

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

VOLUME 11 NUMBER 5
SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2012

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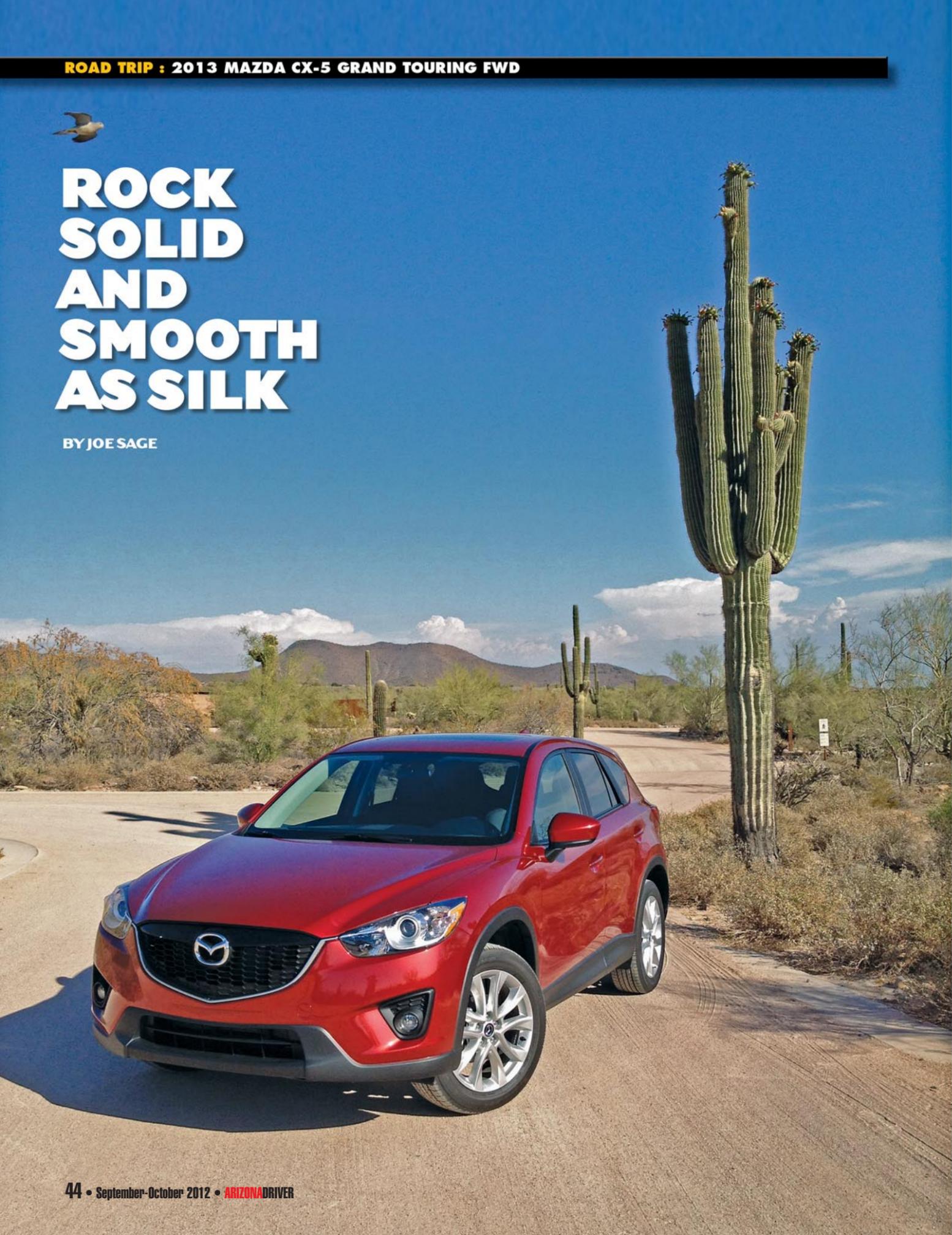
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2013 Mazda CX-5

ROCK SOLID AND SMOOTH AS SILK

BY JOE SAGE



Given the chance, we would take every test vehicle on a long road trip through the region—easier said than done. But the all-new Mazda CX-5 was due to arrive at our offices in time for the 4th of July, and a classic Western pilgrimage was in order.

We drove from the Valley, up I-17 through Flagstaff, north-northeast through the Navajo Nation into Monument Valley and Utah, into Arches National Park and other red rock highlights of southeastern and eastern Utah, on into Colorado on I-70, along the Colorado River and north from there to Steamboat Springs—known as the home of the Bridgestone Winter Driving School—in time for their 4th of July parade.

