

Cagey Performer

MARK ANDREWS

In the advert for the Senova, Nicholas Cage can be seen throwing the car around a test track whilst being pursued by two mystery assailants. The car is based on the old Saab 9-5 which BAIC bought the rights to back in 2009. Unlike SAIC, who bought the old Rover 75 then put it on sale two years later with limited changes as the Roewe 750, BAIC's progress has been much slower, but the result, launched in May, bares little semblance to the Saab.

Outwardly, the car is well put together and has a modern, slightly sporty, look. However, the twin chrome exhausts are actually fake, with a standard pipe hidden on the left side. Inside, the black leather seats with red-stitching add to the promise.

Equipment levels are very good for the class of car and price. All the usual



electric toys are included but there are also electrically adjustable seats for both driver and front passenger along with a heating and fan function. Coupled with the 8 inch touch screen infotainment system in our top of the range Luxury trim level, was a 12-speaker Bose sound system.

Safety is not neglected with six airbags including full side curtain on all models, except Comfort, along with active head restraints which move up and forwards in the event of a rear collision. There are three full rear seat belts and blind-spot detection via way of lights on the mirror; standard across the range.

Cruise controls are mounted on the left stalk with the lights being relegated to a dash-mounted dial. In a nod to the car's Saab heritage, there is a night panel switch located on the central console to dim the lighting of non-essential instruments. This, as in Saabs, is also the location of the engine stop/start button.



While the soft plastics on the top of the dashboard are good, the plastics around the central console are on the cheap side, and side pockets on the front doors are very flimsy. There is also an option for cream coloured seats and a split black and cream dash.

On the road, the car simply fails to live up to its sporty promise. We drove the 2.0 litre turbo version, although there is a 2.3 litre turbo also available. Despite the Saab heritage engine, the 2.0T does not deliver by modern standards and is hampered by the old school five-speed automatic gearbox. The result is a car that however you drive it – be it in sports mode or using the paddle shifts in manual – it fails to excite.

More positive is the handling. Thanks to the Saab platform, the car is sure-footed with limited body roll. Steering has a natural feel and a European weightiness to it. Many drivers will find the considerable height difference from the accelerator pedal to the brake uncomfortable and it certainly takes some getting used to. Surprisingly, there is no electric parking brake but an American style pedal operated one.

Cage can certainly drive angry in the commercial but we are left wondering how. We think it's unlikely that he will be shipping his over to Miami anytime soon, but if he chooses to drive it in Beijing, he will have a competent car with a high specification. For the rest of us, prices start at RMB 149,800 and go up to RMB 215,800.



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