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## 2009 Chevrolet Equinox **Five-seat crossover SUV improved for 2009.**

### **Overview**

Chevrolet Equinox has been improving every year since its introduction. The 2009 Chevy Equinox gets more standard equipment, including XM satellite radio and side-curtain airbags. Five different sound systems are available on the 2009 Chevrolet Equinox models, along with Bluetooth wireless connectivity for hands-free cell phone use.

Chevy Equinox is a five-passenger vehicle that competes with the Ford Escape, Honda CR-V, and Toyota RAV4 compact SUVs. However, Equinox is bigger and roomier than any of these competitors. The Equinox offers acres of legroom for tall rear-seat passengers with the seat moved rearward, loads of cargo space with the seat moved forward.

The dimensions of the Equinox blur the line between compact and midsize sport utilities. It's nearly 14 inches longer than Ford Escape and just three inches shorter than a Chevy TrailBlazer. Its long wheelbase gives the Equinox good stability and ride quality. Unlike the RAV4, the Equinox does not offer a (hopelessly cramped) third row of seats.

As with the Escape, CR-V, and RAV4, the Equinox is based on a passenger-car design but has an interior like a traditional SUV. Industry observers call these vehicles crossover utilities, or crossovers, because they crossed over the line from truck to car.

Equinox has features that enhance its versatility: The back seats are mounted on tracks and slide fore and aft: Slide forward and you have more cargo space, slide rearward for more rear legroom. The rear seatbacks recline for additional comfort. Fold the rear seats down, then fold down the front passenger seatback, and you can load eight-foot objects inside.

A 3.4-liter V6 powers the Equinox along with a five-speed automatic transmission, netting an EPA-rated 17/24 miles per gallon City/Highway.

All Equinox models are available with front-wheel drive or all-wheel drive. All-wheel-drive models are better on snow and ice, but cost about \$2,000 more and have smaller gas tanks.

The top-line Equinox LTZ features leather-trimmed seats with seat heaters and an optional navigation system.

The more powerful Equinox Sport features a 3.6-liter V6 and six-speed automatic. The Sport features a more aggressive look and sporting cabin. The Sport gets hydraulic (as opposed to electric) power steering, a tighter suspension, 18x8-inch polished, forged alloy wheels with 50-series tires, aerodynamic spoilers and rocker moldings, dual chrome exhaust tips, a gauge package, and sport seats. Along with an 80-horsepower boost from GM's high-feature four-cam V6, the Sport gets an EPA-rated 16/24 mpg.

We found the Equinox offers decent ride quality, responsive handling, with brakes that are easy to modulate. The Sport rides more firmly but reacts quicker and more precisely.

### **Model Lineup**

The 2009 Chevy Equinox comes in four trim levels: the basic LS, the better-appointed LT, the leather-upholstered LTZ, and the Sport.

Equinox LS FWD (\$23,555) and LS AWD (\$25,550) come with cloth upholstery; air conditioning; cruise control; tilt steering; a fold-flat front passenger seat; a Multi-Flex 60/40 split rear bench seat that folds, slides, and reclines; six-speaker AM/FM/CD audio; power windows, power mirrors, power locks with remote keyless entry, side curtain airbags and OnStar. Tires are Bridgestone P235/65 all-season radials on 16-inch alloy wheels. A driver information center comes standard. Options for LS include an upgraded audio system with MP3 capability (\$135), engine block heater (\$75), and carpeted floor mats (\$40).

Equinox LT FWD (\$24,475) and LT AWD (\$26,470) add carpeted floor mats, deep tinted glass, power mirrors, leather-wrap steering wheel, and iPod/MP3/RDS audio system. Door handles and roof-rack side rails are body-color rather than charcoal or black. Option Package 2LT adds fog lights, auto-dimming interior rearview mirror with temperature display and compass, six-way power driver seat adjuster with manual lumbar adjustment and map pocket, remote start, and 17-inch aluminum wheels. Options for LT include a 6CD audio system upgrade (\$435), a tilt-and-slide sunroof (\$750), a remote starter, luggage rack crossbars, 17-inch chromed aluminum wheels (\$550), and Pioneer sound system.

Equinox LTZ FWD (\$28,380) and LTZ AWD (\$30,375) add leather seats, front-seat heaters, chrome-clad aluminum wheels, Pioneer seven-speaker sound system with subwoofer, body-color bumpers with charcoal trim and chrome inserts on the roof rails, and body-color mirrors. Options include a tow package (\$350) navigation/radio upgrade (\$2,145), DVD rear-seat entertainment system (\$995), and sunroof (\$750).

