

A Subtle Difference

All-New CX-50 Selling Alongside CX-5

By Derek Price

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You have to squint to see the differences, but they're real.

Mazda recently released the 2023 CX-50 crossover, an all-new vehicle that's roughly the same size and shape as the longstanding CX-5.

Oddly enough, Mazda isn't replacing the CX-5 with the newer, shinier thing. It's continuing to sell the CX-5 alongside the CX-50, which gives buyers the ability to pick between slightly different flavors in the hottest part of today's automotive landscape.

That also may create some confusion on the showroom floor.

It's not like the CX-5 is woefully out of date. It looks and drives a lot like the CX-50, still crisp and modern, despite being built on a different platform.

What's the difference?

The CX-50 is slightly lower and wider, something you typically want in a sleek sports coupe. At the same time, it's styled to look more rugged and SUV-like with its black fenders and wider C-pillar in back.

They're both handsome vehicles, but I wish Mazda had reversed the styling choice. The taller CX-5 should be the more off-road-friendly version, and the lower CX-50 should be the sporty, fun, four-door Miata with a sport suspension to match.



Despite being lower and wider than the CX-5, the new CX-50 is styled to look more rugged and SUV-like with black fenders and a wider back pillar.

One can dream.

In reality, the CX-50 is one of the best handling crossovers you can buy today, a longtime hallmark for Mazda. It feels natural, comfortable and predictable in turns, and it lunges with a sports-car-like eagerness when you press the throttle.

My tester came with the upgraded engine choice, a 2.5-liter turbocharged four-cylinder that's tuned for lots of torque — 310 pound-feet, to be exact — which is similar to what you'll find in a lot of pickup trucks. The horsepower is rated at a less impressive but still stout 227.

The CX-50's base engine has the same displacement, 2.5 liters, but makes 187 horsepower and 186 pound-feet of torque without the benefit of a turbocharger.

Fuel economy isn't that different between the two engines. The base engine is rated for 30 mpg in the city and 24 on the highway, both of which are only 1 mpg better than the turbo version. Given the output difference, I'd expect a bigger hit to fuel economy from the turbo.

All those numbers are with all-wheel drive. Like Subaru, Mazda is making its entire crossover lineup

come with standard AWD, which helps traction on wet or icy roads but tends to punish fuel economy by a few miles per gallon.

The CX-50's cabin is spectacular, as it should be in a newly released crossover. The high-end trims have the look and feel of what was the domain of luxury cars a few years ago: lots of soft-touch materials with contrasting stitching, solid construction and modern design that makes technology easy to use.

Its tech system, Mazda Connect, lets you use either the touchscreen on the dash

or a rotary selector on the center console to access its many digital features and settings. I found the screen was mounted too far forward to be comfortable to touch, so most of the time I used the rotary knob, which worked fine. People with longer arms may have better luck with the touchscreen.

Wireless Apple CarPlay comes standard, as does radar cruise control with stop-and-go capability.

Pricing for the CX-50 starts at \$27,550, \$850 more than the CX-5.

As of this moment, though, that base version

WHAT WAS TESTED?

2023 Mazda CX-50 2.5 Turbo Premium Plus AWD (\$41,550)

Wheelbase: 110.8 in.

Length: 185.8 in.

Width: 75.6 in.

Height: 63.9 in.

Engine: 2.5-liter turbocharged four cylinder (227 hp, 310 lbs. ft.)

Transmission: Six-speed automatic

Fuel Economy: 23 city, 29 highway

Why buy it?

Sparkling handling, handsome looks and lots of standard features — including radar cruise control, wireless Apple CarPlay and all-wheel drive — make this all-new crossover stand out.

looks like vaporware. Mazda's website currently lists the base S trim as unavailable, along with most of the other affordably-priced versions. The cheapest CX-50 trim you can buy now, according to their online store, is the 2.5 S Premium Plus model, which starts at \$37,150.

When you upgrade the engine, the Turbo Premium Plus tops the lineup at \$42,300.

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Soft-touch materials and contrasting color stitching make the high-end trims of the CX-50 feel luxurious.

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A CLOSER LOOK



AT A GLANCE

FACTS, FIGURES AND RATINGS

What was tested? 2023 Mazda CX-50 2.5 Turbo Premium Plus AWD (\$41,550).

Options: Zircon Sand paint (\$395). Price as tested (including \$1,225 destination charge): \$43,170.

Wheelbase: 110.8 in.
Length: 185.8 in.
Width: 75.6 in.
Height: 63.9 in.
Engine: 2.5-liter turbocharged four cylinder (227 hp, 310 lbs. ft.)
Transmission: Six-speed automatic
Fuel Economy: 23 city, 29 highway

RATINGS
Style: 9
Performance: 8
Price: 8
Handling: 10
Ride: 7
Comfort: 7
Quality: 8
Overall: 8

Why buy it? Sparkling handling, handsome looks and lots of standard features — including radar cruise control, wireless Apple CarPlay and all-wheel drive — make this all-new crossover stand out.