The return trip took us south out of Steamboat Springs on Colorado 131 to I-70, west through Glenwood Canyon, then picked up the same route back through Moab and south through Monument Valley back to Arizona.

A great route, a good schedule, and a compelling new vehicle ready for a solid tryout. Let's hit the road.

ALL NEW, ALL INCLUDED

The CX-5 sits in a very competitive segment, but Mazda clearly brings a highly competitive vehicle to the market, at least by the numbers and inclusions.

Our test CX-5 came in the highest of three trim levels—Grand Touring—but in front-wheel-drive (AWD is also available). We don't always list every item from the Monroney sticker, but in this case (see specs at right), we are compelled to do so by the fact that our Grand Touring example had not one dollar in options, add-ons or upcharges. This top trim is very complete, with all modern electronics, interfaces and amenities, from audio to dual climate to moonroof to electronic handling systems—and is still priced very attractively.

Three available levels are Sport, Touring and Grand

SPECS: MAZDA CX-5 GT

ENGINESKYACTIV 2.0L
HP/Torque155 hp / 160 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION6-speed sport automatic
DRIVETRAINFront-engine, front-drive
FUEL MILEAGE26 MPG city, 32 highway
STANDARD FEATURES: 18-inch alloy wheels, P225/55 R19 all-season tires, variable rain-sensing wipers, fixed-intermittent rear wiper, heated power mirrors w/ turn lamps, rear privacy glass, power moonroof, 5-passenger seating, tilt/telescope leather-wrapped steering wheel w/audio-cruise-Bluetooth™ controls, power locks, power windows (driver one-touch), leather trimmed sport seats, carpet floor mats, remote keyless entry, dual zone auto climate, 40/20/40 split fold-down rear seat, 37-month warranty and 60-month/60k-mile powertrain warranty, 24-hour roadside assistance, ABS with EBD and brake assist, 5-passenger 3-point seatbelts, child safety seat anchors, blind spot monitor, 4-wheel disc brakes, electric power steering, independent front and rear suspension with front/rear stabilizer bars, auto halogen headlamps, DRLs, stainless steel exhaust outlets, rear roof spoiler, roof mounted satellite antenna, fog lamps, dual lighted vanity mirrors, 5.6" color display with rear camera, Bose AM-FM-CD-MP3-SAT 9-speaker audio, aux input/USB, Bluetooth™ phone/audio, HD radio, center armrest and covered storage, rear seat center armrest, 6-way power driver's seat, power lumbar support, heated front seats, DSC, TCS, hill launch assist, advanced airbags/curtains, ring-structure SKYACTIV body, TPM, anti-theft immobilizer.

BASE PRICE\$27,045
OPTIONS:[none]
DESTINATION CHARGE795
TOTAL PRICE\$27,840

KEEP RIGHT >>

NORTHERN ARIZONA

The route to northwest Colorado is actually quite direct. From wherever you start, drive to Flagstaff, then north on US 89, east on US 160 to Kayenta—(while there, don't miss the uniquely situated Navajo Code Talkers Museum, inside Burger King)—then north into Monument Valley, which looks like classic Arizona but is mostly in Utah.



SOUTHEASTERN UTAH

Southeastern Utah is a travel treasure trove, with parks and attractions to keep you busy for weeks. The drive north brings you through Bluff, Blanding and Moab. Shown are Monument Valley, Wilson Arch, a classic Moab motel, Arches National Park and Fisher Towers Road. Also nearby are Canyonlands NP and Dead Horse Point.



Touring. If you choose Mazda's 6-speed SKYACTIV-Drive automatic (almost the only choice), you can also choose between FWD or AWD. That makes six models. The base model—the FWD Sport—is also available with a 6-speed manual, for a total of seven models. We would certainly like to see a manual also available on at least one of the AWD models, the better to tool over some tougher terrain at times.

A bottom-rung 2013 Mazda CX-5 Sport with manual transmission and front-wheel drive has a base price of \$20,695, while the FWD automatic starts at \$22,095. The top FWD model—our test vehicle—starts at \$27,045. AWD models (all with 6-speed automatic) run from \$23,345 to \$28,295. We would certainly pay \$1150 to have AWD, and the fuel mileage difference is almost negligible: 25/31 MPG city/highway with AWD versus 26/32 as a front-driver. (Note that the manual-shift front-driver gets the best fuel mileage, at 26/35 city/highway. Again, please build that AWD manual.)

BATTING CLEANUP

Mazda brought us the CX-7 and CX-9 crossovers for a number of years. And let's not forget the Mazda Tribute—close kin to the hotcakes-selling Ford Escape of the last decade. The Escape has just gone through a major evolution, so where did that leave Mazda?

