

Manufacturers with two brand lines (Japan has multiple examples) are readily able to distinguish between their mainstream brand and an upper tier often termed premium-luxury, with the two terms used interchangeably, or blended.

It's much clearer for a company with three brand lines, splitting out luxury and premium (top and near-top). But the products have to back this up.

GM used to be far more complex—Cadillac as the top ticket, Chevrolet as mainstream, but in between, they've had to position Buick, Pontiac and Oldsmobile; Saturn and Geo; and original Hummer, along with easily distinguished GMC. Many simply fell into "if you know, you know" spots.

Since they thinned out the stables, some 15 to 20 or more years ago, Buick has had the middle

level to itself, for a more easily prescribed identity as GM's premium brand, between Chevy and Cadillac. And in their current generation of vehicles, it is clear that they have filled their promise.

What may be even more impressive is that they are able to do so at the less impressive end, as it were. Driven here is the premium brand—Buick—but in its entry level model—Envista—but in its top trim—Avenir. The entire Buick Envista lineup starts below \$25k and caps out below \$30k.

The short version is that Envista replaces the tiny Buick Encore in the lineup, while the next-up Encore GX remains. A puzzle comes from Envista's specs and price being so close to the Encore GX.

They are distinguished largely by body form—the Envista a lower coupelike crossover, Encore GX a taller more traditional shape. (Encore GX also has two engine options and two drivetrain options, though while one matches Envista's power and

FWD, it has a different transmission—see chart.)

As for form, Envista's roofline easily blends into a row of sedans, while it does have a liftback, like any crossover. You could consider it sort of a four-door fastback liftback, categories aside.

Most likely, it's the result of global shifts—the tiny Encore was Opel-based, but GM spun off that ownership. The new Envista has a percentage of Chinese blood, where GM has shifted some sourcing and inspiration. It was able to fit the slot.

The newest generation of Buick styling is striking overall—clean, premium and immediately recognizable, a plus as brand presence quickly grows.

Beyond its looks, we were in for a big surprise. We had seen the specs—three cylinders? 137 hp? super simple suspension and brakes? It sounded like an econocar flashback. But from a brand so successfully tackling the premium level?

But then we drove it, and wow! In a ranch cor-

ral, some horses are stronger than others, though that's not how machine horses are measured. But it is as though the horses in this Buick were well-bred and well chosen. (And its three cylinders are, by the way, turbocharged.)

From our very first run—a fairly long and complex one involving local streets, freeways, hills, rain troughs, the works—we noted the Envista is lively, responsive, quick and accurate. It nailed everything. Our expectations based on stated power simply baselined the impressive actual reality.

The transmission difference from same-power-train Encore GX's CVT might be invisible to many, but this six-speed absolutely optimizes how those 137 horses hit the road. Although we would gravitate to AWD when available, we used the Envista basically just in town and on the freeways—not in snow or off-road—though during extremely in-

tense, record-breaking, newsmaking rains. And we never even thought about the lack of AWD.

Instruments include a winning combination of artful digital expressions of analog styles, notably a contextual sweeping speedometer.

Buick has been launching some impressive vehicles, putting premium foreign brands on notice. And most likely with friendlier domestic parts and service costs. Ours being the top-trim Avenir underscores the opportunity that is afoot here, from base trim to top. The whole lineup is clearly something to look at. We were repeatedly stunned by how much more powerful the Envista felt than its numbers would have suggested. So, while apples and oranges are confoundingly close between this and Encore GX, it may all come down to style and form. And you can't lose—every version is a premium vehicle in an entry-level price range. ■

COMPARE:	(discontinued) Encore	Envista	Encore GX
HP/torque	138/148	137/162	137/162 or 155/174
Drivetrain	FWD/AWD	FWD only	FWD/AWD
Transmission	6-auto	6-auto	CVT / 6-auto
Length / wheelbase	168.4 / 100.6	182.6 / 106.3	171.1 / 102.2
Cargo	18.8 / 48.4	20.7 / 42.0	23.5 / 50.2
Starting price	(2022) \$24,600	\$26,200	\$26,595
	(2026 approx) \$27,300		

# MORE THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS

And a solid formula to begin with

BY JOE SAGE



## SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Bupyeong Gu, S Korea
ENGINE/TRANS BUILD	Mexico / Mexico
PARTS CONTENT	S Korea 53% / China 20% / US/Canada 3%
ENGINE	1.2L 3-cyl turbo, DOHC, dir inj, alum die cast block, alum SPM cast head
HP/TORQUE	137 hp / 162 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	na
TRANSMISSION	6-speed auto
DRIVETRAIN	(only) FWD
SUSPENSION	F: MacPherson strut; R: compound crank, Watts link
STEERING	elec pwr assist rack & pinion
BRAKES	16-inch
WHEELS	19x8.0 pearl nickel aluminum
TIRES	245/45R19 all-season
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	182.6 / 106.3 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	na
TURNING CIRCLE	(19-in wheels) 38.4 ft
HEADROOM (FR)	w/o moonroof* 39.4 / 37.3 in
	*four has moonroof but no spec provided
LEGROOM (FR)	41.9 / 38.7 in
CARGO CAPACITY	20.7 / 42.0 cu.ft
WEIGHT	3115 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	reg unl / 13.2 gal
MPG	28/32/30 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	\$29,400
PAINT: White Frost Tricoat	600
MOONROOF: power tilt-slide	795
AVENIR ADVANCED SAFETY PKG: rear cross traffic alert, heated/pwr/auto-dim side mirrors, lane change w side blind zone alert, adaptive cruise, intermittent wipers	795
DESTINATION CHARGE	1395
TOTAL	\$32,985

## 2026 BUICK ENVISTA LINEUP

	FWD only
Preferred	\$24,600
Sport Touring	26,100
Avenir	▼ 29,400

Note: per manufacturer press materials.

## 2026 BUICK CROSSOVER LINEUP

	FWD	AWD
Envista	▼ \$26,200	---
Encore GX	26,595	28,595
Envision	---	41,000
Enclave	46,400	48,400

Note: per consumer website.