Conundrum

BY JOE SAGE

While Mazda has had a newer double-digit lineup for several years now—the CX-30, CX-50, CX-70, CX-90—they've kept the CX-5, their long-time global best-seller. Perhaps they've been hesitant to migrate those customers, a common scenario, but an uncommon response—this happens regularly with any brand, but others move on.

But where does it fit in with those? Is it different in other ways? How much do they overlap? Do they confuse the customer? Or are they clearly two separate vehicles on two separate paths for two separate groups? Curious about this for awhile, we get reacquainted with the CX-5 in its own right, after considerable time with the double digit lineup.

Ours is the Mazda CX-5 2.5 S Premium Plus—in legendary Soul Red Crystal Metallic—the top of five trims basically spanning the $30s in price, which is basically the same price span as CX-50.

In US sales, CX-5 and CX-50 sell in close numbers, each about a third of the whole brand's total, or two-thirds together. That benefits from about a 35 percent current jump for CX-50, although CX-5 still grew a tiny bit at the same time. Wow. Imagine what they could do if combined into one? Or would the magic disappear?

(Note that the considerably smaller CX-30 has lost volume this year, about the same as, or a third again more than, the growth for CX-50. We do not have data showing how many of these are actually the same customers, migrating. We also don't know that it won't flip back around based on fuel prices, style and trends, or who knows what.) Imagine being a Mazda product planner. Fascinating.

One interesting phenomenon is that when we have conversations about why there are both of them, with colleagues who might have solid opinions, we often hear that, well, one—or the other—is bigger. So we went to the stats. And as you can see in our chart, they are fundamentally the same. Style is different, but possibly only to the more familiar eye. In the "that's why we have choices" realm, it only gets more baffling.

We might all expect the proof to be in the pudding—how do they drive? Best, of course, is to drive them side-by-side, an opportunity we will seize if and when it presents itself. But we can go back and read our own notes on our CX-50 drives. Surprisingly or not, both of those recents (one a hybrid, one note) said, "we were driving it all day and having a ball." Our full CX-5 notes were less favorable, although pleasant enough overall .

Who knows—if the past year's sales numbers stay on trend, maybe CX-50 will finally take over and this will go out to pasture. Or not. They clearly like keeping it around. So try them on for size. For most, it will probably tug less at the "how did this all get to this point?" question and continue to appeal to the "I know what I want" segment. ■

VITALS COMPARED	CX-5	CX-50
Length / wheelbase	184.6 / 110.8	185.8 / 110.8
Width / height	73.2 / 66.7	75.6 / 63.9
Headroom (F/R)	39.2 / 39.1	38.6 / 37.5
Legroom (F/R)	41.7 / 39.9	41.7 / 39.8
Cargo (cu.ft)	33.7 / 66.5	31.4 / 56.3
Weight (lb)	3856	3915
Towing (lb)	1500	1500-3500
Pricing (base by trim)	$29,990 to 38,990	$29,900 to 42,900

Some specs (e.g. headroom, weight) can vary per sunroofs, trim levels, etc.; shown are the most typical.

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Hiroshima, Japan
ENGINE/TRANS BUILD	Japan / Japan
PARTS CONTENT	Japan 90% / US/Can 0%
ENGINE	2.5L 4-cyl DOHC 16v dir inj, alum alloy
HP/TORQUE	187 hp / 186 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	13.0:1
TRANSMISSION	SKYACTIV-Drive 6-speed auto
DRIVETRAIN	i-ACTIV AWD
TOP SPEED	116 mph
SUSPENSION	F: indep MacPherson strut w stblzr bar; R: indep multilink, stblzr bar
STEERING	pwr-asst rack & pinion, eng speed var
BRAKES	F: 328mm vented; R: 325mm solid
WHEELS	(Premium Plus) 19x7J alloy black metallic
TIRES	P225 / 55 R19 a/s
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	184.6 / 110.8 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	8.2 in
TURNING CIRCLE	36.8 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	(pano sunrf) 39.2 / 39.1 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	41.7 / 39.9 in
CARGO CAPACITY	33.7 / 66.5 cu.ft
ROOF CARRIER	165 lb
WEIGHT	3856 lb
TOW CAPACITY	1500 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	reg unl / 15.3 gal
MPG	24/30/26 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	**$38,990**
PAINT: SOUL RED CRYSTAL METALLIC	595
DESTINATION CHARGE	1495
TOTAL	**$41,080**

2026 MAZDA CX-5 LINEUP

2.5 S	$29,990
2.5 S Select	31,990
2.5 S Preferred	34,250
2.5 S Premium	36,900
2.5 S Premium Plus	▼ 38,990