

Bigger Without Going Bland

Mazda's CX-5 Adds Room Without Losing Driver Appeal

By Derek Price
CARGAZING.COM

How do you make one of the best-driving compact crossovers bigger without whittling away the personality that made people like it?

Mazda's answer with the all-new 2026 CX-5 is simple: change plenty, but don't mess with the formula that matters.

This third-generation model stretches 4.5 inches in both overall length and wheelbase, giving rear-seat passengers more room and making the cargo area more useful. Yet the important part is what didn't change.

The CX-5 still feels like a Mazda.

It's maneuverable, crisp and more eager to change direction than most practical crossovers. Against segment stalwarts such as the Honda CR-V and Toyota RAV4, driving feel remains one of the best reasons to pick the Mazda.

Some people will look at the carryover engine and transmission and wonder why Mazda didn't do more. I had the opposite reaction.

The familiar 2.5-liter four-cylinder makes 187 horsepower and sends it through a traditional six-speed automatic with standard all-wheel drive. In a market crowded with continuously variable transmissions, I like that Mazda stuck with actual gears.



The all-new 2026 Mazda CX-5 grows in size but keeps clean, athletic proportions and restrained detailing that give it an upscale look.

Throttle response is crisp, and the transmission feels direct. The CX-5 is more energetic than its horsepower number suggests, especially for something rated at 24 mpg city and 30 highway. Mazda has been pulling off that trick for years, including with the Miata.

I don't see much reason to replace a good powertrain just to say it's new. This one works better from the driver's seat than plenty of newer combinations.

I do wish Mazda had kept a turbo option. The outgoing CX-5 offered several turbocharged trims, but the redesigned 2026 lineup doesn't.

A hotter engine, or even a V6, would give enthusiastic buyers somewhere to go above the standard model. The existing engine is perfectly adequate, but the chassis feels capable of handling more power.

The styling may be the redesign's biggest leap forward.

Mazda has gotten very good at making mainstream vehicles look like premium products. The proportions are clean, and the details are restrained. The whole thing looks expensive without trying too hard.

Inside, the same idea mostly works.

My Premium Plus tester had the 15.6-inch touch-

screen, and it looks terrific. I just wish Mazda hadn't pushed so many basic functions into it.

There's no traditional volume knob, and climate adjustments rely heavily on the screen. It's not the end of the world, but reaching for a physical control would be easier.

I'd also like fewer hard plastics in a cabin that otherwise does a convincing impression of something upscale.

The Premium Plus starts at \$38,990. Soul Red Crystal Metallic paint and destination brought my tester to \$41,080, which feels reasonable for a loaded, all-wheel-drive crossover with this

much polish.

Overall, Mazda got the important parts right.

The new CX-5 is larger, roomier and more technologically ambitious, but it hasn't lost the responsive feel that has long separated it from the crowd. I'd change a few things if I could wave a magic wand, especially the touchscreen controls and lack of a stronger engine option.

Those are picky complaints about a good, solid redesign.

For buyers who need crossover practicality but still care about how a vehicle feels from the driver's seat, the CX-5 remains one of my favorites.

AT A GLANCE

WHAT WAS TESTED?

2026 Mazda CX-5 2.5 S Premium Plus AWD (\$38,990). Options: Soul Red Crystal Metallic (\$595). Price as tested (including \$1,495 destination charge): \$41,080

BY THE NUMBERS

Wheelbase: 110.8 in.
Length: 184.6 in.
Width: 73.2 in.
Height: 66.7 in.
Engine: 2.5-liter four-cylinder (187 hp, 186 lb.-ft.)
Transmission: Six-speed automatic
MPG: 24 city, 30 highway

RATINGS

Style: 9
Performance: 8
Price: 9
Handling: 9
Ride: 8
Comfort: 8
Quality: 8
Overall: 9

WHY BUY IT?

It's still a smart pick for drivers who want practical crossover space without giving up upscale styling, responsive handling or the reassuring feel of a conventional automatic.



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Inside, the CX-5 uses a large central touchscreen, clean horizontal design and added passenger room to create a modern, uncluttered cabin.

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A CLOSER LOOK



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FACTS, FIGURES AND RATINGS

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