

LIFE AFTER SPORT! **CARS**



CRUZE MISSILE

Holden's latest attack on the small car market, **THE CRUZE**, is easily their best effort yet

My relationship with the Holden Cruze went like this: irritation, forgiveness, more irritation but less serious than before, love, but the kind of love a man has for good TV, and finally acceptance. Not a bad journey for a small car.

Yes, small car. Not the kind of thing a red-blooded *Alpha* reader normally wants to confront, but confront it he sometimes must. The car market in 2009 could be safely called "quite bad", but small still sold. People are buying more little'uns, and

Holden's Cruze is the company's offering in a growing market, following on from its attempts with the Barina and Vectra. And finally ditching the unloved JF Viva, which did seem to have some kind of design concept going – just not a very good one.

Unlike those, clearly town runabouts or Mum's own specials, the Cruze is a compact sedan; it looks like a "proper" car. It's got an ego that goes beyond the school run. It's The Little Car That Wanted To Be Big.

Most tiddlers accept what they are, but the Cruze "envelope" is somewhat larger than the competition, and more ambitious. Squint at it between your fingers and it could almost be a full-sized sedan.

Get behind the wheel, though, and things are not quite so straightforward.

Even with the 2L turbo diesel, the Cruze is a heavy thing to carry around. Especially when the gear ratios are set strangely high. I learned to keep the revs up and mentally turn first into second and second into third. Eventually I got it right. This is a basic vehicle, and you live with its quirks. So what if I stamped on the accelerator at 38km/h in third gear and nothing happened? Slip down a gear. Live with what you've got. I still had air-conditioning, didn't I? And cruise control, controls on the steering wheel... I even found a plug for my MP3 player.

After a few days, I'd moved towards forgiveness. The gear stick and I reached understanding. I could cruise along a freeway quite comfortably and feel like I was in a car twice the price. I could more or less tune out that big diesel burble.

The driving position was comfortable, the steering fairly firm, handling pretty responsive. Happen to find yourself in the supermarket car park, and the boot will gobble

everything you offer it. And best of all, it looks like a proper car, not like a hearing-aid or a toy.

The Cruze is also – and let's be very fair here – one of the safest things on the road: five-star crash rating, six airbags, stability control, the lot.

There's a feeling that most things are being done right with the Holden Cruze; the red lion on track to seriously compete with the big boys of the little car world. – *Ivan Smith*

From **\$20,990** for the CD petrol manual, to **\$25,990** for the CDX petrol auto and CD diesel auto

STRAIGHT DRIVE

GEELY MK

John Hughes, one of the first to import Hyundai here, is introducing local buyers to the Chinese Geely – pronounced Jee-lee. The 1.5L Geely MK will cost under **\$20,000**, putting it up against the smaller Koreans now so entrenched in our market.



HONDA INSIGHT

The success of the Prius has launched a wave of hybrids. The Honda Insight will make its road debut this year, borrowing a lot of the innovative touches from the US-only FCX Clarity hydrogen car, and will cost about **\$30,000**.



ASTON MARTIN ONE-77

Or you could save up and get one of 77 Aston Martin One-77s to hit the roads of the world's well-heeled suburbs. For only **\$4 million**, you get hand-sculpted aluminium panels and a huge 7L, 522kW V12 engine that can reach frankly stupid speeds of 350km/h.



ON YA BIKE

KAWASAKI 1400GTR ABS

Bike firms love speed, but Kawasaki is also proud of the way it will get you to stop. Its new 1400GTR ABS has ABS braking for balanced stopping, with little lock and slip. The 16-valve engine is geared for low torque and has a six-gear transmission. Expect to pay about **\$25,000**.



DUCATI MULTISTRADA 1200

Can't decide what kind of bike you want to ride? The Ducati Multistrada 1200 is supposedly four bikes in one. The bike's electronics mean it can be switched from a sports bike, to a long-distance tourer, to an urban bike, then an enduro. It will start at about **\$23,000**, with ABS braking for an extra **\$1500**.



HARLEY SOFTAIL FATBOY LO

One of four new Harleys this year, the Softail Fatboy Lo will keep hairy blokes' arses close to the bitumen. Powered by a twin-cam 96B engine, the makers are crowing about its styling: it comes only in vivid black, with a satin chrome muffler and stylish half-moon floorboards. **\$30,000**



WHACKY RACERS

MINI BEACHCOMBER

The Mini Moke is back – sort of. Mini has modelled its Beachcomber concept car on the cult set of wheels. It has a soft top and lightweight door that can be opened right up to let in the sunshine. Expect it to go on sale in the US later this year.



KOENIGSEGG QUANT

Swedish boffins have paused ogling their blonde workmates to develop the Koenigsegg Quant. It is expected to give 500km from a 20-minute charge, with power topped up by the photovoltaic coating that covers the vehicle. Expect to see it on the road in 2016.



VW PASSAT (SELF-PARKING)

Stanford University and Volkswagen teamed up to develop a Passat that parks itself. Long the bane of mums in 4WDs, reverse parking is solved thanks to sensors and robotic controls, which also look at merging, intersections, hazards and turning over the radio when Alan Jones starts talking.