Equinox Sport FWD (\$28,685) and Sport AWD (\$30,680) get the bigger V6 and six-speed automatic, a sports suspension, 18-inch forged alloy wheels with 50-series tires, aerodynamic spoilers and rocker moldings, dual chrome exhaust tips, gauge package, and sport seats. Options include the tow package, audio upgrades, and sunroof.

Safety features include antilock brakes, StabiliTrak electronic stability control, tire pressure monitor; dual-stage driver and front-passenger airbags, and side-curtain airbags with a rollover sensor. All-wheel drive is optional for improved stability in slippery conditions.

## **Walkaround**

The Chevy Equinox is aerodynamically smooth, thanks to a subtle shaping of front and rear fascias as well as the rear spoiler. From the front, Equinox still looks the part of a Chevy truck, with its requisite single-bar grille sporting a large gold Chevrolet bow-tie emblem.

Sport models have a more menacing look akin to SS versions of the TrailBlazer and 2006 Silverado.

In the broadside view, Equinox looks different from the rest of the Chevy Truck family. The roof pillars and the sheetmetal above the windows but below the roof seem to be extra-thick, imparting a feeling of extra solidity and strength, important for a truck made on a car platform. When you shut the doors, the sound is more like the muted mating of plastic than the hollow clang of sheetmetal. It's a sound that no other Chevy truck makes.

The doors open wide for easy entry and exit, and the rear gate goes up and out of the way, allowing you to stand fully upright for easy loading of groceries, camping equipment, or dogs.

The Equinox looks solidly planted on its wheels. Equinox is based on a car-type platform, with unit-body construction rather than body-on-frame construction for better ride and handling.

The Sport reinforces this notion of stability with a lower stance, low-profile rubber and deeper bodywork, adding a sporty flair. With its lower clearance, the front end is more likely to drag on steep driveways, however.

## **Interior Features**

The Chevrolet Equinox cabin is a clean and functional design. We found the quality of some of the interior materials and control interfaces in the 2006 Equinox disappointing, but Chevrolet addressed some of our concerns for '07 with a new instrument cluster, center stack, shift knob, steering wheel, and heater and ventilation (HVAC) controls.

For 2008, window switches were lighted and the compass moved from the mirror to the Driver Information Center that includes more than 20 personalization and vehicle information features, such as trip odometer, fuel range, outside temperature display and door locking programs. There were no significant interior changes for 2009.

The Equinox Sport gets special gauges.

Rear-passenger legroom in the Equinox is excellent. The rear seat rides on a track that allows it to slide back and forth up to eight inches, to bring kids or briefcases closer to the front, or to provide extra legroom for tall second-row passengers. With both front and rear seats in the full rearward positions, there's more rear-passenger legroom in the Equinox than you'll find in many larger SUVs: a full 40.2 inches. With the rear seat completely forward, there's 35.7 cubic feet of cargo space behind it. But even with the seat pushed back into limousine position, there's still plenty of room for your stuff. GM calls this innovative feature the Multi-Flex rear seat.

Because the rear seatback is split 60/40, Equinox can transport two rear passengers along with long cargo items. The front passenger seat folds flat, further extending cargo room length, so you can lay a ladder or other objects inside. When folded, the hard front seatback can be used as a table or desktop.

Rear passengers enjoy a 12-volt power outlet and a fold-down center armrest with two additional cupholders.

Cubby storage: Up front, Equinox carries flexible net storage pockets on both sides of the center tunnel. The center console/armrest has a small storage cubby and a coin holder for toll money. Dual cupholders pop out of the end of it, but they're flimsy and get in the way of the handbrake. The armrest flips up, providing better access to an open floor console that's a perfect place for a purse, briefcase or tote bag. The floor-mounted cupholder works well, while slots farther to the rear hold CDs angled forward for easy selection.

The Sport interior is trimmed in dark ebony, with the requisite leather-wrapped steering wheel and more heavily bolstered front seats. All the practical flexibility of the regular Equinox remains, however.

OnStar offers interaction with live human beings who provide information and respond to questions. You can ask them for the location of the nearest Italian restaurant, for example. OnStar's Turn-by-Turn Navigation service lets the driver or passenger to talk to a live adviser, who sends complete step-by-step audio directions, as needed, that can be played through the vehicle's stereo speakers after the OnStar operator hangs up. The directions are triggered as needed by the OnStar system's GPS capabilities. This enables drivers to find their destination while keeping their hands on the wheel and eyes on the road. OnStar operators will dispatch rescue crews to the scene should your airbags deploy and you fail to respond to their calls, an excellent safety feature for you or your loved ones. OnStar always knows the location of your vehicle. Simply press the blue button and a human operator responds, to provide directions and other assistance. They can unlock your doors if you lock your keys inside. They can direct

you to the nearest gas station or help find a motel. If your vehicle is stolen, OnStar can pinpoint its location and direct the authorities to apprehend and recover.

