

Nailed it.

by Joe Sage

Last year's CX-5 was a winner but could have benefited from a stronger engine. This year's CX-5 has that engine.

In a stroke of fate, history almost repeated itself this year, from last, but there were a couple of rewrites. Last year, we received the 2013 Mazda CX-5 just in time to drive it to Northwest Colorado for the 4th of July. And last year—given all those days and miles, which could work either way—we really liked the vehicle. But we thought it could use a little more power, which was noticeable in the Rocky Mountains but also on I-17 headed north right here at home.

This year, we received the 2014 Mazda CX-5, by sheer coincidence, just in time to repeat that drive to Colorado, though this time for high school graduation instead of the Fourth. Time, however, did not allow for the drive—unfortunate for the poetic balance as much as for the comparison. On the other hand, this year did bring us the one thing we had wished for last year: a bit more powerful engine.

Both last year's and this year's were delivered in top Grand Touring trim (there are three levels) and in front-wheel drive (AWD is also available). Both last year's and this year's had standard feature

inclusion lists a mile long. Last year's had no options, while this year's had two small ones (a bumper guard and a cargo cover) and one significant package (GT Tech Package at \$1625). Base price went up \$575 over the year, and our total this year was \$30,340, versus \$27,840 last year (see sidebar for Tech Package inclusions).

The big difference was that last year's had a 160-hp SKYACTIV 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine, while this year's had a 184-hp SKYACTIV 2.5-liter four-cylinder engine. Fuel mileage ratings for the new engine are 25/32 MPG (city/highway) or 27 MPG combined. Last year's were 26/32/29 (with the smaller engine and automatic transmission). To put that in perspective, had we taken our 2000-mile repeat road trip, which was almost all highway time, our fuel expense would have theoretically been the same, at 32 MPG both years. If we went with combined ratings, we would have used 74 gallons instead of 69 (or spent about 20 bucks more this time). Since it skewed toward mostly highway, with a couple of short stretches around Moab and

Steamboat Springs, call it ten bucks. The roughly 19 percent boost in horsepower is more than worth it.

The new CX-5 is still available with a 2.0 four, but now slightly downrated to 155 hp. Both are available in FWD or AWD, and the mileage drops a touch in AWD (from 25/32/27 to 24/32/26 MPG city/hwy/combined, with the 2.5L).

With the 2-liter engine, transmissions are different: the AWD model has the same 6-speed automatic, but the FWD has a 5-speed automatic. The small engine with FWD is also available with a 5-speed manual. As with last year's model, our one remaining wish would be for an all-wheel-drive model with a manual transmission—either engine, though we would favor the 2.5L (which as of now doesn't offer a manual even with FWD).

The 2014 Mazda CX-5 has a 5.8-inch touchscreen for rearview camera, available nav, hands-free phone and audio and other controls. The audio is pumped from a 9-speaker Bose system which still includes CD as well as MP3—not over-the-top sound, but solid and with a very responsive tuning interface. Climate control is dual-zone.

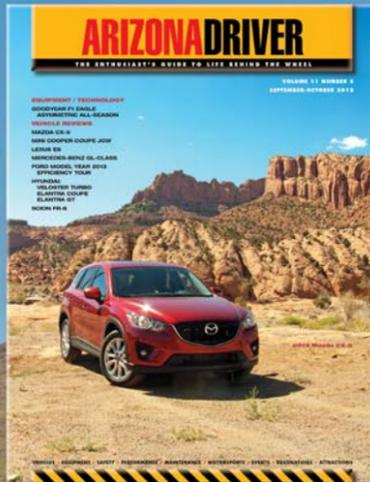
The difference in power was noticeable right away in Valley traffic. Despite no interstate odyssey, we managed enough quick uphill Interstate to also confirm the additional grunt. The 6-speed automatic felt great.

Over-shoulder interior rear 3/4 visibility is good,

even with the solid presence of a somewhat combined C-D pillar with a small window in between. It all comes together.

"The future" does not always stand the test of time. Stylists' crystal balls can be right on, or they can be way off. Mazda's crystal balls are pretty much right on. The CX-7 and CX-9 zoomed into the future years ahead of others. The old Mazda Tribute was a stylish alternative to the Ford Escape. Ironically, we now like the CX-5 partly because the Escape has rebalanced away from this, to the curvier side, and we like the lingering two-box basis of the Mazda. Bear in mind they have maintained this while also delivering the best aerodynamics in the segment: a Cd of 0.33.

The smooth and solid 2014 Mazda CX-5 should be at dealers by the time you read this. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE/TRANS2.5L 4-cyl / 6-spd auto
 POWER/TORQUE184 hp / 185 lb-ft
 DRIVETRAINFWD
 PAINTSky Blue Metallic Clearcoat
 INTERIORBlack leather trim sport seats
 MPG (EST)25/32/27 city/hwy/comb

BASE\$27,620

- GRAND TOURING TECH PACKAGE: navigation, auto-leveling HID headlamps, adaptive front lighting, Smart City Brake Support, keyless entry, auto-dim mirror with HomeLink.....\$1625
- Rear bumper guard.....\$100
- Retractable cargo cover.....\$200
- Sirius Satellite Radio.....n/c
- Destination\$795

TOTAL\$30,340