

Shifting Gears

[Rolling Through a Superstorm In a Mazda CX-5](#)

Posted: 03 Dec 2012 11:09 PM PST



By Roger Witherspoon

The full moon over the Hudson River was just a faint, fuzzy ball behind the swirling band of clouds marking the passage of Super Hurricane Sandy.

It was a strange sort of hurricane, in that there was virtually no rain. But the gravitational pull of that obscure moon and the winds that roared down from the Hudson Highlands at speeds approaching 100 miles per hour were pushing the river's salt-water tides to record heights. That made it a perfect time to cruise along the river and watch the effects of a superstorm in action.

It was less than two miles from my home to the river's edge. But it took time to navigate the normally short, direct route over or around the downed trees, the occasional, bouncing, live wire, broken branches and other blowing debris that littered the streets and highways of Westchester County, New York City's northern suburb. Periodically, I opened the window of the Mazda CX-5 to listen to the raging wind or the cracking sound of trees coming down, turning down streets that seemed particularly noisy.

At the entrance to a short causeway over a Hudson River inlet, a utility worker emerged

from a Ford F-150 truck dripping muddy river water off its hood and put flares across the road, blocking it off. The Bear Mountain Extension provided the shortest route to Camp Smith, an Army base, and the winding road up to the Bear Mountain Bridge, about 10 miles south of West Point. The lowest point of the road, he said, was under about four feet of water in a 20-yard stretch, and the river was still rising.

That did not deter the drivers of two, huge, military trucks headed for CampSmith. The trucks were armored on the sides and bottoms better deflect the blast from roadside mines. Slowly, the convoy drove in to the fast moving water – and got stuck at the deepest part.

The utility worker called for police support and raced down the roadway. In minutes, dozens of police cars drove onto the causeway, the officers piling out in an effort to help the trapped soldiers.

I left the Mazda at the side of the four-lane roadway and played traffic cop until a real officer came and took over. Then I slid back behind the leather steering wheel, hit the Bluetooth button to connect the audio from my Smartphone to the 225-watt, nine-speaker, Bose sound system, and continued rolling through Superstorm Sandy as the Temptations belted their '60s classic *“Runaway Child.”*



The Mazda CX-5 is a mid-sized, five-passenger SUV that is not particularly intended for off-road driving and certainly wasn't designed for moonlight swims in swollen rivers. But its 19-inch aluminum wheels, and all-wheel drive makes it a pretty secure mode of transport even in abnormal conditions. It is not a Jeep or FJ Cruiser, and downed tree trunks would have brought the CX-5 to a lurching halt. But rolling over small branches and through hubcap-deep puddles and fast-moving streams was not a problem for a well-balanced SUV with traction and stability controls.

While all Mazda's are marketed under the "zoom-zoom" logo, that speedy phrase really applies only to their sports cars. The CX-5 has a small, 2-liter, four-cylinder power plant cranking out just 155 horsepower – which is pretty anemic when you are taking off. The CX-5 is rated with a towing power of 2,000 pounds, though that may well be a strain for the

little engine that could. As it is, the CX-5 has little power for passing, unless you shift into the electronic manual mode and downshift for extra torque. It is an easy maneuver, and in manual mode, the Mazda is extremely responsive and the pickup is instantaneous.

It has the sleek silhouette common among crossovers. And along its sides are soft, subtle lines which help deflect airflow as the car moves faster. This both reduces drag and lessens the wind noise.

In their design studios, the Zoom-Zoom guys gave some thought to the quality of the interior of the CX-5. It is a quiet car, regardless of whether the wind is moving at 100 miles an hour or the speedometer is approaching that mark. There is little exterior noise to intrude on the



music or conversation.

All the surfaces have thickly padded real or simulated leather, accented with chrome and brushed aluminum. It is a five-seater, with the second row designed to actually hold three, average-sized adults. Each of these seats can fold flat to add to the already ample cargo area. The front seats can be heated, though only the driver's seat is power adjustable.

If there is a drawback, it's that the navigation system is mediocre. Mazda uses the Tom-Tom system, which was designed originally for hand held devices and, in that mode, competed with the more popular Garmin. Tom-Tom is more difficult to use than either Garmin or the standard navigation systems designed for cars. Its personal settings are hard to find, and it is not intuitive to operate. The 5.8-inch screen, on the other hand, is small and individual street names are harder to see. However, the screen is crystal clear, and the backup camera is lighted so you can actually use it at night.

The crossover SUV market is a crowded one and Mazda will have a tough fight to carve its own niche from the likes of a Nissan Murano or Ford Escape. But the Mazda CX-5 offers a lot for \$30,000 and is sure to be competitive. It's a comfortable way to roll, whether running on the open, sunny road, or running away from a runaway river.



2013 Mazda CX-5

MSRP:	\$30,415	
EPA Mileage:	25 MPG City	31 MPG Highway
As Tested Mileage:	20.9 MPG Mixed	
Towing Capacity:	2,000 Pounds	

Performance / Safety:

2.0-Liter, 4-cylinder, DOHC, aluminum engine producing 155 horsepower and 150 pound-feet of torque; all-wheel drive; 6-speed automatic transmission; independent MacPherson strut front suspension; independent, multi-link rear suspension; front & rear stabilizing bars; 4-wheel disc brakes; 19-inch alloy wheels; power assisted steering; anti-lock brakes; blind spot monitoring; Halogen headlights; fog lamps; stability and traction controls; hill launch assist; dual front airbags; front and rear, side impact airbags.

Interior / Comfort;

AM/FM/Sirius Satellite and HD radio; 9-speaker, 225-watt, Bose surround sound system; iPod, MP3, and USB ports; Bluetooth; navigation system with 5.8-inch touch-screen; backup camera; tilt & telescoping, leather wrapped steering wheel with fingertip audio and cruise controls; powered sunroof; fold-flat rear seats in 40/ 20/40 split; leather seats; heated front seats; powered driver's seat – manually operated passenger seat.