

Portland Observer Auto Review

News and reviews on new motor vehicles

2009 Mercury Mariner Premier 4WD

Mercury Mariner shows mediocre merit



Specifications: 3.0-Liter, 240-hp @ 223 lb-ft. torque, DOHC 24-valve V-6 engine; 6-Speed automatic transmission; 17-City, 24-Highway MPG; \$32,795. MSRP

BY KATHLEEN CARR

The 2009 Mercury Mariner has been mechanically overhauled, on the heels of a total redesign for 2008. New four-cylinder and V-6 drivetrains produce more power with better gas mileage, and ride quality and braking performance have improved. The cabin also has some interesting new options. Those are all good things, because the redesigned 2008 Mariner left me lukewarm. Its acceleration was too modest to justify its

thirst at the pump, and it had too many low-rent plastics and seating annoyances inside. The changes for 2009 move the Mariner from average to appealing, but not decisively so. It still has a few flaws, and lined up against competitors the Mariner doesn't stand out. For 2009, "Part 2" of the refresh of the Mercury (and the Ford Escape twin) begins with more powerful and efficient powertrain options. The entry-level 2009

Mariner comes with a 171-hp, 2.5L four now mated to a six-speed automatic transmission -- that's two speeds and 18 hp more than before. Customers looking for more power can order the optional 3.0L V-6 with 240 hp -- 40 more hp than last year's six. The extra power from the updated V-6 results in a 0-60-mph time that Ford claims is a substantial 1.7 sec quicker than the 2008 model. The 2009 Mariner also benefits from retuned suspension and

steering systems. The Electric Power Assist Steering, along with low-rolling-resistance tires and the addition of front bumper and rear tire spoilers, help Ford and Mercury eke out 1 more mpg from the SUVs. The Mariner is now closer in fuel economy to the compact SUV class sales leader, the Honda CR-V. A capless refueling system and seat fabrics that Ford claims are "ecofriendly," with soy-based foam taking the place of petro-

leum-based products, round out the changes. With a bump in power and fuel efficiency (now that the four-speed automatic is history), the fully refreshed Mercury Mariner is now better equipped to take on its formidable competition for another couple years. That's due in part to the new six-speed automatic, which replaces last year's antiquated four-speed gearbox. The four-speed wasn't a deal-breaker; it upshifted smoothly around town and kicked down to third on the highway for easy-enough passing performance. The six-speed isn't as well-mannered in its upshifts, but its

highway responsiveness is just as good -- and it has shorter gears for quicker passing-lane bursts, with none of the old drivetrain's droning exhaust. Among a vast sea of competitive models, we haven't been terribly impressed by the Mariner in recent years. It's a fine vehicle, but the materials, engines, and lack of innovative features have left us wanting, especially when compared to younger alternatives. The 2009 model's boost in power and refinement will address these issues head on, though a complete redesign might've had the best chance of propelling the Mariner to the front of the pack.

Ask Deanna!



Real People. Real Advice
An advice column known for its fearless approach to reality based subjects!

Dear Deanna!
I work two jobs because my wife got laid off. She's never satisfied and when I think about it, I'm breaking my neck and she spends money left and right. I don't have a problem with this, but if she wants to have her glamorous lifestyle, she needs to get a job. When I approach her, she claims she can't find work but she's not looking. I'm tired and want to rest but also want to keep my wife

happy but don't know how. -- Joel; Omaha, Neb.

Dear Joel:
Shut her down, close your wallet and take the credit cards immediately. If your wife won't work, then you need to make her an item on the budget and give her a monthly allowance. Once her money runs out, then oh well, she's stuck until the next cycle or until she gets a job. This may not make your wife happy but at least you'll still be around to see her.

Dear Deanna!
I made the mistake and tried to help a friend that got evicted from her apartment. She has three children and I feel as if I'm living in a tornado. These kids have no home training, constantly spill food and are always dirty. I'm really losing my mind because you would think they were deaf the way the television is on full blast. The way my home looks and the stress I feel makes me willing to lose the friendship if I kick her out. What do I do? --Anonymous; Jacksonville, Fla.

Dear Anonymous:
There may be more to the story of why she got evicted in the first place. If you value your sanity and possessions, help her plan her next move. Be mature and have a discussion without placing the blame on the children and express your desire to reclaim your space. Have a few applications available and some cash to speed

the process. This approach should save your friendship and also get the tiny terrors out the door quick, fast and in a hurry.

Ask Deanna is written by Deanna M. Write Ask Deanna! Email: askdeanna1@yahoo.com or 264 S. LaCienega Blvd. Suite 1283 Beverly Hills, CA 90211. Website: www.askdeanna.com

Food Stamp Workers Hired

The Legislature has approved a request from Gov. Kulongoski to immediately hire 60 new workers throughout the state to meet the increasing demand for Food Stamps.

The need for Food Stamps has grown 13 percent in Oregon since October 2007, and in some communities the increase is as high as 25 percent. The new positions will be targeted in the communities that have shown the greatest increase in Food Stamp applications.

"We need to be sure that every Oregonian who is eligible for assistance through the food stamp program has the opportunity to benefit from it," said Gov. Kulongoski. "With the rising cost of food and other basic expenses, we must do all we can to make sure that families in our state are not going hungry."

Oregon's food stamp benefits are distributed through the "Oregon Trail Card," which works like a debit card. Many working families turn to these benefits when their monthly income does not cover rent, health care, food and other basics. Benefits are determined on a sliding scale, from \$14 to \$463 per month for a family

of three. Currently 258,600 households (approximately 499,000 individuals) receive food stamps in Oregon, or about 13 percent of the Oregon population.

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