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## REVIEW • MOTOR MATTERS 2016 MAZDA CX

The 2016 Mazda CX-3 looks racy, handles well, and offers a compelling alternative to the Chevrolet Trax, Honda HR-V, and Jeep Renegade that have surged onto the market over the last year.

U.S. car buyers have never before bought as many SUVs and crossover utility vehicles as they're taking home today. Now a growing segment of even smaller entries is offering new options, including the CX-3. It's the smallest crossover sold by the sporty Japanese brand, slotting neatly below the CX-5 compact SUV.

Through an alternate lens, you can view the new CX-3 as the capacious hatchback that the Mazda3 doesn't offer. While we love Mazda's compact cars, they're hardly capable of holding four adults. The CX-3 remedies that problem, and adds optional all-wheel drive to boot. Given continuing cheap gas prices and the rising fuel efficiency of SUVs of all sizes, we suspect the CX-3 will do very well. Its sales may be closer to those of the Fiat 500X or the MINI Countryman than Honda's high-volume HR-V, but it's reasonably priced and much more capable for the usual tasks of hauling people and a whole lot of stuff. And it's fun to drive, which can't be said of the Honda or the Chevy.

The CX-3 shines on first impression. The exterior design is one of the most impressive, cohesive renderings of the company's Kodo design theme yet. Only the latest MX-5 Miata wears the sinewy curves and taut lines better. From any angle, the CX-3 is an attractive vehicle, offering an elegant, up-market feel with a clear intention for sporty behavior on its sleeve.

Inside, it's more of the same. Like all of Mazda's recent vehicles, the interior of the CX-3 is remarkably upscale in appearance. Sure, there are still plenty of hard plastics in the cabin, but there are also premium elements like wrapped dashboard pieces, highlight piping on the seats, contrast

stitching, and controls and buttons with a solid and substantial feel. Overall, the interior look and quality look far pricier than a base price around \$20,000 might lead you to expect.

Looks are one thing, but utility vehicles are primarily about capability, performance, and comfort. The 2016 CX-3 doesn't shirk this burden. We found it one of the most enjoyable cars to drive among all the new small crossover utilities. Mazda's electric power steering is well-weighted, and steering geometry tweaks like extra caster improve its straight-line stability without compromising maneuverability. And the CX-3 is highly maneuverable; its 34.8-foot turning circle is low for a front-drive (or all-wheel-drive) vehicle.

Comfort isn't affected by the sporty driving capability, in large part. In fact, the 2016 CX-3 is surprisingly quiet and comfortable even on poor road surfaces, soaking up most bumps without upsetting the occupants--although wheel choice matters. After spending several hundred miles in the CX-3, we can confidently say it's a very comfortable place to be, even for extended periods. The seats are supportive but supple, and road noise is very low, especially with the base Sport trim's standard 16-inch alloy wheels and taller tires. The 18-inch wheels and lower-profile tires on the Touring and Grand Touring models improve steering feel a tick, but at the cost of a bit more road noise, especially over rough surfaces, and they also bring a bit more stiffness to the overall ride. Still, it's not intrusive in either case.

The CX-3 comes with a single powertrain--a 146-horsepower 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine with a six-speed automatic transmission--and a choice of standard front-wheel drive or optional all-wheel drive. Both engine and transmission are products of Mazda's SkyActive engineering, meaning that every component of an otherwise standard powertrain is optimized

for fuel economy. The cars are then designed around the engine and its large exhaust-header system, which is why the engine compartment is longer than in other vehicles. But as with other Mazda models, SkyActiv pays off not only in higher ratings, but in real-world figures that meet and often beat the EPA numbers.

Final ratings are 31 mpg combined (29 mpg city, 35 mpg highway) for the front-wheel-drive model, and 29 mpg combined (27 mpg city, 32 mpg highway) for the AWD version. Both of those results put the CX-3 at or near the top of its burgeoning class. The CX-3's light weight plays an important role in acquiring these gas mileage figures with a conventional gasoline four-cylinder engine and six-speed automatic transmission.

Neither the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) nor the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) has provided crash-test data for the 2016 CX-3.

