



Cars & Places

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2007 Mazda CX-7 by Rick Trawick



Tell most product planners that they were getting another SUV in their line-up and they would probably start to cry. But not the brave souls at Mazda, they are introducing not one but two new crossover vehicles in the next few months. First up, the CX-7.

Rather than launch yet another, almost identical vehicle, Mazda has chosen to create something different. The CX-7 is closer to a regular car than most SUV's or even some other crossover, car-based vehicles. Designed around a taller, five-passenger, wagon-like cabin, and sporting an available all-wheel-drive system, the CX-7 has the features that have traditionally made SUV's popular. But Mazda has thrown in styling reminiscent of the RX-8 sports car and a direct fuel-injected and turbocharged, 244 horsepower 4 cylinder engine coupled to a 6-speed automatic transmission. The 2.3 liter is the same engine we last tested in the Mazdaspeed 6. Engineers have slightly detuned the engine to improve the drivability but without taking the edge off the power delivery. Stomp the right pedal and the CX-7 will rocket away, the electronic traction control keeping all four wheels planted. Handling is among the best-in-class thanks to the lower center of gravity compared to others in this group. The CX-7 is fun to drive on twisty roads that are scary in an SUV. At the same time, the CX-7 makes no pretence about being some kind of off-road machine. The ground clearance is sufficient for unplowed, snow covered roads that are the maximum difficulty most SUV's are put through, no matter what their ultimate capability. But you would probably not want to try tackling a rocky dirt trail. EPA fuel mileage

estimates are 19 city and 24 highway, the AWD version only giving up 1 mile-per-gallon in the city. In real-life highway driving we saw 25 mpg.



It's the interior that gives these machines their utility and the CX-7 uses a 60/40 split folding rear seat to increase cargo space from 29.9 cubic feet to 58.6. The styling somewhat limits the size and shape of cargo but that is the price of the sleek body. The exterior styling does look good however and looks especially nice from the rear $\frac{3}{4}$ view. I like the way the side window kicks up and the taillight treatment.

Our Touring edition (model lineup is Sport, Touring and Grand Touring) was equipped with supportive leather seats that were still comfortable after a four-hour trip to the Delaware shore. Plenty of comfort items including cruise control, power window lifts and air-conditioning are standard on all models. Our test car also included the optional Bose 6-disc in-dash CD changer with excellent sound one would expect from the Bose name.

Mazda is out to provide a great value in this class. The pricing for the CX-7 Sport starts at \$24,310, maxing out on the Grand Touring with



all-wheel-drive and a navigation system in the \$33K range. From the outside, it takes a sharp eye to pick out the differences in the range so the Sport buyers won't feel like they are left to drive a vehicle screaming "I'm a cheapskate". (Remember when manufacturers put that fake clock face on the dash to remind you that you didn't spring for a clock!) Even the Sport trim level features the turbocharged engine, traction control and front, side and side curtain airbags.

Will the CX-7 be successful? It remains to be seen, but I'm sure it will give some cars like the Nissan Murano and Toyota Highlander a run for their money. Check it out at www.mazdausa.com.

Don't forget the subscriber contest!

Don't miss out! We are looking to make a significant increase in our readership. I know all of our faithful readers have told friends about the website, but sometimes they forget to sign up, or they lose the address or something. So to encourage everyone to talk us up and get their friends to subscribe, we are having a subscription contest. Here's how it works:

Every reader who gets two of their friends to sign up will get a free, one-year subscription to our print magazine when it is introduced. Yes, we are going to really have a print magazine you can hold in your hand, and when we do, you will receive the first year free! But don't stop there, sign up 5 or more people and you will get an official Cars & Places travel mug. And the top prize will go to the one person who signs up the most people, that special person will receive an embroidered Cars & Places jacket!

We have added a space on the subscription form called "How did you hear about us?", so make sure your friends put your name in that space! And no fair signing up your "other" email addresses!

Let's get started and spread the word! You only have from now until the end of May so get going!

Places to Be!



The trip I mentioned in the Mazda CX-7 story took us to the Delaware shore and Rehoboth Beach in particular. We stayed at the wonderful Bellmoor Inn and Spa. Located in town and just two blocks off the beach, the inn offers a quiet respite from the hustle and bustle of the main street. Well appointed rooms welcome guests after a busy day at or on the beach. A quiet garden area is perfect for relaxing. But to really relax, book an appointment for a massage or facial at the spa. Just be sure to catch the awesome breakfast each morning. See all the amenities at www.thebellmoor.com.

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Moving west to Winchester, Virginia, the Belle Grove Plantation is hosting the Shenandoah Long Rifles living history demonstration this weekend, May 27th and 28th.



Visit an 18th-century encampment of costumed re-enactors demonstrating crafts, gunsmithing, outdoor cooking, & pioneer skills on Belle Grove's wooded acres. There is an admission charge. See www.visitwinchesterva.com or www.bellegrove.org for information and directions.

Just a reminder that Cars & Places is helping out with a local classic car and hot rod show! It will take place on June 18, Father's Day at the Maryland Sheriff's Youth Ranch on Maryland MD-80 about 3 miles south of I-270. It is open to all vehicles, including motorcycles, hot rods, classics and import tuners. People's choice trophies will be awarded and there will be food and music. It will be a great time to share with Dad! Look for a complete schedule and directions coming on our website.

That's all for this week!

So until next time, enjoy your drive!

Rick Trawick

Publisher

Any comments or questions you may have are welcome. Please email them to info@carsandplaces.com. If you would like to see your event mentioned, send it to the same address.

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