Orlando a roomy people-mover

Continued from pg. 1

Standard equipment on all models includes power windows, locks, remote keyless entry, StabiliTrak electronic stability control system and six air bags.

The interior features a twin cockpit look inspired by the Corvette and a centre console with ambient blue lighting.

One of the more interesting aspects is a storage cubbie hidden behind the front fascia of the radio and within easy reach of the both the driver and passenger. It is large enough for items such as an MP3 player, sunglasses and wallets.

On some models, there will be a USB port, perfect for using or re-charging an MP3 player or iPod when on the move.

Prices range from $19,995 for the base LS model to $29,735 for the top-line LTZ model.

However, 85 per cent of sales are expected from the mid-level 1LT and 2LT models, priced at $22,955 and $24,895.

Pricing will be key in this growing segment as many customers shop largely on vehicle cost and economy of operation.

Tested here is the LTZ with $2,305 worth of options and a $1,495 shipping fee for a total of $33,535.

Already on sale in 17 other countries, you can tell the Orlando was aimed at Euroasian markets by its stance. Based on the Cruse compact car platform, it is not as wide as the Mazda5 but taller, something you really see when following from behind.

Fitting seven is possible— but just. The brochure shows three kids in soccer uniforms in the second row seat but when it comes to adults, two is more like it. As for the third row, it is also meant for primarily small fry and I suspect in most cases it will be folded flat.

With the second row fold-forward seats, access to the rear is easier than you would think.

The rear cargo area is reached through a very large liftgate.

When I drove a pre-production version briefly last September I remember the ride being vary choppy and told the GM folks so.

For this test, the LTS I was issued was firstly very quiet on the road, noticeably quieter than the Mazda5 I own.

Ride was what you want in this kind of vehicle, being more skewed toward cruising than sporting but with the feeling coming through the steering wheel of a taut suspension.

The Orlando with its six-speed automatic transmission was quicker off the line and reached highway speeds quicker than my four-speed automatic Mazda5 with both having about the same power, displacement and weight.

The standard analog primary gauge cluster is easy to read with large numerals with a handy centre digital driver information display. I have come to depend on these driver info systems and would now not order a vehicle without one.

While GM is officially out of the minivan market, CUVs like the Chevrolet Traverse or Equinox just don't reach all Canadians and the reason why the Journey, in particular, is so popular in this country.

With the 2012 Orlando, Chevrolet has covered that base with a roomy, fuel-efficient vehicle that really does fit the people mover bill.

The centre audio face flips up to reveal a small, hidden storage space.

BODY STYLE: five-door, seven-passenger multi-purpose vehicle.

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

ENGINE: 2.4-litre direct injection inline four-cylinder engine (174 hp, 171 lb/ft of torque).

FUEL ECONOMY: six-speed manual 10.1L/100 km (28 mpg) city 6.7L/100 km (42 mpg) highway; six-speed automatic, 10.6L/100 km (27 mpg) and 6.9L/100 km (41 mpg) highway.

PRICE: LS $19,995, 1LT $22,995; 2LT $24,895; LTZ $29,735; LTZ as tested $33,353 incl. $1,495 shipping fee

WEB SITE: www.gm.ca

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Optima SX Turbo shown

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Sorento SX shown

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MOTORING 2012

Rio5 EX Luxury shown

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