In terms of features, there's a high level of standard equipment, especially considering the price, and a satisfying range of upgrades are available, including some higher-tech safety items. The base six-speed manual, front-wheel-drive model starts around \$20,000, as do base models of its competitors. A fully optioned CX-3 can easily get you to \$30,000 however.

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### 2016 MAZDA CX

<b>BASE PRICE</b>	\$21,795
<b>EPA est. MPG</b>	29 / 35
<b>SPECS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 146-horsepower</li> <li>• 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine</li> <li>• Six-speed automatic transmission</li> <li>• A single powertrain</li> <li>• Electric power steering</li> <li>• The 18-inch wheels</li> </ul>



## CLICK and CLACK TALK CARS

by Tom & Ray Magliozzi

### OLDER CAR MIGHT NOT BE GOOD FIT FOR NEW DRIVER

BY RAY MAGLIOZZI

In 1996, I bought a brand-new Toyota Tercel as a wedding present for our daughter and new son-in-law. This car has been amazing! Over 223,000 miles with NO mechanical problems or rust. Still drives like new. So, with our granddaughter now turning 16, as a "birthday gift" to the family, I put it into the shop to go over everything so that this 20-year-old car would continue to be reliable transportation for them, and be a good vehicle for a new driver to learn on (four-speed manual). Amazingly, everything was still original, but not surprisingly, it needed some work. It needed a new radiator, a catalytic converter, a timing belt and a bunch of rubber items, etc. I even put in a new radio, as cassettes are not so popular now. One thing it did NOT need was a clutch! The original clutch showed little wear. I find that pretty unbelievable. Of course, now that my granddaughter has been learning how to drive it, that may have changed. I had no problem putting in the \$2,000 to keep this gem on the road! But ... not long after this work was completed, it started using oil -- big time: More than a quart every 500 miles. Ugh ...

I think the engine's shot (I suspect my granddaughter continued driving it after the oil light came on). So, now we're looking at a remanufactured engine or a rebuild. I'm guessing another \$2,000. Ugh ... While this car was, in my opinion, worth \$2,000 to keep on the road, I'm not sure about \$4,000. However, since the first \$2,000 is already sunk, I think I'm committed to it. What are your thoughts? -- Grandpa Gordon

You sound like a wonderful grandpa, Gordon, but I think it's time to abandon ship. It's not that the car couldn't continue to run well with a rebuilt engine; it's that it's not a very safe car, especially for a new, young driver.

It's small, it's lightweight and it won't fare well if it's hit by a Chevy Tahoe, or even a Chevy Malibu. It has basic driver and passenger air bags, but even anti-lock brakes were optional. And if you got the four-speed manual transmission, you probably got the El Cheapo edition without ABS.

Cars built more recently are so much safer. They have stronger structural protection for the passenger compartment, and they have side, knee and head air bags. They have electronic stability control to prevent skids and rollovers. Newer cars are making this Tercel look more and more like a safety antique every day. And we know that, statistically, young drivers have more accidents than the rest of us. That's a fact.

I know you're invested in the Tercel, in more ways than one, Gordon. But if it were my daughter or granddaughter, I'd want her making her early-driver mistakes in something more substantial and better-equipped.

So you have a couple of options. One is to let her take her chances, and just add oil regularly. You can buy about 500-600 quarts of oil for that \$2,000 you'd put into a used engine -- and

that's if you buy them one at a time. If you go for the 55-gallon drum in your living room, you can get 2,000 quarts for \$2,000! In any case, that's a lot of miles -- and, more importantly, you can invest in the Tercel 500 miles at a time -- until you can get your granddaughter an upgrade.

Or, you could always fix and drive the Tercel yourself, Gordon, since you're a much more experienced driver. Then you can give her your 2015 Lexus!

But I think the best thing to do is to keep the Tercel, as is, as a backup car, and look for something safer for your granddaughter to drive every day. For instance, for somewhere in the \$4,000-\$6,000 range, you could get her something like a 1998-2000 Volvo S70. That has front and side-impact air bags, ABS, traction control and a very good crash-test record.

It'll cost you a fortune in repairs compared to what this Tercel cost over its first 20 years, but hopefully your granddaughter has already learned the lesson about what happens when you drive with the oil light on.

Best of luck, Gordon.

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