

GM back in the game with trio of new models

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Our Cruze tester, which I was able to take on a short 15-minute drive through the streets of Brampton, was the LT model, which will be the mid-range trim. Base will be the LS, while an LTZ will top the line.

Two engines are available: a base 1.8-litre four-cylinder, making 136 hp and 123 lb/ft of torque and an Ecotec 1.4-litre turbocharged four-cylinder engine, putting out 138 hp and 148 lb/ft of torque.

We drove the Ecotec turbo mated with a six-speed automatic transmission. While I didn't get a chance to take it on the highway, around the city it performed well.

I was particularly impressed with the styling, which is definitely a step up from the bland-looking Cobalt it will replace. The Cruze has a coupe-like look from the side and a nicely designed front end with the signature Chevrolet bow-tie logo front and centre on the grille. The rear has a more generic look, in my opinion.

Our LT-trim model came with comfortable cloth seats that provided generous legroom, even for a six-footer like myself. There was also adequate room for up to three passengers in the rear of the four-door sedan if the front seats were not at their rear-most positions.

Meanwhile, the Regal name makes its return to the Buick lineup after an absence of a few years. This time around, though, it's a European-inspired mid-size sports sedan with front-wheel drive that will be slotted just below the LaCrosse sedan.

The 2011 Regal, based on an Opel model sold in Europe, will be brought in from Germany with production beginning on the 2012's in Oshawa early next year. Our tester featured a 2.4-litre Ecotec DOHC direct injection inline four-cylinder, mated with a six-speed automatic.

This engine is also found in the popular Equinox crossover, built in Ingersoll, Ont. A turbocharged engine will also be offered in the Regal, we were told. The Ecotec four, like the one on the Cruze, runs on regular unleaded fuel.

In CXL trim, I expect the 2011 model like the one we drove will likely price out in the mid-to-high \$30s, although exact prices won't be announced until closer to launch date.

Expected to compete against cars like the Mazda6, Volkswagen Passat, Volvo S60 and Acura TSX, the Regal CXL sits on 18-inch aluminum alloy wheels. Like the Cruze, this is another 'world car' that is already doing well in overseas markets such as China.

This ain't your father's Buick, and GM doesn't want it to be. As executives emphasized at the launch of the LaCrosse last year, a main focus of Buick these days is to get younger buyers into the brand as Cadillac has been able to do. The Regal seems a likely model to do just that with its sportier look and feel compared with the LaCrosse.

The CXL we drove was well equipped with a power sunroof, eight-way power seats, rear parking assist, leather seats, heated up front, a 320-watt Harman Kardon premium audio system, dual zone climate control, OnStar, XM satellite radio and 40 GB hard drive with navigation system. Most or all of these features are part of a preferred equipment package.

Moving over to Cadillac, the 2011 CTS Coupe will enhance the CTS lineup, which already boasts the Sedan and Sport Wagon.

Starting at \$47,450, the coupe will be offered in both rear- and all-wheel drive.

It is the first true Cadillac coupe in a decade and comes with a 304 hp DOHC V6 engine, paired with either a six-speed manual or six-speed automatic transmission.

Shorter and lower in profile than the CTS Sedan, the handsome CTS Coupe will compete with sports coupes like the Infiniti G37 and the BMW 335i.

These days, automotive customers are very fickle lot. There's not a lot of brand loyalty and even when there is, it's a case of 'what have you done for me lately' as new models are needed all the time to catch the eye of the consumer.

So for 2011, GM will certainly be in the game with all the new hardware like the ones mentioned above joining their ranks.

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