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Wheels: Mazda's CX-5 Lives Up to High Expectations

By Tim Saunders

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The Mazda CX-5 has a powerful climate system that seems to offer instant heat, perfect for January cold snaps.

Editor's note: Wheels is a section featuring car reviews.

Air conditioning is a standard luxury on most vehicles these days, but in my experience these systems can be a little slow in delivering a comfortable temperature.

Not so in the Mazda CX-5. Winter is definitely here, and Muscovites are wearing their furriest ushankas to protect themselves from the elements. During these challenging cold snaps, we all demand vehicles that warm up immediately, and even in this day and age it can take several minutes for many to do so.

Facts at a Glance

Mazda CX-5 2.2 175ps AWD
Sport Nav Diesel & Safety Pack

2012 onwards

New price range:
1,126,727 rubles —
1,533,478 rubles
($34,280 — $46,655)
Technical specifications
0 to 100kph: 9.1 seconds
Top speed: 204 kph
Economy: 21.6 kpl
Power: 172 bhp

Source: Mazda

The Mazda CX-5 seems to almost have instant heat. Whack up the air conditioning dial to the hottest point, and the interior warms up incredibly quickly. The same is true in the summer when temperatures need to be swiftly brought down: It is impressive.

This is just one of the features of this permanent four-wheel-drive crossover, which is Mazda's answer to the Nissan Qashqai. I have driven the Qashqai, and clearly Mazda has scrutinized it. They have done a good job, helped by the striking Stormy Blue Mica finish of the test model. I actually prefer the CX-5's nose, which is more purposeful, and overall it seems a more appealing package.

The one thing it lacks, though, and which I think would be a very welcome addition would be the front-to-back panoramic glass roof that ensures that a high amount of light makes its way into the Qashqai. In contrast, as you can see in the video at testdrives.biz, the interior of the Mazda is comparatively dark even on a sunny day.

The CX-5 uses a clever Skyactiv lightweight platform, which promotes low emissions and greater efficiency, and Mazda claims this puts it on a par with small vehicles.

I scratched my head when I first sat in the driver's seat because I couldn't see how to start this vehicle. There is no key for the ignition, but after a while I saw behind the indicator stalk the start/stop engine button. This is a clumsy position, but once discovered it is not forgotten.

The CX-5 is a 2.2-liter diesel, and as is often the case there is a slight delay when kicking the accelerator, especially when in second gear, but it's a gutsy vehicle, and the six-speed manual transmission is decisive, albeit a bit notchy. It drives like a smaller car and is certainly engaging.

Drivers and their passengers in vehicles of this type enjoy the raised driving position, which creates a more secure and safe environment. This is partly because the driver can see further ahead and can perform overtaking maneuvers that would be impossible in smaller vehicles.

The height of the vehicle gives the driver a greater view of the road, and I have safely overtaken a parked bus on a narrow country lane while driving it because I could see round the bend. Later on, I was able to safely overtake a line of traffic — again because I could see the road ahead when the motorcyclist behind was uncertain.

Inside, the CX-5 has all the refinements motorists expect including built-in navigation system and reversing camera, easy-to-use cruise control, all round electric windows, electrically adjustable driver's seat, power folding wing mirrors, black leather interior and heated front seats. The security cover in the trunk attaches to the inside of the trunk lid so that you don't need to constantly pull it back and forth. These vehicles always come into their own when diaper changes are required. Not only is the cavernous boot ideal for a little one to lie down in but the raised height means that there is no awkward bending.

What sets the CX-5 apart from the competition is the fact that the rear seats can be so easily dropped for large loads. As you can see in the video at testdrives.biz, it is simply a matter of pulling a lever on either side of the inside of the trunk for the seats to quickly drop.

The CX-5 is the first vehicle to be produced by Mazda with no input from Ford, a frightening prospect when you think that Ford and Mazda worked together between 1979 and 2010 and that between them they designed some fabulous vehicles.

As a former owner of a Xedos 6, I understandably have high expectations of Mazdas, and for me the Mazda has been pretty successful. My old Xedos loved its juice, and I have been surprised at how far it is possible to drive the CX-5 on so little fuel, helped in part by i-stop, which intelligently cuts the engine when it has been idling too long for its liking.

Watch the video at testdrives.biz

Contact the author at

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