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2011 MAZDA TRIBUTE: RUGGED GOOD LOOKS MEETS SUV FUNCTIONALITY

Offering more traditional sport-utility vehicle (SUV) styling than Mazda's other crossovers, CX-7 and CX-9, the 2011 Tribute rounds out the Mazda family of unibody-based utility vehicles, making it the perfect choice for buyers in search of traditional, go-anywhere, rugged styling. For the 2011 model year, Tribute carries over key specifications and features from the 2010 model year.

POWER WORTHY OF AN SUV

Performance has always been a pillar of strength for the Tribute. The 2011 Tribute *i* is fitted with a 2.5-liter four-cylinder engine which produces 171 horsepower and 171 lb-ft torque and returns fuel economy of up to 23/28 mpg (city/highway). It is one of the most sophisticated too: light, efficient and refined. Double-overhead camshafts improve engine breathing and high-revving response, which in turn improves performance and fuel economy. It also uses a variable induction system that delivers more power when the driver demands it, enhancing torque at lower revs and maximizing power at higher revs. The pistons are lightweight, improving throttle response, smoothness and the engine's ability to rev. The 2.5-liter 4-cylinder is rated ULEV/Tier 2 Bin 5.

For even more rugged power, Tribute *s* features a 240-horsepower 3.0-liter V6 with 223 lb-ft torque and returns fuel economy of up to 19/25 mpg (city/highway). Its aluminum block and head helps keep weight down, benefiting handling and improving the power-to-weight ratio. As with the 2.5 four-cylinder, it uses double-overhead camshafts to control the valves and improve engine breathing – which in turn boosts performance and gas mileage. A six-speed automatic transmission is standard. The 3.0-liter V6 is rated ULEV/Tier2 Bin 4 and is Flex Fuel compatible.

An easy-shifting five-speed manual gearbox, which has short, sporty gear changes, is standard on the Tribute *i* Sport. It uses multi-cone synchronizers (dual-cone for first and second, single for third through fifth) to reduce shift effort and a cable-shift for improved gear-change precision. The gear lever is positioned at an ideal height on the center console to be as near as possible to the driver's right hand. A six-speed automatic transmission is standard on Touring and Grand Touring models (optional on *i* Sport model).

CONTROLLING THE POWER

The Tribute's sporty behavior also comes from its unibody construction and the fully independent coil-sprung suspension, as used on many sports cars. Many rival SUVs use truck-like body-on-frame chassis, which flex more and provide a much less stable platform for the suspension. The Tribute's unibody construction provides superb structural rigidity, improving ride and handling, as well as contributing to fewer rattles and a much tauter driving feel.

The fully independent coil-sprung suspension – MacPherson struts at the front, multi-link at the rear – ensures each wheel responds independently to road conditions, increasing the sure-footedness of the vehicle, improving handling and road holding. It gives the vehicle more poise in difficult conditions, including at high-speeds and on unpaved surfaces, and also improves ride comfort.

The track, front (60.7 inches) and rear (60.2 inches) is wide, which also benefits stability, handling and road holding. Nitrogen gas-charged shock absorbers give superb wheel control, on- or off-road, and maintain their composure even after tough use. The Tribute handles like a well-sorted sedan, but with all the extra benefits of an SUV.

Another sports car touch is the use of rack-and-pinion steering for greater steering precision and response. Variable power assistance means low-speed maneuvering, such as parking, is easy. Yet at higher speeds, reduced power assistance preserves road feel and steering feedback. Electric Power Steering (EPS), which improves vehicle sensitivity, is standard, and, improves NVH and fuel economy by eliminating the power steering pump.

All Tributes have ventilated 11.9-inch front discs for strong heat dissipation which improves braking performance after repeated use, such as a long downhill stretch with many bends. Both Tribute *i* and *s* models are equipped with standard Anti-lock Brakes (ABS) to prevent wheel lock-up and skids, and to help maintain steering control under braking. The four-channel system is more advanced than a conventional three-channel set-up, as every wheel has its own sensor to provide individual braking control. Electronic Brakeforce Distribution (EBD) varies the distribution of braking force between the front and rear wheels depending on the load to stop the vehicle as quickly as possible.

RUGGED GOOD LOOKS

Part of being a great sports vehicle is great sporty design, and the Tribute scores well here. Tributes makes a powerful statement with a rugged, tough exterior design by offering a more traditional SUV styling than Mazda's other SUVs, CX-7 and CX-9. Outside, the body has a taut athletic skin with a high belt line. Wheels are 16-inch seven-spoke alloys with 16-inch P235/70R tires.

Tribute's interior is upscale and comfortable. The main instruments are chrome-trimmed, sports car-style. The driver's and front passenger's seats have pronounced side bolsters to hold occupants in place during cornering.

