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Mazda's 2013 CX-5 arrived earlier this year not looking or performing radically differently from its compact crossover competitors, but this ground-up, if not ground-breaking, new model is the result of a fresh and more focused approach to vehicle design by the Japanese auto maker.

And with its good looks, typically Mazda driver-oriented dynamics, decent performance allied to improved fuel economy and a nicely done cabin with plenty of room for cargo, it's already proving a hit both globally and here in Canada. In its first six months, sales of 6,876 – which Mazda says have been constrained by supply – just about doubled last year's total for the Tribute, the model it replaces.

Mazda vehicle development engineer Dave Coleman explains there was no “silver bullet strategy that would work” in developing the process that created the CX-5, which is the forerunner of future Mazda product, including the upcoming Mazda6. “What we needed was a silver machine gun that would target all the fundamentals of efficiency.”

And he says the new design methodology that emerged isn't just pie-in-the-SkyActiv but a realistically real-world approach that rethinks the basics. SkyActiv is what Mazda calls this new down-to-the-details philosophy aimed at making sure all the individual engineering building blocks are doing the best job possible. While interlinking Lego-like to ensure all parts of the vehicle work towards the common goal of achieving a workable blend of comfort, convenience, driving dynamics, safety and environmental sustainability.



Future styling will be looked after by its also-new Kodo “soul of motion” approach, which steers it in a pleasing new direction, judging by the CX-5.

SkyActiv's focus is on realizable gains through optimization rather than pure innovation (although there's been some of that, too), an approach that identifies design rough spots and buffs them to a smooth, shiny, efficient finish.

In the case of the CX-5's 2.0-litre, 155-hp/150-lb-ft engine, this resulted in seemingly mundane things that, taken together, produced important changes: reciprocating drag reduced 25 per cent, oil pump drag 71 per cent, valve train friction reduced 50 per cent and belt drive drag cut 27 per cent. And it sounds almost Zen-like, but even the way the cooling water flows through the engine and radiator was analyzed and water pump drag sliced 31 per cent.

Mazda says this kind of through-the-jeweller's-loupe look at things is most evident in the engine and transmission, but was employed for all other aspects of the CX-5's design, from its high-strength steel structure to its agile suspension and livable and usable cabin.

So has it worked, is the CX-5 the most polished performer in the compact class three-ring circus? Well, that's too subjective a call to make as its rivals, a number of them also new, all bring blends of attributes to the party that will suit some buyers better than others.

But it's a quantum leap ahead from the Tribute Mazda soldiered on with for too long to anchor the entry level of its now nicely modernized SUV range, which includes the in-the-middle CX-7 and the seven-seater CX-9.

The CX-5 is available as a starter GX with six-speed manual transmission and front-drive at \$22,995, an upgraded GS with front-drive at \$28,045 and the GT we're looking at here with six-speed automatic and all-wheel-drive, which is priced at \$32,645.



The CX-5's look is a nicely balanced blend of style and interior people- and carrying-capacity practicality, although the latter was trimmed a bit by the designer's charcoal sketching pencil. From the 1,904 litres the shorter Tribute provided to 1,852 litres, although room behind the rear seat was improved 78 litres. Max capacity in Honda's new CR-V is 2,007 litres.

A step up and over a wide sill into the leather-clad driver's seat, which is comfortably and supportively shaped, places you behind a leather-wrapped steering wheel through which you view shiny-bezelled instruments. Centre-stack controls for audio and climate control are reachable and logical, although there is the dichotomy of a soft-touch dash and hard doorcaps. It's nicely but not lavishly done, dressed up with Piano Black (otherwise known as shiny black plastic) and polished aluminum-look trim.

The rear seatback is split 40/20/40, effectively creating two shaped spots on the bench for a pair of passengers who won't find it claustrophobic back there thanks to the side window extensions. Folding it creates a near-level load area, narrowed by the rear wheel arches, but accessed through a large hatch.

Equipment includes a blind-spot warning system and rear-view camera, intelligent key system, power sunroof, rain-sensing wipers, dual-zone climate control, a power driver's seat, Bose audio system, Bluetooth and other electronics links.