The Ford-Mazda relationship is already pretty much in the rearview mirror, having receded from a high point of one-third ownership by Ford down to just three percent by a couple of years ago. Mazda would now evolve their own way.

Whereas the Ford Escape has become a completely different vehicle this year, though bearing its old familiar name, Mazda has a new vehicle that we find more in line with the Escape-Tribute predecessors, despite

wearing a new name that aligns with CX-7 and CX-9. However compelling it may be for Ford to chase the Honda CR-X and other small crossovers, the prior Escape had been the hottest seller in the segment, and we're inclined to think Mazda is on to something with their more traditional approach, in this new CX-5.

The CX-5 also knocks the CX-7 out of the Mazda lineup. While the CX-7 and CX-9 offerings seemed to be built similarly but in different sizes, the CX-9 is still based on the platform used in everything from the Ford Edge and its sibling Lincoln MKX, to the outgoing Ford Fusion and Mazda6. The CX-7, exiting the lineup, was based more on the Mazda MPV minivan platform.

Run all that information through the grinder, and we'd say the results are clear. Mazda now has two choices with well-defined missions.

MAZDA CX-5 WHEEL TIME

We received the Mazda CX-5 a couple of days before our road trip, and we made a few notes as we dashed around town the first day or two. We noted that the vehicle is pretty sizable. We found it easy to tune the radio and add preset stations. The hot months were just coming on, and climate control wasn't cooling very effectively at first.

Turn signal functions are simple, either on or off; hold for a lane change. After a lot of finicky, overly-tricked-out stalks, this was a touch of grace. The righthand stalk, however, almost completely blocks the start/stop button, a startling design failing. We do like the sturdy, machined look and feel of the controls on both stalks—a tapered barrel with an offset stem.

Within the first five miles, we were noting the CX-5's normal dashboard real estate, more conventional shape, and good size and fit—and liking this. While other small SUVs are morphing into carlike little crossovers, we sus-



pect Mazda is nailing a niche that still exists. Around town, we noted that while crossing storm troughs, the CX-5 was solid and smooth as silk. Maneuvering around a vacant parking lot, handling was level and smooth.

We noted one particular instance of pulling out onto the boulevard, and finding ourselves shy of power, with a faltering of the engine before engaging. Others have noted the automatic transmission as a weak point. Ultimately, we only had that one instance around town.

As we headed north on our road trip, though, having made the climb up through Black Canyon on I-17, with a lot of steep stop-and-go for the requisite holiday traffic wreck, once we were up on the high plains, we did note the automatic transmission was underperforming. We had trouble getting enough power out of it a few times, especially when resuming speed during that stop-and-go. Once at the top, trying to open it up and move into more open lanes, the vehicle was still hunting and shifting at times, though on flat terrain at that point.

By the numbers, the brakes are sufficient, if not noteworthy: diagonal hydraulic discs, single-piston caliper front and rear, both just under 12 inches, with the fronts smaller than the rears, but ventilated. In actual use, the logbook noted that you tend to apply them with extra firmness, because you feel you need to, though they do stop abruptly. The turning circle is fairly good: at 36.7

feet curb-to-curb, it's only a foot and a half more than a MINI Cooper; then again, only a few inches less than a Grand Cherokee.

Tunes are generally a must on a road trip, but on the next-to-last day, driving south out of Moab, for a drive team who traditionally can't drive a mile without the tunes blasting, we were leaving this turned off as often as not—the audio quality wasn't great, for a Bose unit. Then again, we only had satellite as a source—200 stations and nothing on, and that's not the car's fault.

We tried to make friends with the transmission. The manumatic does help a little when you need to achieve a power band in the mountains and at altitude, but the revs go pretty high pretty quickly, it doesn't have a lot of gears, nor prodigious torque. But it will get the job done.

All in all, we had a great trip in the new Mazda CX-5 and would happily do it again. It was handy and convenient, well outfitted and feature-laden, attractive and very well priced for all it delivers. We'd like a little more power, or maybe just a remapped transmission. And we'd like that manual AWD. Early in our week, we had enthusiastically told our logbook, "if you're at all interested in this, just go buy one"—we were sold. By the end, we wouldn't buy it sight unseen, but think it's a very strong contender in a high demand category that now has fewer options. Definitely check this one out. ■

NORTHWEST COLORADO

I-70 in Colorado brings you through Grand Junction, past the Book Cliffs. We headed north at Rifle to US 40 in Craig, then east on 40 to Steamboat Springs (the Yampa Valley and Fish Creek Falls are shown below). For the return, we drove south on Colorado 131 to I-70 between Vail and Eagle, then west through Glenwood Canyon, back to Utah.