XM Satellite Radio is especially when traveling cross-country because the stations don't change, offering 24-hour television news broadcasts (Fox News, CNN), sports, comedy, and city-specific traffic and weather.

## **Driving Impressions**

The 3.4-liter V6 used by the Chevy Equinox delivers good acceleration under most circumstances, and it's smooth enough. It feels strained when pushed at high rpm, however. When loaded down with people, you'll need to stand on the gas and rev it to merge onto the freeway or when towing a trailer. The Equinox is a big box for 210 pound-feet of torque.

The 3.4-liter V6 is an old, iron-block, pushrod-overhead-valve design that lacks modern features such as variable valve timing and variable-length intake runners, though it does feature hydraulic roller lifters, just like a Corvette. It's paired with a wide-ratio five-speed automatic that uses a direct 1:1 fifth gear for efficiency.

Fuel economy is EPA-rated at 17/24 mpg City/Highway.

The 3.4-liter V6 is aided considerably by the five-speed automatic transmission. Chevrolet says the Equinox can accelerate from 0 to 60 mph in about 8.5 seconds, which should be adequate performance for most. And while it may not excel at acceleration, the front-wheel-drive Equinox is rated to pull a 3500-pound trailer, the same as the more powerful Escape and RAV4 V6s.

The Sport model's 3.6-liter V6 is a modern, all-aluminum engine with double overhead cams and variable valve timing. It's smooth enough to drop in a Cadillac. With 264 horsepower it outmuscles the 3.4-liter by 80 horsepower and makes 40 lb-ft more torque and much earlier in the rev band.

You don't have to rev the 3.6-liter up as much to get going, but if you do, hold on. Coupled with a more advanced six-speed automatic the Sport is significantly quicker and smoother than the standard Equinox. And in practice it's no harder on gasoline consumption. However, the more advanced powertrain isn't cheap and plays a big part in the Sport's price premium over an LT.

The ride quality in the Equinox models is decent, a benefit of its long wheelbase and 3800-pound heft. This makes the Equinox a suitable companion for long trips. Its handling is responsive and it's easy to modulate the brakes for smooth stops.

The Sport model rides more firmly but reacts quicker and more precisely because of its firmer suspension and wider tires, but using forged alloy wheels minimizes the detraction from a smooth ride. The Sport seems a bit happier as people are added because the heavier engine and transmission add a few percentage points to the front of a car already nose-heavy and more people balance that out.

The Equinox has good road feel in highway driving, yet steering effort is lighter at low speeds for easier maneuvering in tight parking lots. The steering ratio is variable, and the Equinox uses electric, rather than hydraulic, power steering. We don't think the average driver will feel the difference between this system and more conventional hydraulics, and that's a good thing. Unlike a hydraulic servo, the electric booster doesn't use engine power, resulting in slightly better fuel economy.

Sport models, more inclined to be driven by people who will notice a difference in steering systems, use conventional hydraulic assist for the rack-and-pinion steering. The Sport delivers better steering feel than the regular Equinox (no doubt aided by the sports suspension and performance tires). The Sport needs

just 2.5 turns of the steering wheel to go from full left to full right where the standard car needs nearly 4 rotations. Both models need nearly 42 feet to affect a U-turn.

StabiliTrak electronic stability control helps drivers maintain control during sudden maneuvers or in low-traction conditions by using a comprehensive series of sensors to measure acceleration, deceleration, steering angle and yaw rate. The system steps in when the Equinox doesn't seem to be going where the driver intended. When that happens, StabiliTrak regains control by regulating acceleration or applying the brakes at individual wheels, a feat no driver can perform. Trailer sway control is built in to the system but doesn't replace a proper hitch setup. All-wheel drive improves stability on wet pavement, which makes it a valuable safety feature. The system sends the power to the front wheels in normal conditions on dry roads; it automatically transfers power to the rear wheels only if the front wheels slip.

Sport models have a much lower front lip and 1.3 inches less ground clearance than the others, so a little more care is required on steep driveway transitions, such as when entering an underground garage.

### **Summary**

The Chevy Equinox is larger than other compact SUVs. Its flexible interior design provides room for five full-size people and their gear, featuring a sliding second-row seat. Equinox comes standard with a V6 and, with an ongoing set of improvements, offers good value. The Equinox Sport is more responsive and more fun to drive with little impact to fuel economy.