The CX-5's 2.0-litre motor is downsized from the Tribute's 2.5-litre four that made 171hp/171 lb-ft of torque. The new engine revs freely but lacks the bigger motor's grunt and, even though aided by the new six-speed automatic, it serves up performance that's a tad on the tepid side. Although it steps off briskly enough, with 0-100 km/h acceleration in the 10-plus second range and prompt automatic gear swapping (you can also do it yourself) helps around town. And it must be making some torque low down as it handles highway hills easily enough.

On the plus side are improved fuel economy numbers of 8.0 litres/100 km city and 6.4 versus the Tribute's 9.2 city/7.2 highway. But I'd guess many may find they are using the gas pedal aggressively enough to negate those numbers. I averaged 8.1 litres in semi-rural usage and 7.5 litres at four-lane highway speeds, which is better than a number of rivals.

The CX-5 is rated to tow 907 kilograms, up from the four-cylinder Tribute's 680 kg, but I'd guess dragging this around would be considerably less than enjoyable.

The strut-type front and multi-link rear suspension is set up to deliver dynamics that support Mazda's sporty marketing persona and the electric-assist steering's ratio is quick-ish, which results in the CX-5 responding to driver commands in a pleasingly linear fashion. And it feels solid and planted on a bumpy back road or at highway speeds.

The all-wheel-drive system and 210 mm of ground clearance will help in deep snow and it is certainly rough cottage road capable, if not a real off-roader.

It's not a game-changer, but may prove to be something of a standout performer in the rapidly expanding compact crossover league.



***REFRESHED 2013 MAZDA CX-9 SET FOR
DEBUT AT 2012 AUSTRALIAN AUTO SHOW*****Just the Facts:**

- The refreshed 2013 Mazda CX-9 will skip the 2012 Paris Auto Show and debut at the 2012 Australian Auto Show in October.
- The face-lifted Mazda CX-9 now bears a greater family resemblance to the 2014 Mazda 6.
- The 2013 Mazda CX-9 gets new safety features, including forward obstruction warning, lane departure warning and a high-beam control system.

HIROSHIMA, Japan — The refreshed 2013 Mazda CX-9 will skip the 2012 Paris Auto Show and debut at the 2012 Australian Auto Show in October.

The face-lifted Mazda CX-9 now bears a greater family resemblance to the 2014 Mazda 6. The Japanese automaker released images of the 2013 CX-9 on Tuesday.

The 2013 Mazda CX-9 gets new safety features, including forward obstruction warning, lane departure warning and a high-beam control system.

The 2013 Mazda CX-9 will be equipped with the carryover 273-horsepower 3.7-liter V6 engine and six-speed automatic transmission.

"The 2013 model will be on sale late this fall in the U.S.," wrote Jeremy Barnes, a Mazda North American Operations spokesman, in response to an e-mailed query from *Edmunds*. "No pricing to be announced at this time — we'll announce closer to launch."

The Mazda CX-7, the smaller sibling of the CX-9, has been discontinued in the U.S.

Edmunds says: The revised 2013 Mazda CX-9 hasn't been tweaked since 2009, so this should be a welcome new look.



***2013 MAZDA CX-9 WORLD PREMIERE AT
AUSTRALIAN INTERNATIONAL MOTOR SHOW***

2013 Mazda CX-9 World Premiere at Australian International Motor Show

- Incorporating elements of KODO design with Mazda's new family face -

HIROSHIMA, Japan-Mazda Motor Corporation will hold the world premiere of the refreshed Mazda CX-9 crossover SUV at the 2012 Australian International Motor Show.

Held in Sydney, the 2012 Australian International Motor Show begins October 18 and runs through to October 28, 2012. The 2013 CX-9 will be launched in Australia later this year.

Mazda CX-9 is a crossover sport-utility SUV featuring a distinctive sporty appearance, a high-quality cabin, the flexibility of three-rows, and Mazda's exciting "Zoom-Zoom" driving dynamics. The current CX-9 has sold over 210,000 units* in 74 countries, including North America and Australia, as Mazda's range-topping SUV.

