



Chevrolet Captiva

New energy

Car review | A vacation is about more than just relaxing. It is mainly about recharging the batteries with new energy for when the holidays are over. The Chevrolet Captiva is also ready for the future with new engines and improved looks. A car like the Captiva is especially suited to a winter vacation, so Autozine went snowbound with the new and improved Chevrolet.

The Chevrolet Captiva is a so-called "SUV": a "Sports Utility Vehicle". An SUV is based on an off-road vehicle, but in many cases luxury and comfort go at the expense of handling rough terrain. The Captiva is amongst those few SUVs that are still able to conquer the rough stuff, making them more than just a fashion statement.

Its off-road capabilities are all owed to smart electronics, the Captiva doesn't have any mechanical aids (like "low gear ratios" or "diff locks"). When going off-road, its weapon of choice is four-wheel drive. Under normal circumstances the power of the engine is sent to the front wheels. When the electronics detect loss of traction, the rear wheels are also powered. This works fairly well in most cases, but in some occasions the system is too slow and the Captiva comes to a halt.



On the other hand: driving all four wheels all the time requires more fuel than if only powering the front wheels. Since the Captiva will spend most of its life on paved roads, Chevrolet did make the right decision by offering smart four-wheel drive. For those who want the Captiva merely for its looks: the base model is available with front-wheel drive only.

Off-road driving is made easy thanks to "hill descent control". This came in handy several times during the test drive. Even when the road is so slippery that it is impossible to brake or accelerate without skidding, the maximum speed is limited to 30 km/h. Just like the phrase says: thanks to hill descent control the Captiva remains controllable. Even in reverse or neutral gear hill descent control is active. It is therefore possible to change gears downhill without involuntary accelerating during shifting.

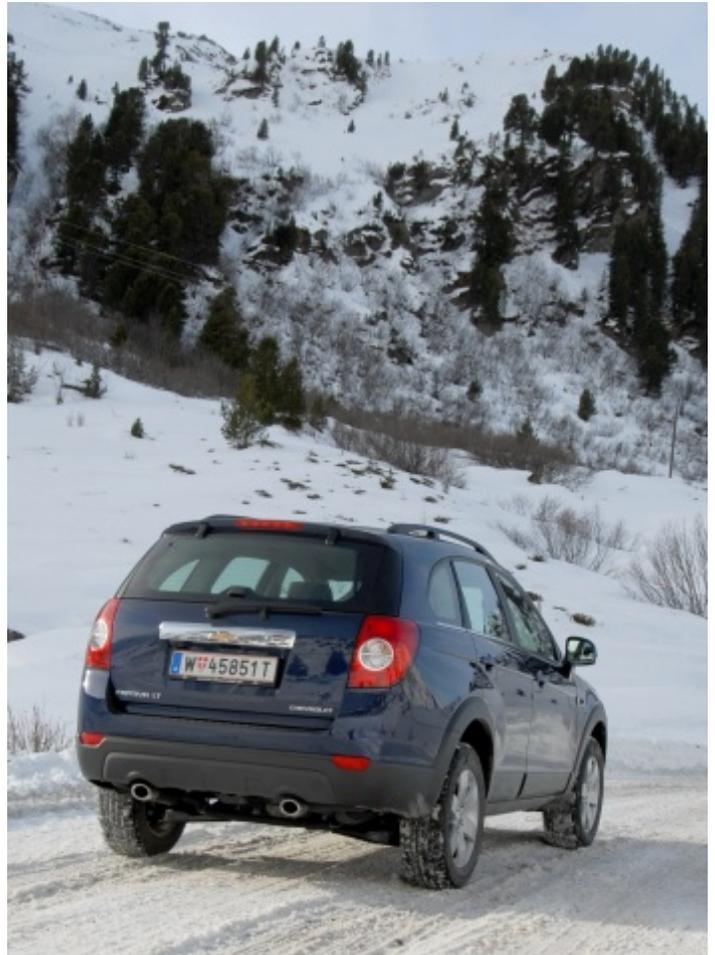


Ground clearance is fine and the wheels are placed in the far corners, so the Captiva can climb serious obstacles without losing traction. In this respect the Captiva is also more capable than other luxury SUVs.

