

The Mazda SUV, crossover and related lineup has evolved through several stages. The Mazda5, somewhere between mini-minivan and crossover, evolved from the original MPV, appealed to some of the same buyers and was in the US market from 1999 through 2015. Mazda CX-9, a borderline midsize full-size SUV, has been with us since 2006 (a 2007 model). Mazda CX-7 was a borderline-midsize compact SUV sold from 2006 through 2012, displaced by the CX-5. The CX-3 subcompact crossover debuted in 2015 as a 2016 model, bringing the brand into a booming smaller space. Through all that, the three-row, seven-seat SUV has maintained a position of great demand, still found with Mazda in the CX-9.

The 2016 Mazda CX-9 is an all-new vehicle, abandoning the old Ford Edge/Fusion platform for a Japanese-built platform (though purely for export). The new CX-9 is lighter in weight yet roomier—a little shorter but on a little bit longer

wheelbase, with shorter front and rear overhangs and easy access to its third row. Up front is a 310-lb-ft 2.5-liter turbo-4 that puts out 227 hp with regular gas or 250 hp with premium.

For that reason, the Monroney sticker and specifications state torque first, and that's not inappropriate, as the thing is a two-ton-plus rocket, especially when running in Sport mode. Aggressive moves are met with a strong and solid response, which in this spacious three-row seven-seater reminded us of a grizzly bear being able to run 100 yards in three seconds—strong, powerful and nimble. Sport mode is not always that noticeable in some vehicles, but in the CX-9 it's a real kick in the pants, like turning on the afterburners.

Horsepower is desirable, torque can be moreso and exhaust pressure is an oft-overlooked power factor as well. Part of the secret to the CX-9's performance lies in its SkyActiv four-cylinder Dynamic Pressure Turbo, promoted as the world's first tur-

bocharger with the ability to vary the degree of exhaust pulsation depending on engine speed.

The CX-9 has one of the finer interiors we've seen—beautiful two-tone rich chocolate brown and black leather, brushed aluminum including sculpted door pulls, rosewood tastefully applied on the armrest, around controls and on the console, and a broad linear design for the instrument panel overall, emphasizing the cabin's spacious width. The infotainment screen stands up from the top of the dash in trademark Mazda fashion and contains a clean and useful interface.

Brake assist is very effective—so much so, it floored to a full stop under our foot once, inches before we would have stopped anyway, apparently because it read the SUV in front of us at a light as perhaps a big brick wall.

If you want to plug in your phone via the 12v lighter socket, it's way around and down low on the righthand side of the console, in the passenger footwell, as on the much smaller Miata.

The backup camera includes a top view icon to help identify the unseen.



The turning circle is not small, by the numbers, but in the real world, it feels remarkably trim and nimble, navigating herringbone parking readily.

The CX-9's Kodo Soul of Motion design theme adds to its potent presence, with a taut, streamlined look from the rear, and a hood that appears long enough for a V12, while actually being more than an inch shorter than its predecessor. In a world where so many vehicles are borderline indistinguishable, especially from the back, Mazda's are always subtly distinctive. The CX-9 bears a nicely tailored suit all around, generating many a compliment during our week.

Mazda's brand image is strong yet fluid. They bring us notable sport, engineering, value and



style, yet it is in no way incongruous that they now bring us what is inarguably a premium or even luxury vehicle, yet at a subpremium price point. ■

TAILORED

a SPRINT-WINNING GRIZZLY BEAR IN
a TAUT, TRIM, SPORTY SUIT BY JOE SAGE



SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	.....SkyActiv-G 2.5L I-4 turbo
DRIVETRAIN	.....AWD
TRANSMISSION	.....6-spd sport mode auto
HP/TORQUE	.....250 hp (prem fuel) / 310 lb-ft
TOP SPEED	.....130 mph
ENGINE BLOCK/HEADS	.....aluminum
SUSPENSION	.....F: indep, MacPherson strut, coil spring, stabilizer bar; R: indep, multi-link, coil spring, stabilizer bar
STEERING	.....column type elec power assist
BRAKES	.....F: 2-piston 12.6" vented disc.....R: 1-piston 12.8" solid disc
WHEELS/TIRES	.....20-in alloy / 255/50R20
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....199.4 in / 115.3 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....8.8 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....38.8 ft
PASSENGERS	.....7
CARGO VOLUME	.....14.4 / 38.2 / 71.2 cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....(AWD) 4301 lb
TOW CAPACITY	.....(all) 3500 lb
FUEL TANK	.....19.5 gal
MPG	.....AWD: 21/27/23 (city/hwy/comb)

INCLUDED: Keyless entry/start, rain-sense wipers, rear wiper, heated mirrors, power moonroof, power lift gate, 8-way power driver's seat w/lumbar, aluminum and rosewood interior trim, 2nd row sunshades, body-ring structure, roll stability, LED headlights/taillights, 3-zone climate, nav, Bose premium 12-spkr audioincl

BASE PRICE	.....\$44,015
MACHINE GRAY PAINT	.....300
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....900
TOTAL	.....\$45,215