

by Dan Lyons • *Special to The Daily Gazette*

2024 Buick Encore GX

MSRP: \$25,600 (GX) As Tested: \$33,730 (GX Sport Touring AWD)



Wearing an optional coat of Copper Ice Metallic paint and 19" gloss black rims, this week's test drive – the Buick Encore GX Sport Touring - made a classy first impression. In my view, the gold hue is worth the upcharge (\$495). The smallest member of Buick's lineup, Encore GX is slotted below the Envision and Enclave, and slightly above the soon to be announced (as of this writing) Envista. Priced at \$25,600 to start, Encore GX is offered in Preferred (MSRP: \$26,895), Sport Touring (\$28,095) and Avenir (\$33,195) trim levels.

Two engines are offered. A 1.2L 3-cylinder turbo engine is standard as is Front Wheel Drive. Linked to a Continuously Variable Transmission, the 1.2L is rated at 137 horsepower and 162 lb.-ft. of torque. Available is a 1.3L I-3 motor, which checks in with 155 h.p. and 174 lb.-ft. of torque. Opting for AWD instead of FWD (\$1,600-\$2,000, depending on trim level) dictates the larger engine, and a 9-speed automatic transmission. I've driven both engines on different occasions, and I recommend the 1.3L/9-speed/AWD, without hesitation. The added horsepower/torque makes the GX feel far more lively, and the transmission's shift points feel/sound more relaxed than the 1.2L/CVT combo. And finally, AWD just makes more sense in this climate. The small crossover feels responsive around town and it handles high demand situations with ease. The 1.3L also adds a muted, guttural growl as a soundtrack to your travels, which I rather enjoyed. The EPA says you can expect 26/28/27 with the 1.3L/AWD, and I logged 28 on my recent week behind the wheel. With its compact footprint, responsive drivetrain and composed suspension, there's more sport in this Sport Utility's handling than the average for the breed, and its ride belies its size.

Highlighting the updates to the Encore GX cabin is the new, Virtual Cockpit system. This pairs an 8-inch diagonal driver information center with an 11-inch center touchscreen. Both are



Photos courtesy of the manufacturer



housed under a single sheet of glass, lending an upscale look. Wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto compatibility are included, and a wireless phone charger is optional. Thumb's-up for the HVAC controls – a combination of two, rotary dials and a pad of physical buttons. The only thing lacking is a digital readout of the temperature you're setting. Audio adjustments are mainly made through touch screen tapping, though there is a knob for system on/off/volume. Sound system upgrades are available (including a Bose premium speaker system (\$500)), but if you're more interested in the sounds of silence, active noise control for the cabin is standard. A bird's-eye view camera system is among the available driver technology features – a useful option that's a rarity in this segment.

Encore GX is categorized as a small SUV, and with front seats set to hold six footers, there's just enough room for a pair of like-sized passengers to slip in behind them. Inside storage spots are found in all the usual places – doors, center console - and all run small. Cargo capacity ranges from 23-50 cu.-ft., depending on how the seats are deployed. The available, fold flat front passenger seat gives you the option to stow long items (up to 8') under cover. A hand's-free, power lift gate and reconfigurable cargo floor are also available, to expand your stowage space possibilities.

I found the Sport Touring trim Encore GX tester to be a classy, sporty segment choice. Top trim Avenir Encores would be even more so, though the price point on loaded models overlaps the starting prices of some quality, larger SUV's. Shoppers therefore need to decide whether they'd rather go smaller and better equipped, or trade off some niceties for more room.