

SECOND DATE

MAYBE THINGS ARE GETTING SERIOUS? by Joe Sage

When we drove the new-for-2020 Encore GX last year, we headlined our piece “Encore encore,” since the Encore GX, though a completely different vehicle, traces its lineage straight back to the very small original Buick Encore. We figure that makes *this* drive an Encore encore encore.

That was a white 2020, this a red 2021, and this one adds a \$1500 power moonroof package.

We were initially surprised to have the same vehicle again so soon. But you know how sometimes you have a date with someone, then maybe a little time goes by, and they call and say hey, want to get together? You say, we just did. They say, well, didn't you have a good time? Yeah, it was fine. So

you get together again, and know what? You're glad they called. You had a good time. This is like that.

The tiny original Encore sprang from GM concepts on the 2007 auto show circuit—Chevy Trax, Beat and Groove—then called minicars, bearing 1.2-liter turbo engines. They were a lot of fun, and people voted on their favorites, but few took them all that seriously, as they were wildly different from the realities of the contemporaneous marketplace. Flash forward, and small has become dominant—not called mini, but rather subcompact, urban or just small. Little utilities are the hottest-selling segment today and have sent most sedans packing.

German Opel-derived (before GM parted with

that subsidiary), the offshoots of those concepts came to life as Opels in Europe in 2013, then as the Buick Encore here in 2013, taking a gamble as a premium fitment micromachine, then indeed the Chevy Trax in 2015 (a year earlier in China).

We first drove the tiny Encore in winter 2014-15 at a Buick winter driving event in New England showcasing new all-wheel-drive offerings. The little guy was a champ, too, chewing up a closed rally course in deep snow. And as you've no doubt noticed, Buick Encore has been a huge success.

This evolutionary path is pertinent to Encore GX not only for explaining its roots and to clarify that this is not the Encore but rather something new with a similar name, but because in a world now flooded with compact and subcompact crossover choices, this heritage gives Encore GX distinction.

Ours had the bigger of two engines, which is not

Buick's ads introducing the tiny new Encore in 2013 featured “Dinosaurs,” performed by They Might Be Giants—with appropriate CG visuals not only poking positive fun at the vehicle's diminutive size, but also no doubt actively suggesting that the time for big alternatives had perhaps come and gone.

by much—1.3-liter vs 1.2-liter, both Ecotec 3-cylinder turbos, with 155 vs 137 horsepower. Add three trim levels and optional all-wheel drive, and the lineup offers fully eight models (see chart at lower right), from just about \$24,000 to \$30,000.

We're generally suckers for AWD, which here comes with the bigger engine, though front-drive was fine in many miles of around-town and freeway driving. Where available, the 1.3L turbo adds just \$395, and its fuel mileage is actually higher. Of note, the 1.3T is mated to a 9-speed automatic, while the 1.2T has a CVT (continuously variable).

During our week, we noted our 1.3L turbo as being plenty powerful for this barely-over-3000-pounder, notably helped by nice gearing. While we'd have to drive the CVT (inherently with the 1.2L engine) to contrast its approach to mimicking shifts, the comparison is ultimately useful to that buyer who really wants to save \$395; otherwise, choosing the 1.3L turbo seems easy.

As for our usual AWD preference, that's not as simple here. The price is reasonable, \$2000 which also includes the \$395 engine upgrade, but it adds more than 200 pounds and drops fuel economy by



three or four points.

Put it all together, and it turns out to be reasonable, clever and useful that GM offers this range of various powertrain combinations.

Again surely benefiting from its echo of the original tiny Encore's styling, Encore GX has a clean, tight, premium-aggressive look, perfectly shaped and scaled for its size, well planted, with everything translating superbly from the littler one.

Who knows. Maybe we're kind of falling for the Buick Encore GX. We're feeling as though we just might like to see it again. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Bupyeong Gu, South Korea
ENGINE/TRANSMISSION	.....Mexico
SEATING	.....five
ENGINE	.....optional 1.3L turbo inline-3-cyl alum/alum, DOHC, dir injection
HP/TORQUE	.....155 hp / 174 lb-ft
DRIVETRAIN	.....FWD
TRANSMISSION	.....(w 1.3T) 9-spd automatic
SUSPENSION	.....F: MacPherson strut; R: compound crank; (AWD: Watts link)
STEERING	.....elec pwr-assist rack & pinion
BRAKES	.....elec 4-whl disc, Duralife rotors, brake drying, brake life monitor; sizes tbd
WHEELS / TIRES	.....18x7.5 alum; 225/55R18 a/s
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....171.4 / 102.2 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....36.8 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....(w moonrf) 37.9 / 38.0 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....40.9 / 36.0 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....23.5 / 50.2 cu.ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....na
TOW CAPACITY	.....(w access hitch) 1000 lb
WEIGHT	.....(Essence 1.3T FWD) 3094 lb
FUEL CAPACITY	.....13.2 gal
MPG	.....30/32/31 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	.....\$28,600
ECOTEC 1.3L TURBO	.....395
CHILI RED METALLIC	.....495
ADVANCED TECH PKG:	adaptive cruise, heads-up display, HD surround vision; Buick infotainment w nav, Bluetooth, streaming, Apple/Android, in-veh apps, voice recog.....1790
EXPERIENCE BUICK PKG:	power moonroof, 18" aluminum wheels.....1500
CONVENIENCE PKG:	auto park assist w braking, rain-sense front wipers, rear camera mirror w washer, wireless charge.....770
LIFTGATE PKG:	power, hands-free.....520
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....995
TOTAL	.....\$35,065

2021 BUICK ENCORE GX LINEUP

Preferred ...fwd.....1.2T ...137hp	.....\$24,200
.....AWD ...1.3T ...155hp	.....26,200
Select .....fwd.....1.2T ...137hp	.....25,800
.....fwd.....1.3T ...155hp	.....26,195
.....AWD ...1.3T ...155hp	.....27,800
Essence .....fwd.....1.2T ...137hp	.....28,600
.....fwd ...1.3T ...155hp	.....28,995
.....AWD ...1.3T ...155hp	.....30,600