The 2013 Mazda CX-9 carries over the utility and dynamic driving performance of the current model while adopting Mazda's "KODO - Soul of Motion" design theme at the front and rear for even sportier styling and stronger presence. Enhancements in craftsmanship and interior design further the feeling of quality and refinement. With regard to equipment, the infotainment system features the latest audio, navigation and speech-recognition systems based on the Human Machine Interface (HMI) which is intuitive to use. In addition, advanced active-safety features, such as Forward Obstruction Warning System, Lane Departure Warning System, and High Beam Control System, help drivers recognize and avoid danger.

As with the current model, the 2013 CX-9 features the MZI 3.7-liter V6 engine and a six-speed automatic transmission for powerful and refined driving pleasure.

The all-new Mazda6 (known as Atenza in Japan) will also make its Australian premiere in Sydney. It is the second of Mazda's new generation of products that adopt the full range of SKYACTIV technologies and the KODO - Soul of Motion design theme. It is the first model to be equipped with Mazda's unique brake energy regeneration system, i-ELOOP.

The 2012 Australian International Motor Show will open to the press on October 18, and to the public from October 19 to 28, 2012. Mazda will hold its press conference on the morning of Thursday, October 18 from 9:12 to 9:22 local time.



2013 MAZDA CX-9

For five model years, the Mazda CX-9 has been running around wearing the same set of clothes and it was about due for a little refresher. Well, Mazda has been working on said revisions and was planning on holding out until the Australian International Motor Show to release the revised SUV, but it has instead decided to give us just a little bit of a teaser of the upcoming changes.

From what we can see of the images so far, the changes will be drastic on the front end, but the rear end appears to remain intact. Mazda also included some very basic information on what to expect under the hood of the 2013 CX-9, as well as some extra technologies that you can expect to see.

The CX-9 will make its debut on October 18th and we will bring you all of the details at that time. *Until then, click past the jump to read all about the information that Mazda has already passed onto us.*

[Exterior](#)

The revised 2013 Mazda CX-9, from what the images are showing us, will boast a much more refined face than the previous generation and Mazda's new "KODO – Soul of Motion" design. The grille is no longer split into an upper and lower segment, and is only underlined in chrome instead of surrounded by it, giving the face a more adult, yet sporty look. We also see the elimination of the oddly shaped fog lamps on the 2012 model and they are replaced by a much more elegant-looking pair of circular fog lamps with a brow-like line over top of them. The lower lip has also been given a little more shape, giving the fascia a better underline, which increases its refined appearance.

The headlights were yet another big revision from the 2012 model, as Mazda has stretched the front and rear edges of the lights away from one another and rounded the edges a little, giving it a more mature look. The front-most edges of the headlights meet up with the chrome strip that underlines the revised grille, giving the CX-9 the luxurious look that it has lacked its entire life.

From the looks of it, we are not going to see any revisions to the sides of the rear end of the CX-9 in 2013, but that could change once Mazda releases additional images.

[Interior](#)

Mazda gave us very little information to go off of for the interior, but we do know that there will be enhancements in craftsmanship and the interior design. From the sounds of it, Mazda is moving toward the soft-touch interior material for the CX-9's interior in an effort to give it a more luxurious appearance and feel, which is something it definitely lacked in the 2012 model year. Let's just hope Mazda didn't go overboard.

You will also get an all-new infotainment system that will boast the latest audio, navigation, and speech-recognition systems in what Mazda calls its Human Machine Interface (HMI).

For now, this is all that we have on the interior. There will be tons more info to come, once we see the final model in Australia.

[Safety Features](#)

Safety features are the top priority in family SUVs and Mazda is proving that it will stay true to this need by adding in a forward object warning system, lane departure warning system and a high-beam control system.

We are certain that the 2013 CX-9 will boast many more safety features, which we will outline for you following its official release.