UTILITY FOR WORK OR PLAY

Designed for real-world driving, the Tribute is at home cruising on the freeway, tackling unpaved roads or in the rough-and-tough urban jungle. Car-like front-wheel drive is standard. If extra traction is necessary – either for off-road driving or pulling heavy loads in slippery conditions – the Tribute is available with Mazda's innovative Active Torque Control Coupling (ATCC) four-wheel-drive system. This ingenious system is available on both four-cylinder and V6 Tribute models equipped with automatic transmissions.

A sophisticated computer monitors the engine, wheel speeds and transmission, and automatically transfers torque between the front and rear wheels. The split to the rear wheels varies between zero and 50 percent. It senses where traction is strongest and delivers the appropriate amount of torque for optimal grip.

Unlike mechanical systems, which react only to wheel slip, ATCC predicts wheel spin, and prevents it from happening in the first place. It changes continually, to suit ever-changing driving conditions, and is also completely automatic, so no driver settings or adjustment is necessary. It reacts faster than a hydraulic system because there is no lag time waiting for a viscous fluid to heat up before splitting power between the axles. The system is also useful on-road – such as in snow or heavy rain, or any time where there is a potential for loss of traction. Compared with less sophisticated four-wheel drive systems, ATCC improves driving responsiveness, handling and fuel economy.

Like all good SUVs, the Tribute has a commanding driving position, great visibility, good ground clearance, a tall roof and large cargo area. The elevated seating position, and superb visibility means you get a better view of the road when weather conditions are bad, such as heavy driving rain.

The vehicle seats five adults in comfort. For extra versatility, there are up to four storage areas within easy reach of the driver's seat, and five near the front passenger. In addition, a center console storage compartment with removable bins offers enough space to store a laptop. Both front doors have storage compartments, as do the backs of each front seat (Touring and Grand Touring models).

There is 31.4 cubic feet of carrying space behind the rear seat when it is up, and 67.2 cubic feet when the seatback is reclined. The rear seat is asymmetrically split 60:40, which improves carrying versatility. For extra practicality, the tailgate features a rear window that lifts separately, ideal for loading less heavy objects.

Of course, safety is a priority. The all-steel unibody construction is not only very rigid, it is also enormously strong. The crumple zones and 'Triple H' construction are designed to absorb and redirect energy away from the passenger cabin. 'Triple H' refers to the H-shaped structures in the sides, floor and roof that provide a rigid cell around the cockpit. Side impact door beams are also fitted, to further improve safety in a side impact.

The Tribute comes with advanced dual-stage front airbags that use various sensors to deploy each front airbag with the right amount of force to deal with the impact. For the driver, sensors measure seatbelt usage and the fore/aft seating position. For the front passenger, sensors first measure the weight in the seat to determine if the seat is occupied and if it is, the sensors turn on the passenger airbag and measure seatbelt usage. Front side impact airbags, fitted into the seats rather than the doors – so they work equally effectively, irrespective of seat position – are standard. Side-impact air curtains with rollover protection are also standard.

Front seat belts have pre-tensioners to reduce slack in the early moments of an impact. In the rear, all three seats have three-point belts and adjustable head restraints for extra safety. For additional safety, Dynamic Stability Control (DSC), Roll Stability Control (RSC), Traction Control System and a tire pressure monitoring system are also standard. Whether the driving conditions are dry and fast or slippery and moderately paced, exceptional handling is assured.

THREE TRIM LEVELS SIMPLIFY CHOICES

The well-equipped, entry-level Sport trim offers all the convenience, safety and utility today's young SUV buyers demand. Standard features include automatic headlights, 16-inch alloy wheels, fog lights, air conditioning, AM/FM/CD audio system, ambient temperature gauge, remote keyless entry system and power mirrors, door locks and windows. Cruise control is standard on vehicles equipped with automatic transmissions. A roof rack and auto-dimming rear view mirror complete with compass, or Homelink® are also available.

The mid-level Touring trim builds on the Sport trim with the addition of privacy glass, a standard roof rack, six-way power adjustable driver's seat with manual adjustable lumbar support, overhead console with dual storage bins and front seatback map pockets.

Offering the highest level of comfort and convenience found in the Tribute lineup, the fully loaded Grand Touring trim comes standard with everything found on the Sport and Touring trims, plus Satellite radio and much more. Additional standard exterior features include heated side-view mirrors and a power-sliding moonroof. A more sophisticated and cozy interior features leather-trimmed seats, heated front seats, garage door opener, electrochromatic mirror with rearview backup camera display and leather-wrapped steering wheel.

Headquartered in Irvine, Calif., Mazda North American Operations oversees the sales, marketing, parts and customer service support of Mazda vehicles in the United States, Canada and Mexico through nearly 900 dealers. Operations in Canada are managed by Mazda Canada, Inc., located in Ontario; and in Mexico by Mazda Motor de Mexico in Mexico City.

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