

# Deceptively potent 3-banger

BY JOE SAGE

The new Chevrolet Trailblazer derives its name from two sources: an earlier Trailblazer; and of course Chevy Blazer past and current, though the Blazer name had taken longer to come back to life.

Chevy Blazer had started out big-pickup-based, then was joined by a smaller S-10 sibling, which ultimately had become the only Blazer, as the bigger one became the Tahoe. The earlier Trailblazer had joined the lineup bigger than the S-10 Blazer.

The Trailblazer name is back, this time as a new small SUV, the hottest trend of the moment, arriving a year after a new bigger Blazer. The new Trailblazer slots above Chevy's smallest offering, the diminutive Trax, and below the next-up Equinox.

The new Trailblazer compares with sister brand Buick's new Encore GX (see our May-June issue). They share the same bones and build to a great degree, though the boxier Chevy Trailblazer has a bit more length and a slightly longer wheelbase. Turning circles are the same, while other variables are a mix, with the sleeker Buick surprisingly hav-

ing more rear headroom, yet less front headroom and less rear legroom than the boxier Chevrolet.

Lineup-wise, Trailblazer is to the tiny Chevy Trax as the new Encore GX is to the tiny Buick Encore. It's their badging and branding that have taken an inverse approach. While Encore GX picks up style and name cues from the smaller Encore, Trailblazer takes its visual cues and name from a larger utility, the Blazer. How a shopper sees these will depend whether they're shopping multiple sizes within one brand, cross-shopping one size between the two, or some of both. Most may not notice the relationships at all, but they add good perspective.

Trailblazer, at \$19,000, starts at a lower price point than the tiny Trax (\$21,400), though it ranges up to \$27,000 against Trax's \$23,200 top end. Trailblazer's high end offers something especially useful. Many a vehicle lineup has one premium trim by price, but another with off-road or sport-performance emphasis at a different price, confusing for anyone who goes straight to the top price to see which is "best." Chevy eliminates this emotional

tug by pricing two top Trailblazer trims the same—ACTIV, with more of a weekend adventure personality, and RS, the one we're driving here, with more of an urban flavor—a welcome approach that frees you to decide based on attributes alone.

Differences between ACTIV and RS are largely cosmetic—with RS bearing plentiful black trim, a mesh grille, dual chrome exhaust tips and such. We considered taking our RS out to blaze some trails, as its name suggests—photos on the consumer website indeed show drivers happily pounding along on dirt roads. But doublechecking differences in specs, ground clearance was not yet stated, and approach/departure/breakover weren't even on the charts. An owner's willingness to subject one trim versus another to gravel chips and cactus scrapes aside, the biggest build difference between ACTIV and RS seems to be the stylish 18-inch wheels and all-season tires on our RS, versus 17-inch wheels and sport terrains on the ACTIV. A shallow sidewall fitment can be more vulnerable

to abuse when blazing trails far from home, so we let that whole idea slide. We concluded those website photos must be the ACTIV model.

Available in five trim levels (see chart at lower right)—all but the base model with optional all-wheel drive—one key variable is the engine, with a 137-hp 1.2-liter turbo on lower-to-mid front-drivers, and a 155-hp 1.3-liter three-cylinder turbo as you work your way up. There are also two transmissions, a CVT or a 9-speed automatic. It looks complex at first, but it's pretty simple—if you want the bigger engine with front-wheel drive, you're shopping the top models. But you can get the bigger engine affordably by opting for AWD on all but the base L. Any with AWD have the bigger engine and the 9-speed automatic. Fuel mileage, by the way, is highest on the front-drive 1.3-liter.

Even in top trim, controls and interfaces—mirrors, climate, infotainment—tend toward the simpler side, but their simplicity offers quick, streamlined operation with less distraction than average.

We were mightily impressed with all aspects of this little guy with a 1.3-liter turbo—remarkably quick and responsive, with its 9-speed automatic extremely well matched. If you've yet to try a three-cylinder, give it a try and expect a surprise—this thing is a blast to drive. ■



**FAMILY ORIENTATION**, at left: (1) the little Chevy Trax; (2) Buick Encore GX, Buick's Trailblazer sibling; (3) earlier Trailblazer; and (4) the current new Chevy Blazer.

• The new Trailblazer (lead photo) is a size larger than Trax or than Buick Encore (not shown), the same size as Encore GX.

• Larger than Trailblazer are Chevy Equinox (not shown), Blazer and Traverse (not shown, which replaced the old Trailblazer in 2009). Larger still in size (though in some cases overlapping in passenger count) are Tahoe (the most direct descendent of the original full-size Blazer) and Suburban.

## SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY .....	Bupyeong Gu, South Korea
ENGINE/TRANSMISSION .....	Mexico
ENGINE .....	ECOTEC 1.3L 3-cylinder turbo, DOHC alum/alum dir injection
HP/TORQUE .....	155 hp / 174 lb-ft
DRIVETRAIN .....	opt AWD
TRANSMISSION .....	9-spd automatic
<i>(1.3T FWD and all 1.2T models have a CVT)</i>	
SUSPENSION .....	F: MacPherson strut; R: compound crank, Watts link (w AWD)
STEERING .....	elec pwr-assist rack & pinion
BRAKES .....	elec 4-whl disc, Duralife rotors
WHEELS .....	(RS) 18-in aluminum
TIRES .....	225/55R18 all-season
<i>(note: ACTIV has 225/60R17 sport terrain)</i>	
LENGTH / WHEELBASE .....	173.5 / 103.9
GROUND CLEARANCE .....	tbd
TURNING CIRCLE .....	36.8 ft
HEADROOM (F/R) .....	(w snrf) 38.3 / 36.8 in
<i>(note: w/o snrf 40.0 / 38.4 in)</i>	
LEGROOM (F/R) .....	40.9 / 39.4 in
CARGO CAPACITY .....	25.3 / 54.4 cu.ft
WEIGHT / DISTRIB .....	tbd
TOW CAPACITY .....	w accessory hitch 1000 lb
FUEL CAPACITY .....	tbd
MPG .....	26/30/28 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE (RS AWD) .....	<b>\$27,000</b>
<b>TECHNOLOGY PKG:</b> Infotainment 3 Plus, 8" color touchscreen, Bluetooth audio streaming w phone, voice command to phone, wireless charge, adaptive cruise, memory card port, LED headlamps, HD radio, 4.2" multi-color driver info center, Bose premium 7-spkr audio, HD rear camera .....	
1620	
<b>CONVENIENCE PKG:</b> single zone auto AC, auto dim mirror, illuminated sliding vanity mirror visors, 120v power outlet, SiriusXM capable, rear A&C USB charge-only ports .....	
620	
<b>DRIVER CONFIDENCE PKG:</b> rear park assist, rear cross traffic alert, lane change alert w side blind zone alert .....	
345	
ALL-WEATHER FLOOR MATS .....	150
DESTINATION CHARGE .....	965

**TOTAL .....** **\$30,730**

## 2021 CHEVY TRAILBLAZER LINEUP

L .....	1.2T ...137hp ....fwd .....	\$19,000
LS .....	1.2T ...137hp ....fwd .....	\$21,600
.....	1.3T ...155hp ....AWD .....	23,600
LT .....	1.2T ...137hp ....fwd .....	\$23,700
.....	1.3T ...155hp ....AWD .....	25,700
ACTIV .....	1.3T ...155hp ....fwd .....	\$25,500
.....	" ....." ....." ....." ....." ....." .....	27,000
RS .....	1.3T ...155hp ....fwd .....	\$25,500
.....	" ....." ....." ....." ....." ....." .....	27,000

