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Mazda CX-3 Road Test

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Keith Ward puts Mazda's CX-3 through its paces...

Based on the admired Mazda 2 hatchback, the higher stance CX-3 impresses right away as one of the best-looking among compact SUV's.

A 14-strong range offers a choice of three engines - two petrol either 120 or 150 PS and a 105 PS diesel, permed with four trim levels and priced between £18,695 and £25,195, so not the cheapest in the class but there are compensating Mazda virtues, such as long life and low depreciation.

When it comes to alternative power, engineer-orientated Mazda declare themselves to be "concentrating for the time being on further evolution of the internal combustion engine", adding: "We are a small company.. on a quest to make the best internal combustion engine



in the world.”

To that end, they disclose work on an exclusive new power unit combining the high-revving and cleaner exhaust of petrol with the superior take-off response and economy of a diesel. So the cross-over SKYACTIV-X now under development is a next-generation petrol engine harnessing petrol-type spark to diesel-type compression ignition - a first.

Meanwhile Mazda hedge their bets by jointly developing with Toyota an electric car for 2019 and a plug-in hybrid for 2021. And driverless? They insist: “We believe people will want to go on driving cars and we will continue to build cars which people want to drive.”

Our test version of the CX-3 top-trim Sport Nav was the more powerful petrol 2.0 litre, pumping out 150 PS and mated to self-selecting 4WD exclusively through a six-speed manual gearbox - automatic not an option. That 4WD system adds a couple of grand - decide whether you really need it - and the standard price of £22,895 was further boosted to £24,565 by options.

They included a leather and suede interior trim at £1,000 which helped lift what could otherwise be seen as a dull-ish cockpit. You already get such as an integrated navigation system with three years’ European map updates, upgraded seven-speaker Bose sound, a reversing camera, chrome door sills, LED head and daytime running lights, a brake regeneration system, emergency city braking, lane-stray warning and bigger 18-inch alloys. The driver’s seat adjusts electrically.



There's a seven-inch multi-media colour touch screen on the dash and a circular controller placed to hand behind the conventional gear lever. It works with compatible internet-enabled Apple and Android smartphones. So-called MZD-Connect also supports iPod, MP3 and CD playback, plus SMS and email readout functions.

In practical terms the CX-3's is not the roomiest interior - an average height driver could just about sit behind himself, while elbow room in the rear seats allows two comfortably, three a squeeze...

The rear seatbacks divide and fall forward as a semi-flat extension to the boot, stretching it to a floor length of 1,200 mm or just under four feet on our tape. Cargo volume expands to 1,260 litres (44.95 cu.ft).



On the road, a taut suspension gives this SUV hatch-type handling. Updates to the CX-3 last summer were designed to “improve refinement with extra sound insulation, while stifling vibration and harshness entering the cabin”. No doubt those big 18-inch wheels on this version still contribute to evident road noise and a rather knobby ride around town.

At 70 mph, the 2.0 petrol was busily pulling around 2,800 rpm while averaging overall just under 40 mpg – not bad with 4WD.

VERDICT

Great. Now – how much of a further boost can those Mazda boffins bring about..?





Mazda CX-3 2.0 150ps AWD Sport; compact SUV; five seats; five doors.

Size: Length 4,275 mm (14.03 ft); width 1,765 mm (5.79 ft); height 1,535 mm (5.04 ft); kerb weight 1,310 kg (2,888 lb)

Boot Length 690 to 1,200 mm (2.26 to 3.94 ft); width 990 mm (3.25 ft); cargo vol. 287 to 1,197 litres (10.14 to 42.27 cu.ft)

Engine: Petrol; 1998 cc; four cyl; 4WD; six speed manual; stop-start

Power: 150 PS @ 6,000 rpm; max torque 204 Nm (150 lb.ft) @ 2,800 rpm

Pace: 124 mph; 0-62 mph in 8.7 secs

MPG: On test 38.9; Official Comb 44.1; tank 44 litres (9.68 Imperial gallons)

Emissions and taxation: CO2 150 g/km; RFL band F; tax liability 29%

Tyres: 215/50 on 18-inch alloys

Insurance Group: 19E

Service: Every 12,500 miles/12 months

Warranty: 3 years/60,000 miles

PRICE: £22,895; as tested with options £24,565

Rivals: Nissan Qashqai; Honda HR-V; Hyundai Kona; Skoda Karoq