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KATHY’S CORNER

owner beware with repairs

WITH KATHY KELLY

BEING FEMALE AND seeing to your car maintenance is not always the easiest of tasks. Not everyone you deal with is as helpful or up front as they could – indeed, should – be and you can be made to feel vulnerable. Mostly this is a scare tactic so that you don’t question what you’re told. Here’s a personal experience I would like to share with you.

When I took my car in for its 8 Service at a well-known dealership, I was asked if there were any issues with the car that I wanted looked at.

I asked for the dash to be checked, as some of the lights had gone out, and also the CD player, as it wasn’t working. The dealership said they would have a look and get back to me. They came back with a quote to replace the dash and also advised that the CD player needed to be replaced. Both fixes were not cheap, so I decided that I would leave it to a later time.

When I went to pick the car up, the dealership charged me an additional few hundred dollars for having looked at the extra items. At no time previously did they mention there would be a charge for this. Needless to say, I was not at all happy with the service and, after speaking with the manager, I was able to get some reduction in the price, but it still wasn’t what I was expecting.

The moral to the story is: make sure you find out the total charge in writing before committing to any work on your car, and that any additional costs whatsoever are to be agreed upon first.

Also, don’t be afraid to get a second opinion – and quote.

You might not only get a cheaper price, but you can usually learn more about your car by asking questions from different repairers/mechanics. The more information you can get, the better informed a decision you can make.

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Starter: Honda Odyssey, Subaru Exiga

TESTERS: BARRY GREEN, JOHN EWING

Which makes the better ‘family taxi’, Honda Odyssey or Subaru Exiga?

STORY BARRY GREEN | PHOTOS JIM MCEWAN

ROAD TEST

movers not shakers

THE HONDA ODYSSEY has long been the benchmark for people movers, either winning its Australia’s Best Cars award category annually or finishing a top placegetter. Last year, the fourth generation arrived in a sportier looking package with improved safety, fuel economy and performance.

But now there’s a new kid (carrier) in town, the Subaru Exiga. One of the well-regarded Liberty line-up, Exiga has a similar size engine to Odyssey and can carry six (one less than the Honda product). We ran them head to head.

VALUE FOR MONEY

Our test vehicles were the better equipped (and dearer) variants of two equipment levels, the appropriately named Exiga Premium and the Odyssey Luxury.

Using the Liberty 2.5i Premium wagon as an indicator, Glass’s Guide suggests the newcomer’s residual price might be expected to hold up better by 4 percent at the end of the first year. But at the end of five years, residuals favour Odyssey by 4 percent.

In terms of projected running and repair costs over five years, there’s next to nothing in it. The Honda is slightly cheaper by way of our basket of replacement parts and insurance, but standard servicing costs over 75,000 km (80,000 in the instance of Odyssey) it’s Exiga by some $160. Overall, the Honda comes out a relatively insignificant $250 in front.

Exiga presents as being slightly more fuel frugal, with an Australian Design Rule (ADR) combined figure of 8.6 litres/100 km to Odyssey’s 8.9. On test, the former backed up its claims by returning an average of 9.2, while the latter sipped 10.6. The good news, though, is that both run happily on 91 RON unleaded.

Honda offers a 3 year/100,000 km warranty and Subaru 3 year/unlimited km, but with most vehicles averaging about 15,000 km a year, buyers get more than adequate coverage in any case.

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STARTERS: HONDA ODYSSEY LUXURY, SUBARU LIBERTY EXIGA PREMIUM

MORE INFO

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The features list is impressive on both vehicles. Standard items include cruise control, 17-inch alloys, power mirrors and windows, front fog lights, halogen head lights, cup and bottle holders, cargo luggage hooks, front and rear seat armrests, remote locking, map lights and multiple power jacks.

But the real difference is in the manufacturer’s list price, where Exiga Premium at $41,990 is some $6000 cheaper than its rival.

**DESIGN & FUNCTION**

An immobiliser is standard on each, while Odyssey has an alarm, Exiga is only pre-wired for its installation. It does, however, boast DataDot theft recovery identification.

Both achieve their passenger carrying brief fairly capably – as they should. Each looks after its driver by adjusting, including tilt and height, although neither has lumbar support. The Honda’s front seats are heated and fully reclinable and boast flip-down armrests. The Honda’s noise suppression is good; our meter readings show it to be quieter at idle and hard acceleration from 50-80 km/h. Exiga is better at a constant 80 km/h, showing it to be quieter at idle and hard acceleration.

The Honda’s front seats are heated and fully reclinable and boast flip-down armrests.

By pulling a lever, Exiga’s second row 60/40 split-fold seats are able to be slid into up to 13 positions. The third row can also be split folded flat, 50/50, by lever, and pulled back into an upright position with straps. Odyssey also offers its second row passengers a 60/40 fold and slide function, but when down leaves a gap into which luggage and gear can fall. The third row is power retractable, conveniently activated by a switch in the cargo area, to flat fold.

Being externally taller pays a dividend in real terms inside the vehicle, where the Subaru driver enjoys nearly 100 mm more head room. Second and third row passengers benefit by 20 mm over the Honda. However, Odyssey is wider across the second and third row of seats, by 40 and 30 mm respectively. There’s more leg room too.

With all seats in place, the Honda offers more length and height for load space, whereas the Subaru has a wider cargo area. Youngsters are well catered for by Odyssey, with five child restraint anchor points available to Exiga’s two. However, these are located on the ceiling at the rear – not the ideal place if row three is taken up with passengers. Neither vehicle has a full size spare wheel, although both have two on the ceiling at the rear – not the ideal place if row three is taken up with passengers.

In terms of build and finish quality, both rate well, although we reckon the Honda has the smarter designed, more appealing interior.

**ON THE ROAD**

Despite Odyssey being 9 kW more powerful (132 kW V 123), Exiga took the honours convincingly in all six of our acceleration tests. Lugging 152 kg more, the former seems doughty away from a start and down low but is far happier at higher revs, in true Honda fashion.

Drive like you do every day, though, and Odyssey impresses with the way it goes about its business. The engine is smooth, ditto the automatic transmission which swaps its five cogs glidingly and intuitively thanks to computer mapping called Grade Logic. But, unlike its predecessor, this new generation lacks tiptronic (manual change) option.

Exiga’s CVT is capably too, and should you want to shift manually it comes with steering wheel-mounted ‘paddles’. It has a better towing capability able to pull 1400 kg (braked) and 750 kg (unbraked) compared with 1000 and 450 for Odyssey.

Odyssey has always scored well for its ride quality, and this continues with generation four. Exiga is not as supple, its suspension travel feeling shorter and tauter in terms of absolute handling, this and all-wheel-drive capability tips the scales in its favour, although the Honda remains dynamically adept for a people mover.

Our series of emergency braking tests revealed little between the two, with the Honda averaging 25.2 metres to stop from 80 km/h and the Subaru taking just 0.1 m more.

Honda’s noise suppression is good, our meter readings showing it to be quieter at idle and hard acceleration from 50-80 km/h. Exiga is better at a constant 80 km/h, despite noticeable tyre roar and wind noise.

**CONCLUSION**

People movers come in basically two styles and engineering outcomes: one that is based principally on a commercial van, and the other that has more of an SUV/wagon association. The former delivers in carrying not just up to seven people but their luggage and gear as well, whereas the latter is usually not so accommodating in this dual dimension.

Our test duos very much fits the second bill – but which one is best? Exiga ticks more boxes, so in terms of cost, hard objectivity, it must get the nod. But don’t disregard Odyssey, particularly if that seventh seat is more likely to be called on than not.