Petrol

The reason for this test drive is the introduction of new engines. First, the top model was driven: the 3.0 litre six-cylinder petrol engine. This replaces the 3.2 litre six-cylinder. Despite its smaller displacement, the new power train is more powerful (258 PS / 288 Nm). Yet, the new top model is not recommendable. Its maximum power is only available at very high engine

speeds, so the mighty feeling of driving a V6 is lacking.



The six-cylinder engine is always connected to a six-speed automatic gearbox and that is not a pleasant combination. The automatic does everything it can to improve fuel economy. It does this by shifting up when it detects the driver is keeping a constant speed. This reduces the engine speed so much, that the speed of the car itself also decreases. Accelerating and decelerating constantly makes the Captiva tiresome to drive, so it feels like this quickest Captiva doesn't want to perform at all.



This behaviour can be compensated by turning "eco" mode off. Regrettably in this mode the brains of the automatic gearbox still don't understand what the driver wants. The only solution is to shift sequentially, but that isn't why the average customer bought an automatic in the first place.

Diesel

The holiday spirit was lifted by the 2.2 litre diesel engine (184 PS / 400 Nm). This is connected to a manual gearbox and in this configuration the Captiva feels like a completely different car compared to the "3.0 V6". Operating the clutch and gearbox does require some muscle power, but that just suits the robust character of this car.

The diesel engine is very torque strong, even at low revs. Climbing hills can be done at as little as 1,500 rpm, and even then a gentle touch on the throttle is enough to accelerate immediately. Perhaps more useful in everyday life: in third gear the Captiva can slow down to almost crawling speed and even then one can accelerate to 60 mph without shifting at all.

Although Chevrolet emphasised that the new engines offer better fuel economy than before, there is no shift indicator or stop/start mechanism available. All engines do operate quietly, making the Captiva very suitable for travelling long distances.



Because of their huge dimensions, and especially their high centre of gravity, most SUVs have poor handling. And, when an SUV also has to be capable of performing off-road, it is very hard to make them handle like normal cars. Yet, Chevrolet did manage just that. Driving the Captiva doesn't make it necessary to alter one's driving style.

The fact that the Captiva is a very big car cannot be disguised, this car is not suitable for city traffic. It isn't only hard to manoeuvre in tight spots, many parking spaces are simply too small for the Captiva.

Space

A big vehicle like this does offer more than ample space inside. The cabin has been improved for 2011 with new materials and a higher trim level. Now the Captiva can match quality levels of SUVs that have been introduced more recently.



The standard audio and navigation system has also been renewed. The voice which instructs the driver sometimes sounds a bit artificial, but this does not make it less clear. A smart detail is the USB connector in the centre console, located beneath the cupholders. If an MP3 player is left in the car accidentally, it isn't exposed to the prying eyes of the outside world.

The new Captiva offers the same space as before. The head and legroom in the front are huge. The back seat comfortably accommodates two adults. Behind the rear seats two extra seats can be found, and even there the space is above average; so the Captiva can transport up to seven holiday makers. Enjoy your trip!

Conclusion

The Chevrolet Captiva was introduced in 2006. Even now the cabin space, off-road capabilities and price/performance ratio are better than average. To keep up in other areas as well, the 2011 Captiva features new looks, improved materials and new engine. The visual changes give a higher quality feeling to the car.

Regrettably the new 3.0 V6 petrol engine is not recommendable: it doesn't perform well and the automatic gearbox doesn't do what the driver expects it to do. The 184 PS 2.2 litre diesel is the best choice: it is powerful, quiet and relatively economical. That gives the Captiva new energy for years to come ■

