

AUTOMOTIVE

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Crossfire SRT-6: Not real practical, but it sure can be fun

by DEVIN COMISKEY

My, how far Chrysler has come since the days of the throwaway K-cars.

Gone are the bland designs, cheap quality and flat-out boring cars. Today, Chrysler is showing the other American manufacturers what it's like to be on the bleeding edge of design and performance. That boldness couldn't be more striking than with the Crossfire SRT-6 convertible.

TEST DRIVE

The Crossfire, introduced as a coupe last year, is based on the chassis of Mercedes SLK two-seat roadster. But the similarities between the two ends there. For the 2005 model year, Chrysler has added a convertible roadster and a ferocious, supercharged V6 engine, courtesy of Dodge's Street Racing Technology group, that pumps out 330 horsepower and enough torque to disfigure your face at full throttle.

The Crossfire's design is unmistakable, and just one aspect of the car that will draw ooh's or boo's. The chiseled, brutish design, with its round back, long, sloping front and aggressive low

stance that looks like an animal waiting to leap on its prey is hot and one of the best designs on the road today. Other people either loved or hated the design. Either way, the Crossfire is an eye-catcher.

The Crossfire Roadster's interior is small. It's very claustrophobic and there are also blind spots galore with the top closed. The top retracts in roughly 22 seconds, but requires the driver to manually unlatch a large handle and push the top up eight inches before pressing the top-down button. There's no reason Chrysler couldn't have made this fully automatic. There's also no wind guard, so wind and noise flow through the compartment with the top down at any speed, unlike other popular roadsters.

The leather-trimmed power seats are comfortable and can be heated. Leg room, however, could be a challenge for anyone more than six feet tall. The gauges have a classic look to them, but the black-on-grey LCD displays are hard to read. Flipping on the parking lights illuminate the displays nicely.



CHRYSLER CROSSFIRE SRT-6

AUTOMOBILE PROVIDED BY DAIMLERCHRYSLER MOTORS
COMPANY, LLC, WWW.CHRYSLER.COM

BASE PRICE: \$49,120

PRICE AS TESTED: \$51,195

ENGINE: 3.2L Supercharged SRT V6, 330 hp/310 ft. lbs. torque

TRANSMISSION: 5-Speed Manual/AutoStick; special 3.07 rear axle ratio

DRIVE: Rear-Wheel Drive

FRONT SUSPENSION: Independent double wishbone

REAR SUSPENSION: Independent five-link

SEATING CAPACITY: 2 adults

WHEELS: 18" front/19" rear alloy wheels

TIRES: Michelin Pilot Sport ultra-high performance 225/40 ZR18 (front) and 255/35 ZR19 (rear)

FUEL ECONOMY: 17 city/24 highway

BRAKES: ABS, ventilated disc brakes (330 x 32 mm front; 300 x 22 mm rear), with dual-piston calipers.

SAFETY: Four-wheel antilock disc brakes with Brake Assist, Electronic Stability Program which integrates single brake application and throttle intervention for yaw control, ignition and throttle intervention for wheel spin control, all-speed traction control senses drive-wheel slip and individual-

ly brakes the slipping wheel and/or reduces excess engine power until control is regained, driver and passenger front air bags, door-mounted thorax side air bags, lower anchors and tethers for children (LATCH/ISOFIX) child restraint system, Sentry Key® vehicle immobilizer, security alarm system, quad halogen projector headlamps, tow-away protection.

SELECTED STANDARD FEATURES: Fixed rear spoiler, integrated chin spoiler, SRT-6 badging on decklid and engine, 15-spoke, lightweight SRT aluminum alloy wheels, 200-mph (320 km/h) instrument cluster, race-inspired seats, trimmed in Nappa Pearl Leather with Alcantara suede inserts and bolsters, power convertible fabric top, heated glass back light, power eight-way heated leather driver seat, power four-way heated leather passenger seat, power windows with one-touch down driver and passenger controls, telescoping steering column with leather-wrapped steering wheel, speed control, Infinity® Modulus audio system with AM/FM/CD, and a 240-watt digital amplifier (six speakers including dual subwoofers), dual-zone semi-automatic air conditioning, remote keyless entry with central locking (including fuel filler door), universal garage door opener.

WARRANTY: 3-year/36,000 mile basic limited warranty, towing assistance during warranty period.

Dual-zone climate control, power windows and side airbags are all standard.

Our test model came with the optional \$1,200 Infinity CD stereo with navigation. I suggest skipping this option, as the controls are confusing and the nav display insufficient. You'd do better spending \$600 on an aftermarket unit.

On the road, the Crossfire SRT-6 is a brute. The acceleration is nothing short of scary, as mashing the pedal unleashes a hellacious howl from underneath the hood and the car rockets from 0-60 in just five seconds and climbs from there. There's so much power sent to the rear wheels, even under light acceleration, the traction control system gets quite a workout. With the supercharged V6, power is plentiful at any RPM.

Chrysler, however, committed a real sin by only offering its AutoStick manual/Tiptronic transmission in the

Crossfire SRT-6. Not offering a six-speed manual takes away a lot of fun in driving this all-business sports car.

The handling characteristics of the Crossfire also invoke a love-hate relationship. While it rides like it's on rails in even the tightest of corners, it exhibits a lot of unexpected body roll. It's questionable why or how the suspension was designed this way. It's almost race-car stiff and you can feel every imperfection in the road, but Chrysler needs to lighten the dampening on the shocks and stiffen up the springs on this car. It seems they got it backwards.

The wide 18-inch front and 19-inch rear wheels are wrapped in high performance rubber, which contribute to the fantastic grip and braking performance on the Crossfire. All season tires are available, but why bother?

The SRT-6 Roadster adds a hefty

\$20,000 to a base model Coupe, but you get the added benefits of a better handling car, one of the most powerful engines available in its class, a stand-out design and convertible top. Our test model topped out at \$51,195, including destination charges and the stereo system.

The Crossfire SRT-6 can be a great car to drive or a real pain, depending on the weather, road conditions and also why you'd buy it. On smooth, curvy roads, it's a driver's dream. You may also fall in love with its unique styling.

On rough roads, however, the stiff ride becoming annoying quickly. With decent trunk space, there's some room to haul goodies in. But the car is not a practical daily driver, as there's very little room in the passenger compartment. As a secondary car for those perfect driving days, you can't go wrong.