New Mazda CX-5 First Impressions

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Author: Keith Ward

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Keith Ward samples the newest version of Mazda's CX-5 SUV...

In the ever-expanding SUV market, Mazda UK boss Jeremy Thomson is counting on his CX-3 and CX-5 models for 33 per cent of his total sales here this year. (2017).

Not surprising when the run-out CX-5 itself currently attracts one quarter of Mazda's global customers, is their top seller in Europe and has notched 32,000 sales in the UK alone since 2012.

And on the eve of launching an "all-new" CX-5 to replace the five-year-old current version Thomson can celebrate Mazda's top spot among non-luxury brands in the latest, respected JD Power survey of quality in car manufacture. It even beats some of the luxury makes.

All-new CX-5? Well, except for the power trains, admits Thomson. And they continue faithfully to develop the Japanese company's SKYACTIV technology, introduced with the current CX-5, with its emphasis not so much on mpg and CO2, more on "responsiveness and heightened driving pleasure".

There are subtle changes to the external styling, a lower roofline and the introduction of a genuinely striking new body colour – Soul Red Crystal Metallic, the Crystal bit claiming to increase brightness by 20 per cent and depth by 50 per cent. Put it side by side with standard red metallic and you do see the difference. But you don't need a ball to see Crystal is an £800 option.

Inside the CX-5 it is easy to accept Mazda's claim of improved quality in seating, styling and furnishing materials. The rear seats divide 2:1 and now recline, or fold into an almost-flat

floor. Pockets are deeper. There's an air of premium Volvo about it.

Those qualities were certainly in evidence in our media preview. Most of 200-plus tough miles around the Cairngorms in northern Scotland were in what is tipped by Mazda to be the best-seller – a diesel (really!) with 150 PS and 2WD in superior Sport Nav trim. The similarly dressed petrol is £2,000 cheaper but, turbo-less, tended to run out of puff up mountain slopes. It was recording 41 mpg. The 175 PS diesel with 4WD impressed even more than its 2WD, 150 PS diesel stablemate and recorded the same 45.1 mpg, but it's an extra £2,700 for features you may not want or need.

A 10-strong range offers a choice of two four cylinder engines – a 2.0 petrol giving 165 PS and a 2.2 diesel tuned to 150 or 175 PS; front or 4WD; six-speed manual or automatic transmission and just two levels of trim: SE-L Nav and a £3,000 step up to Sport Nav.

Prices run from £23,695 (2.0 petrol 2WD SE-L Nav) to £33,195 (2.2 diesel 175PS 4WD Sport Nav Auto).

Standard equipment on the SE-L Nav generously includes dual-zone climate, integrated sat-nav with three years' European map updates, smart automatic city braking if you nod off; cruise control, auto dusk-sensing LED headlights, auto wipers, DAB radio (location-dependent, of course) and a seven-inch colour touch screen with multimedia connectivity.

That top Sport Nav trim brings black leather upholstery, an eight-way power adjustable driver's seat with memory settings, a welcome reversing camera, a 10-speaker Bose sound system, and 19-inch in place of 17-inch alloys.

Two of its features, new to the CX-5, are a power touch-button tailgate and an impressive heads-up windscreen colour info display, especially welcome for sat-nav directions. Rare among its direct rivals, this last item is a £500 option in a VW, point out Mazda, archly.'

Mazda spend some time trumpeting what they call their spirit of Kodo, a Japanese "Jinba Ittai" relationship between car and driver, akin to that of horse and rider. It all sounds a bit pseud's corner.

But there is an impression of effortless competence in the CX-5's sure handling and cosseting ride.

VERDICT

The CX-5 feels a car comfortable in its own skin – Crystal or not.

Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Mazda 2.2 150PS 2WD Sport Nav Diesel

Type: Compact SUV; 5 doors; 5 seats

Size: Length 4,550 mm (14.93 ft); width 1,840 mm (6.04 ft); Height 1,680 mm (5.51 ft); kerb weight 1,669 kg (3,680 lb)

Boot: Volume 506–1,620 litres (17.87–57.21 cu.ft); length 960–1,590 mm (3.15–5.21 ft); min width 1,050 mm (3.44 ft)

Engine: Diesel; 2,191 cc; four cyl; turbo; 2WD; six speed manual

Power: 150 PS @ 4,500 rpm; max torque 380 Nm (280 lb.ft) @ 1,800–2,600 rpm

Pace: 127 mph; 0–62 in 9.4 secs

MPG: On test 45.1; Official Combined 56.5; tank 56 litres (12.32 Imperial gallons)

Emissions and taxation: CO2 132 g/km; Road tax Band H; VED £200 then £140

Tyres: 255/55; 19 inch alloys

Insurance Group: 20E

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles

Service: 12,500 miles

On sale: June 30th

PRICE: £28,695; as tested with options £29,256

Rivals: VW Tiguan; Nissan Qashqai; Ford Kuga; Toyota RAV4, Audi Q3, BMW X1, Skoda Kodiaq