

ENCORE ENCORE BY JOE SAGE

In 2007, GM introduced a whimsical trio of concepts at the New York Auto Show—Chevy Trax, Beat and Groove—micro-vehicles for the future that erased the stigma of small meaning econocar. After Chevy Trax first came to other global markets in 2013, GM surprised the US with a Buick version for 2014. An unlikely combination—a premium subcompact AWD utility—it turned out to prove the whole idea’s point in spades, going on to become Buick’s best-selling vehicle in North America.

The little subcompact has grown big coattails, big enough to spawn a larger sibling for 2020—the Encore GX, with five more cubic feet of cargo volume than Encore. Encore GX benefits from coming later—though more conventional, the cuteness of the original little Encore shines through as part of a pair. (Think back to about junior high, and you can surely come up with some older-younger sibling pairings that benefited the same way.)

Encore GX joins Encore, Envision and Enclave in the lineup—one more “En-” name, but while sharing the Encore name (plus GX) on a different vehicle may seem unusual, it’s useful, perhaps vital, to the new compact’s personality and positioning.

Encore GX is not just an upsized Encore. The little one has a bigger engine with less power and lower fuel mileage (but a bigger tank). Encore GX offers two engines, and though numbers aren’t mas-

sively different, \$395 for our bigger three-banger seems worth it. Suspension and brakes have different specs. The little Encore doesn’t tow, while Encore GX tows 1000 pounds. Cabin dimensions other than cargo are almost the same. Length and wheelbase are even pretty close. Encore GX is more than an inch wider and a fraction of an inch less tall, small dimensions that make a big difference in overall stance compared with the little Encore. Turning circles are nearly identical.

The cabin is quite spacious—over our shoulder, it feels like the interior volume of a luxury full-size sedan if you were to just forgo the long hood and trunk. Ours was fully tech- and convenience-featured via a few very moderately priced options.

We had a blast driving the Encore GX, easily passing innocently oblivious performance cars on freeway ramps. An uncommon rear suspension may be a factor in firm ride; we even induced occasional skittering in hard cornering (some serious cone time could be enlightening). There’s often a lag when the light turns green, after which it’s strong and uniform. A little pedal technique can beat that. Overall, it was potent, smooth sailing, and a very enjoyable week behind the wheel.

Particularly due to sharing a name, it’ll go head to head with Buick’s biggest seller, the tiny Encore. Whether Encore GX splits buyers away from the

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY PLANT ...Bupyeong-gu, Incheon, South Korea	
ENGINE/TRANSMISSION MFG	Mexico
ENGINE (standard)	1.2L Ecotec DOHC DI 3-cyl
HP/TORQUE	137 hp / 162 lb-ft
(optional on ours)	1.3L Ecotec DOHC DI 3-cyl
HP/TORQUE	155 hp / 174 lb-ft
DRIVETRAIN	FWD (AWD avail w 1.3L)
TRANSMISSION	CVT
SUSPENSION ... F: MacPherson strut; R: compound crank	
STEERING	rack & pinion elec
WHEELS / TIRES	18.75 alum / 225/55R18 AS
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	171.4 / 102.2
WIDTH / HEIGHT	71.4 / 64.1 in
TRACK (F/R)	61.1 / 61.9 in
TURNING CIRCLE	36.8 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	(w/o moonroof) 39.7 / 38.1 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	40.9 / 36.0 in
CARGO CAPACITY	23.5 / 50.2 cu.ft
TOW CAPACITY	(w/ accessory hitch) 1000 lb
WEIGHT	(Essence, 1.3L, FWD) 3094 lb
FUEL CAPACITY	13.2 gal
MPG	30/32/31 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	\$28,500
ECOTEC 1.3L TURBO	395
WHITE FROST TRICOAT	1095
ADV TECH PKG: HD surround cams, heads-up display, adaptive cruise, Buick infotainment/nav	1790
CONVENIENCE PKG: auto park assist w brake, rear camera mirror w wash, rain sense wipers, wireless charge	770
LIFTGATE: HANDS-FREE POWER	520
DESTINATION CHARGE	995
TOTAL	\$34,065

hot-selling Encore or multiplies interest across both will be interesting to follow. Each has plenty of positive glow to add to the other. In any scenario, both should do very well. ■