[Engine and Drivetrain](#)

Under the hood and in the transmission department, we have a complete carryover from last year's model, as the 2013 CX-9 will feature the same 273-horsepower 3.7-liter V-6 engine and 6-speed automatic transmission to either the front wheels or all four wheels. Since there are no changes expected, you can anticipate the same 17 mpg city and 24 mpg highway mileage from last year.

Last year's CX-9 boasted a 3,500-pound towing capacity with the towing package installed or with AWD and a 2,000-pound capacity in front-wheel drive without the kit. Again, with no major structural changes, we expect the same towing numbers.

Pricing and Release Date

There is no pricing or release date available yet, but anticipate a late 2012 or early 2013 addition to the Mazda USA lineup. Mazda did announce that it would hit the Aussie market in late 2012. We anticipate the pricing to remain in the \$30,000 range, like it did last year, but don't be surprised to see a mild jump in pricing.

Competition

The closest competitor to the CX-9 will be the 2013 Honda Pilot. Hands down, no question about it, the CX-9 crushes the Pilot in looks. The Pilot looks as if it was ripped straight from the 1960s and just mildly upgraded to somewhat resemble a modern vehicle. It definitely ranks near the top of worst redesigns ever made. However, it is still a formidable foe in every other way.



Coming in at a base MSRP of \$29,420, the Pilot will likely be about the same as the CX-9 but it boasts an established driveline, while Mazda is in the process of still building its driveline. The Pilot falls behind with its 250-horsepower engine mated to a 5-speed automatic and its 2,000-pound maximum towing capacity at the base level, with the towing package equipped. At the top end, the Pilot hauls up to 4,500 pounds, putting it above the top-level 2012 CX-9.

The Pilot also falls a little short in the mpg game, given the CX-9 makes the improvements we anticipate seeing over last year's model. Even if there are no improvements in mpg, this remains a draw between the Pilot and CX-9.



On the inside, we don't quite know what to expect from the CX-9. We do know that the Pilot went a little too far on its interior, loading up the center stack with buttons, keeping that goofy-looking center-stack-mounted gear shifter and making the overall fit and feel of the interior not much better than a late-1990s Accord. If the CX-9 steps up the way we expect it to, it'll knock the Pilot out of contention in the interior styling.

We need to wait and see how much of an increase we will see in the 2013 CX-9's pricing, if there is any, and make our final decision then. On paper, we say the CX-9 is a good choice over the Pilot, but we need to wait for the official details and we need to get some seat time to make a true comparison.

FIRST LOOK: 2014 MAZDA6

Mazda is on a big push to improve the efficiency of all its new vehicles by using a suite of technologies called SkyActiv. The company already dropped a new 40-mpg SkyActiv four-cylinder engine into the 2012 Mazda 3, launched the efficient 2013 CX-5 crossover, and now is following up with the 2014 Mazda 6 sedan. Like the CX-5, the new midsize is designed from the ground up to follow the SkyActiv mantra of reduced weight and improved efficiency. The car made its official debut at the Moscow Motor Show in Russia, and will go on sale around the world later this year.

Mazda had dropped strong hints about the design of the new Mazda 6 with its previous Takeri concept, and much of that language has made its way to the production car. As the CX-5 did, the 2014 6 follows Mazda's new kodo design philosophy. The semi-circle front grille, angled headlights with chrome eyebrows, and angular lower fascia are all reminiscent of the CX-5. As on the Takeri concept, aggressive flares over the front wheels taper softly into the front doors. The headlights get Mazda's first-ever use of LEDs, for a halo ring illumination. While the front half of the 6 has plenty of styling drama, the rear is much more sedate. The roofline and rear glass slope gently into a stubby trunk with an integrated spoiler. Narrow taillights wrap onto each fender, and a silver chrome strip connects the lights above the license-plate indentation.



