) with AWD, as our example. That's not as much as we might have hoped, in a five-passenger utility that has kept its weight below two tons (3881 lbs). However, if you opt for the four-cylinder, you will get either a 20/29 MPG city/highway rating (with AWD) or 22/32 MPG with FWD. This creates a pretty remarkable range of purchase possibilities.



The Denali model step-up includes exterior body elements and interior appointments; exclusive 18-inch and 19-inch wheels; an eight-way power front passenger seat; side blind zone and rear cross traffic alerts; IntelliLink infotainment and color touch nav systems; a safety package with forward collision, lane departure and rear park alerts; and Denali-exclusive colors including Atlantis Blue Metallic, Champagne Silver Metallic, Ashen Grey Metallic and the handsome Iridium Metallic shown here on our test Terrain.

Five grand in options on our tester was money well spent (see sidebar), as is typical with GM's reasonable add-on pricing. If you were to go light on entertainment and navigation, you could knock a couple of grand right off that total. The trailering package is a bargain, with the Terrain Denali with V6 capable of towing 3500 pounds (the four-cylinder is rated at just 1500 pounds).

## TERRAIN INSIDE AND OUT

It took us awhile to warm up to the styling of the Terrain. It is the vehicle's exaggerated squareness (rooted in those wheel arches) that stands out. Unlike the overused phrase that some particular car looks like it's moving when it's standing still, this one had looked to us like it's standing still when it's moving. Again, this time the paint job surely makes a huge difference. Or maybe we've decided it looks good standing still.

If we were currently raising a family, we had joked that we'd have two more kids just so we'd need the GMC Acadia, for looks alone. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but GM is delivering such gorgeous sheetmetal on so many other products—Impala, Camaro, Corvette—we thought the team could still apply some more magic here.

But check out this beauty on the facing page. Bottom line: it's growing on us more and more.

The Terrain has a comfortable and attractive cockpit, with a deep and aerodynamically sloped windshield, as in many. But instead of creating a whole picnic table's worth of space, the instrument panel artfully slopes down. This creates more interior volume, while giving the driver a commanding feel, with center stack controls all at a full arm's length, presenting the aura of a space commander's console.

Among these controls, we had a few beefs. The backup camera image was weak. Changing inside temperature meant wrestling with screens and cycles of readouts, and other screen interface misadventures were also frustrating. The radio was limited on preset buttons. The rearview mirror is mounted left of center, conflicting a bit with



the driver's visor. That kind of thing. On the steering wheel, a combination of soft-touch and ultra-smooth surfaces presents a top third of the wheel that's really slick, challenging grip while turning (and also very cold on a 43-degree morning).

But we continued to note the cockpit favorably overall—reminded of the Infiniti QX's promotion of a personal aircraft cockpit feel. The center stack console is augmented by an efficient set of binnacle instruments. Add attractive red stitching across the upper reaches of the dash, an elegant touch that also breaks up that expanse. We were always happy inside, other than struggles with the touchscreen interface.

The Terrain has a power rear hatch (a little slow) and a cargo net that can be divided up and utilized different ways, plus a cover—convenient and easily, intuitively done. Gaps between that and the back seats are covered, and there are a couple of pockets on both sides (smaller on the left, where a huge subwoofer resides).

## NOTHING CAN STOP A TERRAIN

Turning circle is one of our essential benchmarks, whether for dealing with a high mountain trail or a supermarket parking lot. The Terrain's is a whopping 40 feet, about three full feet more than a Jeep Grand Cherokee, despite the Terrain's wheelbase being almost two inches shorter. On our first divided four-lane boulevard U-turn, we were forced to do a three-point turn in traffic, though we eked out a full turn on another.

It's not uncommon in an SUV to find yourself 20 mph over the limit before you know it. We were



## SPECIFICATIONS

|   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| ENGINE  | 3.6L V6 SIDI with VVT         |
| POWER / TORQUE  | 301 hp / 272 lb-ft            |
| DRIVETRAIN  | AWD                           |
| TRANSMISSION  | 6-speed automatic             |
| CARGO VOLUME TO SEAT 1  | 63.9 cu ft                    |
| CARGO VOLUME TO SEAT 2  | 31.6 cu ft                    |
| BASE CURB WEIGHT  | 3881 lb                       |
| MPG (EST)   | 16/23/19 (city/hwy/comb)      |
| (note: the 19 MPG combined shown on our Monroney has been raised to 20 MPG) |                               |
| FUEL TANK   | 20 gallons (18 w/ 4-cylinder) |
| FUEL  | gas/ethanol                   |

BASE PRICE .....\$36,275

INCLUDES: Very highly equipped, with four and a half columns of small type on the Monroney sticker—electronics, safety, comfort, entertainment and more.

CARGO PACKAGE .....Net, cargo cover, luggage rack center rails.....\$235

ENGINE: 3.6L V6 SIDI with VVT .....\$1750 incl 19" satin chrome clad alum wheels

ENTERTAINMENT: rear seat system .....\$1295

NAV: Color Touch w/IntelliLink .....\$795

TRAILERING PACKAGE .....\$350

DESTINATION .....\$825

TOTAL .....\$41,525

KEEP RIGHT >>





pleased that we tended to cruise perfectly comfortably at legal speeds in this—though we did wish for more pep accelerating up freeway ramps.

Heading down the ramps during metered rush hour, we had the power and agility needed to jockey into favorable position. Entering aggressive freeway traffic, with a new entrant crawling in front of us and the Indy 500 to our left, we were able to tap the brakes, check our seven o'clock and find a quick clear spot in a better lane, with plenty of power on tap. Minutes later, we had to thread another needle, dashing past a semi and a truck with a huge trailer loaded with mechanical gear, to catch our exit. All normal conditions in the northeast Valley and, again, no problem.

Despite AWD, we had noted a little front-drive torquiness at one point under some certain condition, so we tried to urge that to life again, but did not. We could easily induce an effect that could alternately be thought of as twitchy, or as very responsive. We suspect this is an attribute of the electric power steering, rather than front torque. Accelerating, powering through turns, changing lane to lane, we concluded the Terrain is a very steady machine, with no-nonsense handling and a nice growl that speaks "GMC, the truck division."

At super low speed, backing off a gentle driveway curb, we experienced some heavy rocking. This supports our notes on general surface street driving, though. The powertrain and suspension create a comfortable, driver-centric ride, with strong road feel—not cushy—straight tracking and decent power when we need it. The Terrain is responsive, and that's what counts.

### SIZING THINGS UP

Our week's notes combined mentions of the relatively smaller size of the Terrain (a five-seater) and the relatively larger size of the Terrain (with a somewhat ponderous style and bearing). Ultimately, it's a favorably balanced package: the styling and layout deliver a large interior in a comfortable, manageable size. Its styling still strikes us as kind of static, but it is a GMC, and they've successfully made it look truck tough.

Our bottom line on the Terrain's styling: it is distinctive, and that's hard enough to come by, so we give it a passing grade. We found ourselves admiring its reflection in passing windows. If you're getting tired of all the SUVs and crossovers with flowing, folded sheetmetal and a rising beltline, this is not that.

We had come to this vehicle with fairly low expectations. That was apparently all cured by the Denali package and Iridium paint. We also attribute it to a highly and constantly evolving marketplace. In a world of increasingly plentiful look-alikes, the Terrain seems fresh. ■

