

Chevrolet engineers and designers went to great lengths to create a feeling of quality inside the cabin of the new Cruze sedan. Although there are still some hard plastic pieces, the interior has a richer, more luxurious feel than most compact cars on the market.



Cruze strikes the right balance

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new Cruze, GM hopes to increase its market share against segment leaders like the Toyota Corolla, Mazda3, Honda Civic and the Hyundai Elantra.

I had an opportunity to drive both manual and automatic versions of the Cruze Eco during a recent outing with a small group of auto journalists.

During the leisurely six-hour event, we drove north from Toronto to the picturesque town of Port Perry and back with a lunch stop thrown in.

The morning drive was a mixture of urban and rural, both highway and secondary roads in a black granite metallic- coloured Cruze Eco with a six-speed automatic transmission (\$1,450).

Also included was a Connectivity Package (\$745) featuring Bluetooth, six-month OnStar subscription, USB port and steering wheel audio controls. A driver information centre (\$275) and premium paint (\$195) completed the option list, bringing the total to \$22,760.

The cabin is plain, yet well finished and what strikes you after a couple of hours driving, is how quiet it is. Not something you would expect in an economy car like this.

The ride is firm, yet not overly so and the electric steering performed well in city and highway situations.

In all, this was a very enjoyable car to drive and with the automatic transmission it has a Transport Canada fuel economy rating of 5.1L/100 km (55 mpg) on the highway.

On the way home, I got into a silver ice metallic Cruze Eco six-speed manual with similar options as the earlier car. It priced out at \$21,855.

Not many people will opt for the manual transmission, but if fuel economy is your number one priority, it's the way to go.

The Eco is the only Cruze model that offers a stick shift. The transmissions gearing is optimized for fuel economy with a "tall" sixth gear ratio for highway driving, resulting in lower revs.

It also means you may have to downshift to pass slower cars, but I spent most of the drive home on three and four-lane highways and didn't have to overtake any one in a hurry.

I found the clutch a bit touchy, but it might be because my own car is a manual with a slightly different clutch take-up.

GM Canada expects 10 per cent of Cruze sales to be the Eco model with the LT Turbo being the model leader. However, after driving the Eco, it would be my choice. There is just the right balance of economy and performance.

If the bulk of your driving is stop-and-go city driving, a hybrid may be your best bet for great fuel economy.

But if highway "Cruzing" makes up a good part of your commute, the Eco may just fit the bill for you.

Chevrolet Cruze Eco 2011 at a glance

BODY STYLE: four door compact sedan.

DRIVE METHOD: front-engine, front-wheel drive.

ENGINE: 1.4-litre DOHC inline turbocharged four-cylinder engine (138 hp, 148 lb/ft of torque).

FUEL ECONOMY: 1.4-litre Eco manual: 4.6L/100 km (61 mpg) highway, 7.2L/100 km (39 mpg) city; automatic 5.1L/100 km (55 mpg) highway, 7.8L/100 km (36 mpg) city.

PRICE: \$19,495 manual, \$20,945 automatic.

WEB SITE: www.gm.ca/Chevrolet

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