The sheetmetal is built on a new SkyActiv-Body principle that uses more high-strength steel than the old Mazda 6, allowing the car to be lighter yet 30-percent stiffer than its predecessor. Measuring 191.5 inches in length, the new sedan is about two inches shorter than the outgoing model, but Mazda says that better packaging and a slightly longer wheelbase improve interior room. Rear-seat legroom grows by 1.5 inches while knee room increases 1.7 inches. The trunk opening is 1.25 inches wider, and it uses a "swan" hinge that doesn't impede on cargo room.

The cabin itself is smart but understated. The instrument cluster has a three-binnacle design, with the right-most spot occupied by 3.5-inch LCD trip computer. The tidy center stack, large touch-screen radio, and clear three-dial climate controls are all familiar from the CX-5. The interior is composed mostly of dark plastics, but satin metal trim pieces help break it up and keep the design from being too dull. Based on our experiences with the CX-5, all cabin materials should be pleasant to touch and well put-together.

Efficient Powertrains

One of the biggest goals of 2014 new Mazda 6 is to offer drastically improved efficiency, so to that end the Russian-specification car is launching with two SkyActiv-G four-cylinder gasoline engines. Mazda will announce final details on American powertrain options later this year, but they should closely mirror the choices seen here. The 2.0-liter engine produces 148 hp and 155 lb-ft of torque, and can be mated either to a six-speed manual or six-speed automatic transmission. Mazda says this engine will return the equivalent of 39 to 40 mpg combined. The larger 2.5-liter engine makes 189 hp and 189 lb-ft, and is offered only with an automatic transmission. It's claimed to return a combined 37 mpg.

To further increase fuel economy, both engines can be fitted with i-stop, Mazda's stop-start system that can restart the engine in as little as 0.35 second after the car has been idling. The 2.5-liter engine also is offered with i-ELOOP, a system that recharges a capacitor when the car decelerates. The capacitor can power some accessories like the radio and climate control while the car is idling, reducing engine load from the alternator. Mazda says i-ELOOP can reduce fuel consumption by as much as 10 percent.

Other nods to efficiency include underbody trays and the aforementioned trunklid spoiler, which conspire to keep the aerodynamic drag coefficient down to just 0.26 Cd. A weight-loss regime compared to the old Mazda 6 also helps bolster fuel economy. The 2014 model is claimed to weigh as little as 2954 pounds, a drop of nearly 300 pounds compared to the 2012 car.

Zoom-Zoom Chassis

Despite the quest to save every drop of gasoline, Mazda claims it hasn't neglected the sporty driving characteristics that endear us to the company's vehicles. Mazda says its SkyActiv-Chassis design has agile suspension, direct steering, and strong brake feel that are meant to "give the driver the feeling of being in complete control." The electric power steering has been specifically tuned to keep the car stable at high speeds and reduce "pull" on uneven road surfaces. The brakes, steering, and accelerator are all said to have a linear, consistent feel. The Russian-spec car shown in Moscow has either 17- or 19-inch alloy wheels.

On top of that, the 6 receives an array of new active safety gadgets. Automatic high-beams and adaptive headlights help with night visibility. A new feature called Emergency Stop Signal makes the taillights flash rapidly when the driver brakes especially hard. Designed to attract attention from other drivers, the system is unlikely to be legal under America's strict lighting standards. A lane-departure warning system and Smart City Brake Support, which can apply the brakes to prevent collisions at speeds up to 19 mph, are more likely to be sold on the American-spec Mazda 6. Hill-start assist and a blind-spot warning system also are available.

Ready For Primetime?

The Mazda 6 has long struggled in America's highly competitive midsize sedan segment. The 2014 version faces an even tougher crowd, as it must face off against Ford's brand-new 2013 Fusion, Hyundai's Sonata, the ever-popular Toyota Camry, and the upcoming 2013 redesign of the Honda Accord. Mazda hopes its blend of daring design, improved fuel economy, and an engaging driving experience will make the 2014 6 sell in greater numbers than its predecessor ever did. While the first two of those aspects are sure to help Mazda fight the segment mainstays, it remains to be seen whether midsize buyers have any interest in driving enjoyment. The 2014 Mazda 6 goes on sale later this year.



***WHAT DO YOU YOU
DRIVE?***

