SUV

MAZDA MX-5 RF

56

MASTER APPRENTICE

60

DRIVING THE FUTURE

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TEKTRES: BARRY GREEN, JOHN EWING, JOEL TUCKER, LUKE GILPIN
STARTERS: HAVAL H6 PREMIUM, MITSUBISHI OUTLANDER LS 2WD SAFETY PACK, KIA SORENTO PLATINUM, MAZDA CX-9 TOURING
SUVS TOPPED THE Australian new vehicle market for the second month in succession in March, accounting for 39.4 percent. This compares with a 37 percent share (38,972 sales) for passenger cars.

SUVs (or Sports Utility Vehicles) are segmented Small, Medium, Large and Upper Large. They can be two or four-wheel-drive, carry up to seven people and many models offer a choice of petrol or diesel engine. Prices range from around $17,000 (Suzuki Ignis) to upwards of $400,000 (Bentley Bentayga).

Two of the most popular locally are the Kia Sorento and new Mazda CX-9, both well-established and accredited seven-seaters. A little over half their price are the Mitsubishi Outlander and a new make to Australia, the Haval H6.

With some serious adverse weather at our door, we put the Sorento Platinum and CX-9 Touring (Large all-wheel-drive) and Outlander LS Safety Pack and H6 Premium (Medium two-wheel-drive) to the test.

KIA SORENTO PLATINUM v MAZDA CX-9 TOURING

VALUE FOR MONEY

- Price favours the CX-9 by some $3700, but you get what you pay for and the Platinum is a higher specification level than the Touring in their respective model ranges. No surprise, then, it comes with more standard equipment.
- According to Glass’s Guide, the Mazda has slightly better retained value after three years at 56 percent compared with 54 for the Kia. There is also little between the two in terms of capped price servicing (just over $100 annually), ditto insurance ($34 difference).
- Diesel will beat petrol any day when it comes to fuel consumption, thus the Sorento boasts a lower ADR combined cycle average of 7.8 litres/100km, 1.0 less than the CX-9. On test, the former returned 7.2, the latter 10.8.
- Kia’s industry-leading, seven year/unlimited km warranty aces Mazda’s three year/unlimited km offering.

DESIGN AND FUNCTION

- Importantly, both cars boast an ANCAP five-star safety rating. Despite their fundamentally different engines, CO₂ emissions are near identical at 205g/km (Sorento) and 206 (CX-9).
- Practicality rates highly for each, however only the Sorento can claim a full-size alloy spare.
- Both have comfortable, supportive front seats which are heated; although Kia’s driver’s side 10-way powered adjustment and four-way lumbar trumps Mazda’s no tilt and two-way lumbar only. The Sorento’s front seats are also cooled and the driver’s has dual memory; the CX-9 Touring neither.
- Rear passengers are well provided for in each, with row three in the Kia and row two in the Mazda having airconditioning vents and controls. The former also has vents in the second row. In both vehicles, families will appreciate the space although, as is the case with most seven seaters, the third rows are more suited to children.
- Cargo room favours the Kia 2066 litres to 1641 (front row up), 1077 to 810 (first and second rows up) and 320 to 230 (all rows up). While both cars have three child restraint points in the second row, only the Mazda has one in the third row.
- The interiors are user-friendly and well laid out ergonomically. Both are upholstered in leather, well finished and smack of quality. That said, the Mazda has arguably more of a premium look and feel.
Both engines are top performers. The CX-9's 2.5-litre turbo petrol four-cylinder is willing and able, and delivers its peak power of 170kW @ 5000rpm. They have identical maximum towing capacity of 2000kg, but the Sorento, with the low-down grunt of its 2.2-litre turbo-diesel four-pot, would make easier going of it. Peak torque is 441Nm (21 more than the Mazda), which kicks in at 1750rpm and stays constant until 2750rpm.

Both ride compliantly, though the Mazda is a little firmer, despite its smaller wheels (18-inch, the Sorento's are 19). The CX-9 feels sharper and more confident dynamically, and overall is sportier than a large SUV has a right to be. The steering, though lighter, offers up more road feel.

The Sorento handles respectably but tends to push a little wide when pressing on, exhibits more body roll and its extra heft (some 125kg) and size shows up in the twisty going.

In terms of NVH (noise, vibration and harshness), both are smooth operators, the Mazda impressively so.

Unfortunately, the weather washed out any chance we had to go off-road, though our previous experience would suggest the Sorento is the more capable.

FAST FACTS

**KIA SORENTO PLATINUM**
- SAFETY: Blind spot detection, front/rear park sensors, reversing camera.
- CONNECTIVITY: Sat nav multimedia system, Bluetooth hands-free with audio streaming.
- WEIGHT (KERB MASS): 2036kg.
- TAILPIPE CO2 EMISSIONS: 205g/km.

**MAZDA CX-9 TOURING**
- SAFETY: Blind spot monitoring, rear park sensors, reversing camera.
- CONNECTIVITY: Sat nav, 8" touch screen, Bluetooth hands-free with audio streaming.
- WEIGHT (KERB MASS): 1911kg.
- TYRES: 255/60 R18.
- TAILPIPE CO2 EMISSIONS: 206g/km.
VALUE FOR MONEY
At $29,990 driveaway, the H6 shapes up as some $2000 (plus on-road costs) cheaper. Glass’s Guide retained values after three years also favour the Haval, 50 to 48 percent, which is a surprise given it’s new.

