

New size, new numbers by Joe Sage

We chuckle as we tell ourselves this is a great little car—funny because there actually was a Mazda GLC years ago, and that's exactly what the initials stood for.

But it's not a car—it's an SUV. Or crossover. Several brands are making more of a distinction on this now, as products exceed the familiar full-mid-compact-subcompact categories. Mazda is a bit ambiguous on the crossover vs SUV thing with the new CX-30, but it falls between the CX-5 and CX-3 in size; we'll be curious where their new single-digit versus two-digit naming scheme goes from here.

The CX-30 was revealed at the LA Auto Show last winter—a visual, speech and walk-around. We've looked forward to getting our hands on one and hitting the road.

Mazda said a couple of years ago that they were going to move into more of a premium mind space—a good positioning move as a smaller manufacturer—and this turned out not to have been much of a stretch at all.

The CX-30 has great proportions, coming across as the size and shape a smaller Mazda crossover was always meant to be. Its high-beltline, low-profile silhouette puts a coupe-like feel atop its small utility bones. Imme-

diately recognizable as a Mazda, front and rear (in an era where many tail ends are unidentifiable), the CX-30 telegraphs the latest evolving trends of their Kodo Soul of Motion styling language. On one hand, it's simple—a kid could draw the basic shape and elements, and you'd recognize it—but as you survey it in three dimensions, it's masterfully applied—simple, complete, clean and balanced.

The feature interface has most layers of operation in a clear staircase, with illustrations and a sentence or two explaining functions and options—a breakthrough implementation—with ease of operation often also supported by knobs. Most systems, you want to set and forget, but this one actually makes you want to revisit. (Radio presets were a bit less intuitive the first time through, then fine.) Storage is plentiful for a smaller vehicle, though one key cupholder is largely blocked by instruments above, unusable for a medium-to-larger cup with straw (we were enjoying many pandemic drive-through meals).

The CX-30 is perhaps heavier than you'd expect, but feels lighter than it is. From our "go," we credited it with ground-hugging sports car-tending performance and han-

dling, though feeling surprisingly light in its sneakers on some lane changes. Sport mode did firm up lateral moves, though shift points felt dramatically different in some scenarios, better overall, but making the car feel heavier during a simple climb (like a freeway ramp).

Driver tech (lane keep, collision warning and such), has exaggerated behavior in many vehicles, but all was fine in the CX-30, with one exception: at interchanges with multiple lanes in each direction facing off for simultaneous left turns onto their freeway ramps, the system was overly terrified, seeming to think this was an impending head-on, a behavior that may need a little more engineering.

We hadn't thought of the CX-30 as an off-roader, but did a turnaround at the edge of a suspended housing development. This put us on unplanned dirt, and we were glad, as the little crossover did quite well with it (ground clearance is almost eight inches, and its relatively simple suspension seemed happy).

The CX-30 is a fine little machine straight out of the box. We use sport mode in many vehicles just to make up for deficiencies—cornering lag, acceleration, that kind of thing—but in this vehicle, we didn't even tend to use it—it's that responsive on its own, not needed as a corrective measure, but fun at times as, well, a sport measure. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE2.5L 4-cyl Skyactiv-G w cylinder deact
 HP / TORQUE186 hp / 186 lb-ft
 DRIVETRAINi-Activ AWD
 TRANSMISSIONSkyactiv-Drive 6-spd auto
 TOP SPEED(Premium AWD) 126 mph
 SUSPENSIONF: indep MacPherson strut;
 R: torsion beam
 STEERINGelec power assist
 BRAKESF: 11.6 vented; R: (Prem) 11.9 solid disc
 WHEELS / TIRES(Prem) 18x7J / 215/55R18 M+S
 LENGTH / WHEELBASE173.0 / 104.5 in
 TURNING CIRCLE(curb) 34.76 / (wall) 37.3 ft
 GROUND CLEARANCE(laden/unladen) 6.9 / 7.9 in
 HEADROOM (F/R)(w moonroof) 37.8 / 38.3 in
 LEGROOM (F/R)41.7 / 36.3 in
 CARGO CAPACITY20.2 cu.ft
 WEIGHT3408 lb
 FUEL / CAPACITYregular unl / (AWD) 12.7 gal
 MPG25/33/27 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE W PREMIUM PKG\$28,200
 PREMIUM INCLUDES: auto LED headlights, heated front seats, leather wheel & shift knob, keyless entry/start, power moonroof, power liftgate, paddle shifters, roof rails, Android/Apple, 8.8" display w Mazda Connect, heads-up display, Bose 12-spr premium audio, ActivSense Safety (driver attention alert, smart cruise w stop-go, lane depart warn, lane-keep assist, smart brake, blind spot mon w rear cross-traffic alert)
 SNOWFLAKE WHITE PEARL MICA200
 DESTINATION CHARGE1,045
 TOTAL\$29,445



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