Buick LaCrosse is a revelation

As tested, the 2010 Buick LaCrosse CSX with a full slate of technologies and equipment, set against a Cocoa Cashmere perforated leather interior with smoked chrome accents and ice blue ambient lighting.

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"The new LaCrosse is intended to represent modern elegance," Ed Welburn, vice president of GM Global Design, said at the launch of the vehicle. "Throughout the design, you experience a balance of contrasts. Both the interior and exterior have been designed with harmony in mind. The exterior balances taut, sculpted lines with sensuous accents and surfaces."

So, step away from the familiar badges and cues from the past, walk around the car and study its very contemporary profile. Buick designers cite shaping influences that range from traditional Chinese ingot design to the flowing lines of ribbon dancing, even though there's an evolution of the Buick "sweep spear" line that curves down the concave and athletic sides before breaking up and around the rear wheel.

The design is less Buick, more ambiguous somehow. But in a good way!

"What is that, a Lexus? An Acura?" were the questions posed by a younger, less brand-savvy generation.

Slip inside the car and the revelation continues.

This is one of the handsomest interiors I've ever been in. It reflects new levels of quality and elegant design, especially at night. A cool blue light strip, also seen in Cadillac vehicles, divides the width of the dash while ambient pools of light bathe the console, door releases and door handles, complimenting the myriad of illuminated buttons, knobs and controls.

On my fully-loaded tester, that included everything from audio, HVAC and NAV buttons to a switch for steering wheel heating, one of those decadent tools of the idle rich that is unnecessary, silly and, oh man, so easy to get used to on frosty mornings.

The layout is tastefully done and there are few complaints to be found in the roomy and comfortable cabin with a large luggage-swallowing truck space behind, although the curving dash of the wraparound cockpit will bash the occasional errant knee of an exiting driver.

The 2010 LaCrosse is offered in three models— CX, CXL and CXS.

The CX model currently starts at $32,795 with a 255 hp 3.0-litre direct injection V-6, although a new, more economical version harnessing the widely-used 182 hp 2.4-litre Ecotec four-cylinder engine should be available any day now.

One step up to the CXL trim level harnesses the same 3.0-litre V6 but adds to an already respectable list of standard equipment with dual-zone automatic climate control, fog lamps, outside rearview mirror with LED turn indicators and puddle lamps, and 17-inch alloy wheels.

An advanced all-wheel-drive system with electronic limited-slip differential (eLSD) is also available at this level.

At the very top of the lineup, as tested here, the 2010 Buick LaCrosse CXS starts with a more powerful 3.6-litre direct injection V6 generating 280 hp at 6300 rpm and 259 lb/ft of torque at 4800 rpm. Although the engine note is oddly mechanical in nature, it pulls like a train, with the performance aspect of this very sporty sedan aided by a real-time active-dampening suspension and a full suite of dynamic traction control technologies.

Fuel economy is rated at 12.2/7.3/10.0L/100km (city/hwy/comb) although my less scientific but more real-world combined results were 12.9L/100km.

I'm pretty sure that anyone test driving the new 2010 LaCrosse, regardless of generation, would probably climb out of the driver's seat with the same comment.

"Nice Buick."

BUICK LACROSSE CSX 2010 AT A GLANCE

BODY STYLE: Mid-size, four-door sedan.
DRIVE METHOD: front-engine, front-wheel-drive.
ENGINE: 3.6-litre VVT V6 (280 hp, 259 lb/ft)
FUEL ECONOMY: CXS FWD as tested, 12.2/7.3/10.0L/100km (city/hwy/comb)
PRICE: $47,220 as tested
WEBSITE: gm.ca

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Civic
LEASE FOR /APR $148# @ 2.9%£ PER MONTH FOR 48 MONTHS WITH $3,868 DOWN ON APPROVED CREDIT
$17,420‡ MSRP For Civic DX Sedan Includes Freight & Fees
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Civic DX Sedan model FA1E2AEX
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Consumer Guide – Sept. 2009

PROVEN: Civic is Canada's best-selling car for the 12th straight year.*

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Car and Driver/10Best – Jan. 2010

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$39,515 MSRP For Odyssey NHL® SE Includes Freight & Fees
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Odyssey NHL® SE model RL3H5AE
"Top 10 Family Cars"
Kelley Blue Book – Feb. 2010

PROVEN: Odyssey is a true friend of the family.

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$28,015 MSRP For CR-V LX 2WD Includes Freight & Fees
0.9%† PURCHASE FINANCING FOR UP TO 48 MONTHS
CR-V LX 2WD model RE3H3AEY
"Residual Value Award - Best Compact Utility"
Automotive Lease Guide – Feb. 2010

PROVEN: CR-V value starts high, and stays there.¥

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#Limited time lease offers based on new 2010 Honda models. Lease examples based on new 2010 Civic DX Sedan, model FA1E2AEX / 2010 Accord LX Sedan, model CP2E3AE / 2010 Odyssey NHL SE, model RL3H5AE / 2010 CR-V LX 2WD, model RE3H3AEY available through Honda Financial Services on approved credit. £2.9% / 2.9% / 1.9% / 3.9% lease APR for 48 / 48 / 48 / 48 months. Monthly payment (includes freight and PDI, environmental fees and OMVIC fee) is $148 / $248 / $388 / $268. Down payment or equivalent trade of $3,868.30 / $5,506.71 / $7,205.74 / $5,734.36, first monthly payment and $0 / $0 / $0 / $0 security deposit due at lease inception. Total lease obligation is $12,433.70 / $19,809.10 / $29,322.61 / $21,051.15. Taxes, license, insurance and lien registration (if applicable) are extra. 96,000 kilometre allowance; charge of $0.12/km for excess kilometres. Retailer may lease for less. Retailer order / trade may be necessary. †Limited time financing offers based on new 2010 Honda models. Available for up to 60 months on 2010 select Civic and Accord models; available for up to 48 months on all 2010 CR-V models; available for up to 36 months on 2010 Odyssey models. Finance example based on new 2010 Civic DX Sedan, model FA1E2AEX available through Honda Financial Services on approved credit. ‡MSRP is $17,420 (includes $1,430 freight and PDI, and environmental and OMVIC fees) financed at 0.9% APR equals $297.02 per month for 60 months. Cost of borrowing is $401.43 for a total obligation of $17,821.43. Taxes, license, insurance and lien registration (if applicable) are extra. Retailer may sell for less. Retailer order / trade may be necessary. #/£/†Offers valid from May 2nd, 2010 through May 31st, 2010 at participating Honda retailers. Offers valid only for Ontario residents at Ontario Honda Dealers. Offers subject to change or cancellation without notice. See your Honda retailer for full details. *As reported by Canadian manufacturers for calendar year 2009. ∑As reported by Car and Driver, Jan. 2010. ¥As reported by Automotive Lease Guide, Feb. 2010. NHL and the NHL Shield are registered trademarks of the National Hockey League. ©NHL 2010. All rights reserved.