Both cars are covered by a five year/100,000km warranty and come well-equipped. The ‘Safety Pack’ to the Outlander’s title denotes several driver assistance features such as Forward Collision Mitigation, Lane Departure Warning and Adaptive Cruise Control. The H6 boasts Blind Spot Monitoring.

Both are backed by capped price servicing, but over three years it’s advantage Mitsubishi with costs about a third of the Haval.

ADR combined cycle fuel economy also favours the Outlander, 6.7 to 9.7 litres/100km. The H6 also requires costlier 95 RON PULP. On test, however, the latter returned closer to its official number with 10.0 litres/100km, compared with 8.4 for the Mitsubishi.

DESIGN AND FUNCTION

The Outlander can claim a five-star ANCAP safety rating while the H6 remains untested locally. However, it was awarded five stars by ANCAP’s Chinese affiliate, C-NCAP.

The Mitsubishi runs greener, with an official 156g/km of CO₂ emissions, nearly 70 less than the Haval.

Neither car has seat cushion tilt nor lumbar adjustment. The H6’s seats are firmer, but both accommodate their occupants well in terms of comfort, ergonomics and space. The Outlander wins out on cargo room with a particularly deep boot, and rear passengers will appreciate having their own airconditioning vents.

The Mitsubishi is neatly put together, but feels a little dated in its interior finishes, whereas the H6 has a more modern look. The faux, high-gloss woodgrain might be an acquired taste for some.

MITSUBISHI OUTLANDER LS 2WD
• SAFETY: Driver’s knee airbag, rear park sensors and camera.
• CONNECTIVITY: 6.1” colour touch screen, Bluetooth with audio streaming.
• WEIGHT (KERB MASS): 1430kg.
• TYRES: 225/65 R17.
• TAILPIPE CO₂ EMISSIONS: 156g/km.

HAVAL H6 PREMIUM
• SAFETY: Blind spot monitoring, front/ rear park sensors, reversing camera.
• CONNECTIVITY: 7-inch colour LCD screen, Bluetooth hands-free with audio streaming.
• WEIGHT (KERB MASS): N.A.
• TYRES: 225/65 R17.
• TAILPIPE CO₂ EMISSIONS: 225g/km.

ON THE ROAD

Both engines are 2.0-litre four-cylinder – but that’s where the commonality ends. The H6’s unit is turbocharged, as opposed to normally-aspirated, and blitzes the Outlander in power output (145kW @ 5200rpm v 110kW @ 6000rpm) and torque (315Nm @ 2000rpm v 190Nm @ 4200rpm).

No surprise, then, that the Haval – whether around town, highway cruising or laden climbing a hill – performs more eagerly, particularly as it drives through a six-speed, dual-clutch auto as opposed to the Mitsubishi’s fuel and emissions-focused CVT. Sports mode enlivens the latter a tad, but the Outlander feels doughy in the low and mid-range and, simply put, would be better served with more oomph and grunt. The Haval is rated to tow 1700kg, the Outlander 1500kg.

Both cars ride well, although the Haval is a little on the firm side, and handle acceptably for their segment – up to a point. The H6 lacks grip on wet roads when cornering, even at relatively low speeds. At times, it scrambles for traction, causing the hazard lights to flash, which is not just annoying but distracting. The Outlander offers better grip in the damp and feels a little more progressive and communicative in putting its power down, but tends to push into understeer.

The Haval’s brakes are progressive initially, but start to feel wooden and in need of an extra shove when maximum retardation is called for.

Road noise in both is acceptable, but the Mitsubishi’s engine takes on a rather coarse feel and sound when pushed.
### WHICH TO BUY?

That depends. The Mazda CX-9 Touring offers refinement and a sportier drive experience. It’s the one you have when you don’t want a traditional SUV. If high-level specification, diesel grunt and economy, extra off-road skills and family practicality float your boat, then go the Kia Sorento Platinum.

Haval is the first Chinese brand to put its product up for testing by RACQ, which we commend. The H6, in several ways, exceeded our expectations. But with few dealers and a name not familiar to many Australian consumers, it will take some time before we see the H6 matching the record 3158 Outlanders bought in the first quarter of this year, a rise of 25.5 percent over the same time in 2016.

Essentially it’s a promising but work-in-progress newcomer versus reliable, if sometimes a little vanilla, incumbent. To be honest, there are better cars in this segment. Think (in alphabetical order) Hyundai Tucson, Kia Sportage, Mazda CX-5, Subaru Forester, Toyota RAV4 and Volkswagen Tiguan.

### COSTS + RATINGS

#### KIA SORENTO PLATINUM

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#### MAZDA CX-9 TOURING

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#### HAVAL H6 PREMIUM

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#### MITSUBISHI OUTLANDER LS 2WD SAFETY PACK

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^ Prices are manufacturers’ list prices unless otherwise noted and do not include statutory and delivery charges. Prices correct at time of printing.

^^ Based on an RACQ insurance comprehensive policy for a 35-year-old male, maximum no claim bonus, vehicle financially unencumbered, and $650 excess. Multi policy and RACQ member loyalty discounts may apply. Discounts of 2.5–15 percent may be available to RACQ members depending on length of membership.