

Detroit Auto Scene ROAD REPORT

2012 Buick Enclave Is Very Smooth Ride

BY GERALD SCOTT
NEWS DEPT.

Is it just me or is the collective Big Three vehicle fleet starting to shrink somewhat? Compared to the 1990s, that is to say for reference.

There are still large, dedicated vehicles to be had, like the Silverado pickup truck or Ford's F-350-sized vehicles. There are large versions of the Ram Truck, too.

But overall, the fleet seems to have shrunk somewhat from 10-15 years ago, when large SUVs and corresponding pickup trucks were seemingly everywhere.

For Buick, the downsizing seemed to start around 2001 when it introduced the Rendezvous, its first-midsize crossover SUV.

Well, a decade later, meet the 2012 Buick Enclave AWD-Premium Group, the brand's first such luxury crossover.

The super-big SUVs of the previous generation were notable, in part, because of how tall they were, how tall in the saddle, so to speak, that drivers and passengers rode above the traffic.

The Enclave brings that down a notch or two – not as compact as the aforementioned Rendezvous, but not as big as a Suburban either.

Actually, Enclave seems to want to hit the sweet-spot between large and small vehicle. It stands reasonably tall, slightly above traffic, but it still feels manageable and, unlike many of the 1990s SUVs, one doesn't feel like a 10-year-old trying to steer a firetruck.

Rather, the Enclave comes to you, the driver. Interesting that Buick markets it as a "crossover," something more svelte, than just an SUV, which is never said in the marketing materials.

Our test vehicle came with a 3.6L, SIDI V6 engine, one mated to a 6-speed automatic transmission.

This all translated into 22 mpg city and 16 mpg hwy, to go along with that command-

ing presence on the road.

You might wish for better mileage, but you have to remember the vehicle's curb weight is 4,985 lbs., so that explains the modest mileage figures. Although the Enclave's exterior design is elegant, well, that's still a lot of metal for the engine to push around the highway – almost 5,000 lbs., that is to say – so, with a V6 engine, you're never going to get much better than 22 mpg on the highway.

But anyway, it's still a fun, relatively seamless crossover to drive. The vehicle has that 6-speed automatic with manual shift control for those occasions when the driver wants to override the auto and actually drive the car.

Everything about the Enclave speaks of elegance.

It's competing against the likes of the Acura MDX, Lexus RX350 and Volvo XC90 and Buick brags about its "heritage forward" design package, one with exceptional attention to detail and quality.

The entire package seems in line with its premium attitude – there are six standard air bags, power liftgate, StabiliTrak electronic stability control system with rollover mitigation technology, traction control, XM Satellite Radio, On-Star with Turn-by-Turn, voice-guided navigation and more.

Buick builds in plenty of creature comforts into this crossover, we must say.

There is a driver confidence package that further includes a remote vehicle starter system, ultrasonic rear park assist, rear vision camera system and more.

Rear seat audio controls and dedicated headphone jacks means that the family in the back seat can tune the parents out and the entertainment in (assuming families want that these days).

Buick says that the Enclave is built with more legroom than the competition and there is segment-best room behind the third-row seat.

The vehicle is built at the



2012 Buick Enclave interior.

GM Delta Township factory near Lansing, a manufacturing facility known for its high quality scores.

So here you have the 2012 Buick Enclave, an earnest competitor in the luxury crossover segment and a true joy to drive. What you give up in mileage you seem to get back in driver and passenger comfort and amenities, and these days, that's a tradeoff many in this category are more than willing to make.

So here is Buick, whose heritage is linked to elegant passenger cars, now offering crossovers like the Enclave. Going back 10 years to the launch of the Rendezvous, Buick's first such modern SUV that was celebrated earlier, well, the Enclave is a worthy successor as Buick greatly widens the product lineup that today's consumer expects from it. Anyone who test-drives the Enclave should be impressed.

2012 BUICK ENCLAVE - AWD

- Base Price: \$45,080
- As Tested: \$50,985
- Engine: 3.6L SIDI V6
- Mileage: 16 city/22 hwy
- Length: 201.5 inches
- Wheelbase: 119 inches
- Curb wt.: 4,985 lbs.
- Assembly: GM Delta Twp.

OPTIONS:

- Audio system with Navigation/DVD system that includes touchscreen navigation, DVD rear seat entertainment, XM Nav and traffic (\$3,185); Power sunroof with 2nd row skylight (\$1,400); 20-inch aluminum wheels (\$300) and carbon black metallic paint (\$195).

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2012 VERANO

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\$21,984^{00*}

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\$22,570*

24 MO. LEASE
\$199*

2012 SONIC

Stock #420493

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Was \$26,390

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Was \$28,040

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