

WHEELS

Cruze Eco fuel economy rivals that of a hybrid



Shutters to close the grille contribute to increased fuel economy.

By TOM STRONGMAN

The Chevrolet Cruze is typical of the new generation of small cars. Clean styling and a well-appointed cabin make the car pleasant to live with, while a small turbocharged engine delivers highway fuel economy that is similar to that of a hybrid.

Compact cars are surging in popularity, and rising fuel prices are likely to make them even more appealing. The Cruze is quiet, smooth and responsive, and that means that even when you tire of watching the fuel read-

out you'll still be pleased with the car.

The Cruze is available in five trim levels. Base prices start at \$16,995 and range to \$22,695. The test car was the high-mileage Eco version, and its base price was \$18,995.

The base Cruze comes with a 138-horsepower, 1.8-liter four-cylinder engine, while the other models are powered by a turbocharged, 1.4-liter engine that also delivers 138 horsepower. The smaller engine, which has variable valve timing, has more torque at lower rpm. The turbocharger kicks in extra power at low rpm so smoothly that it is hard to detect. The Eco delivers

up to 42 mpg on the highway with a manual transmission. That mileage comes close to that of a hybrid without the extra cost and complexity.

The test car was equipped with the six-speed automatic transmission, and its fuel economy was rated at 26 mpg in the city and 37 on the highway. In mostly city driving in very cold weather, I averaged 26.5 mpg.

The high-mileage Eco model gets numerous changes from the standard car. Among them: lightweight wheels, low-resistance tires, a deeper front fascia, trunk lid spoiler, revised gear ratios, lowered suspension, no spare tire and an electronically controlled front shutter that closes off a portion of the grille at higher speeds to reduce drag.

One drawback to the Eco with a manual transmission is a 12.6-gallon fuel tank, compared to that of the 15.6-gallon tanks of all other Cruze models.

Inside the Cruze, it's clear that this is not a bare-bones compact car. The nicely designed cabin was comfortable and attractive. Brushed silver accents highlight the center stack that has soft-touch buttons.

The cloth seats had contrasting color inserts that were repeated on the door panels and the instrument panel. I especially liked the way the cloth panels were carried onto the instrument panel because it made the interior feel softer.

The test car had optional steering wheel



controls for cruise control, Bluetooth telephone and audio.

The Cruze has considerable standard equipment, such as 10 air bags, including front knee bags that are a first for the segment. Driver aids include vehicle stability control, traction control and anti-lock brakes. The top-line LTZ gets a six-way power driver's seat, Bluetooth phone connectivity, USB audio interface, leather seats, cruise control, 18-inch wheels and ultrasonic rear parking assist.

A power sunroof, navigation system and premium audio system are also available.

Price

The base price of the test car was \$18,995. Options included cruise control, Bluetooth phone connectivity, USB audio interface, steering-wheel controls, automatic transmission, black metallic paint and a compact spare tire. The sticker price was \$20,640.

Warranty

Three years or 36,000 miles, with a five-year, 100,000-mile powertrain warranty.

The Specs 2011 Chevrolet Cruze Eco

Engine: 1.4-liter, 138-hp 4-cyl.

Transmission: Six-speed automatic front-wheel drive

Wheelbase: 105.7 inches

Curb weight: 3,009 lbs.

Base price: \$18,995

As driven: \$20,640

MPG rating: 26 city, 37 highway

Restored 1955 Studebaker Commander is a picture of graceful lines

By TOM STRONGMAN

Jerry E. Ward has been fond of cars since he was a teenager, and his escapades with cars are many. He owned a 1951 Ford convertible when he was in the Navy. Using the hobby shop on the base in California, he dropped in an Oldsmobile V-8.

It broke a piston on the way back to Kansas City and he spent the night replacing the broken part in a roadside service station.

Ward, 70, of North Kansas City, Mo., has owned numerous cars since those early days.

He loves to track down and restore interesting cars, and he usually does one every couple of years. His latest is an immaculate 1955 Studebaker Commander Starliner.

The sleek and aerodynamic 1953 to 1955 Starliner hardtop is one of the most notable Studebakers. Its design is credited to Raymond Loewy, but the car was actually designed by Robert Bourke, a member of Loewy's studio. Loewy is also known for designing the Shell logo, the Greyhound bus, the Lucky Strike cigarette package and the Studebaker Avanti.

Ward found his car two years ago in North Carolina. It was purchased new in New Milford, Conn., for \$2,852. Options included an automatic transmission, air conditioning, wheel discs, push-button radio, white sidewall tires, electric clock and a special four-barrel carburetor. The color was Windsor Blue and Shasta White.

When Ward got the car to his shop and

began dismantling it, he discovered that it was completely rust free and in excellent shape. The 259-cubic-inch V-8 had a mere 63,000 miles and needed no repair. He did rebuild the carburetor and added new gaskets.

Ward replaced wear items such as hoses, bushings and brakes, and had various grille and bumper pieces rechromed. A local bodyshop applied new paint. Ward had a leather interior installed that is much nicer than stock.

The result is an amazing window into 1955 because the car looks as if it just came from the assembly line.



The sleek nose and low profile made the Loewy-designed Studebaker one of the handsomest cars of its time.

Now that this car is complete, what is Ward's next project? He doesn't know, but for now, he's simply enjoying this car and all of its unique style.

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