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2003 Cadillac Escalade Provides Security and Luxury

Advertising Feature

Thursday DriveTime



BY DALE BUSS
AVANTI NEWS FEATURES

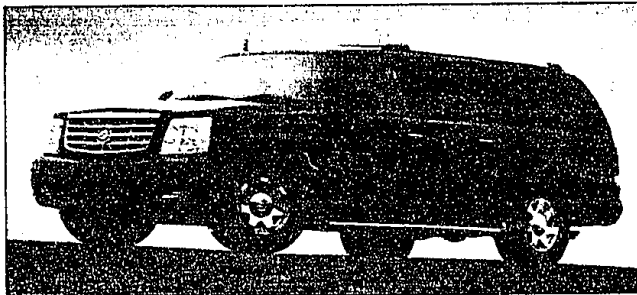
There's no better prospect than taking a Cadillac Escalade for a trip through the Upper Midwest when the snow is falling and winter winds are swifling. The eight passenger SUV is huge, high off the ground and sure-footed, and the feeling of security it provides driver and passengers is matched only by the 2003 Escalade's luxurious creature comforts.

That's the appeal good news. But along with the coddling and cocooning come some not-unexpected drawbacks as well: Escalade rides and handles too loosely; it gets atrocious mileage; and operating the vehicle's various accoutrements can be so complicated as to seem to require a co-pilot.

Listing at prices starting at \$50,795, Escalade is the two-year-old SUV entry for Cadillac, which once again is trying to recapture some of its past glory with an overhaul of its entire product lineup. Cadillac says that Escalade appeals to younger buyers, and it received the 2001 "Most appealing Luxury SUV" award from J.D. Power & Associates, a renowned evaluator of customer satisfaction with autos and auto makers.

No doubt the Escalade's cabin scored huge with consumers. The front, middle and rear seat levels each have their own climate controls, ensuring maximum comfort even for family members whose internal thermostats diverge widely. Heated mid-level seats that recline are a pleasant plus as well. One quibble: Heat for the middle seats emerges from the ceiling too close to the head of the right-side occupant.

On our family trip, the 2003 Escalade's vast entertainment options were a big hit. The optional Panasonic DVD system for mid-and-rear-seat passengers allowed my two teenagers to pass the hours quickly watching *Lord of the Rings*. The newly available XM Satellite Radio was an absolute delight: How many places can you find hour after hour of music from the tortured but significant Seventies, or a continuous program of fami-



2003 Cadillac Escalade is loaded with luxurious creature comforts.

ly-oriented humor from old Bill Cosby routines to snippets from *Law & Order*. We never even got to the point of playing a CD on the Escalade's Bose-equipped audio system—how nineties would that be?

Minor complaints about the interior include the fact that buttons and knobs bearing only icons are so numerous that they could overwhelm many drivers' ability to remember the associated functions. Instead, words of description with many switches would be a big help. And while Bulgari is certainly a gold-plated brand, placing one of its clocks on the center console seems redundant, with a large digital clock just a few inches away on the dashboard.

For 2003, in addition to making the cabin even more a den of comfort, Cadillac has improved Escalade's handling and performance. A new four-channel electronic-brake-control system replaces a three-channel hydraulic control, providing benefits such as more stable, controlled ABS stops—as illustrated by the necessity for quick braking on a snow-covered stretch of Interstate 94 recently near Jackson.

The robust six-liter Vortec 6000 engine in the all-wheel-drive version lends Escalade 345 horsepower, more than any other SUV, and remarkable pickup for such a huge vehicle. Another pleasant surprise is Escalade's turning ratio of just 39 feet, very tight for a mammoth SUV and handy when you're poorly navigating unfamiliar city streets.

The 2003 Escalade also features safety enhance-

ments including front-seat dual-level airbags for driver and passenger-sensing system so the airbag knows whether to deploy. Huge airbags on the side mirrors that blink along with front and rear turn signals are a useful touch. GM also has added power-adjustable feature to the brake and accelerator pedals for the new model year.

A striking advantage at night in Escalade is the high-intensity discharge headlamps, which drench the road ahead with simulated daylight; GM says Escalade is the only SUV to carry these lamps as a standard feature.

Yet, for all that functional aplomb, Escalade doesn't necessarily turn heads the way some of Caddy's new sedans do. It is boxy-looking and unremarkable, especially compared with some of its competition in the ultra-luxury niche. Escalade looks rakish only by contrast with plain-looking cousins such as GMC Yukon and Chevrolet Suburban.

Escalade doesn't display best-in-class handling either. It's a bit mushy and unresponsive. And while even large potholes on the rustic roads of Oakland Township are effectively damped by Escalade's cushy suspension, the ride overall seems more truck-like than it should.

With fuel efficiency on a 900-mile round trip to Wisconsin that averaged only about 15 miles a gallon even on the Interstate system, Escalade required way too many stops to refill its 26-gallon tank. But once the fuel-tank cap was back on, it sure was a nice vehicle to climb back into.

Write Dale at dalebuss@aol.com.

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A-PLAN 36 MO. LEASE REVENUE	ZERO DOWN	\$1800 DOWN	248 Taurus® Available
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A-PLAN 36 MO. LEASE REVENUE	ZERO DOWN	\$1000 DOWN	61 Ranger® Available
	\$226 ³² mo.	\$181 ¹⁷ mo.	

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Oxford white clearcoat, dark graphite cloth, AM/FM stereo, 10-speaker Bose® audio system, 4.2L EFI engine, elec 4-spk auto CD, PowerSteering, 10-speaker Bose® audio system, 10-speaker Bose® audio system, 10-speaker Bose® audio system, 10-speaker Bose® audio system. (Stock #13179) MSRP \$27,700

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A-PLAN 36 MO. LEASE REVENUE	ZERO DOWN	\$1800 DOWN	207 F-150® Available
	\$278 ¹⁴ mo.	\$231 ¹⁴ mo.	

2003 WINDSTAR LX

Light Parchment Gold, med. graphite cloth, elec. AM/FM stereo, 10-speaker Bose® audio system, 10-speaker Bose® audio system, 10-speaker Bose® audio system, 10-speaker Bose® audio system. (Stock #13180) MSRP \$17,000

\$19,276⁶⁸ OFF LEASE BUT

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A-PLAN 36 MO. LEASE REVENUE	ZERO DOWN	\$1600 DOWN	187 Windstar® Available
	\$315 ³⁰ mo.	\$314 ³¹ mo.	

2003 MUSTANG COUPE

Black on dk graphite cloth, 170-hp V6, 5-spk auto CD, 10-speaker Bose® audio system, 10-speaker Bose® audio system, 10-speaker Bose® audio system, 10-speaker Bose® audio system. (Stock #13181) MSRP \$22,400

\$15,990³⁶ OFF LEASE BUT

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A-PLAN 36 MO. LEASE REVENUE	ZERO DOWN	\$1600 DOWN	43 Mustang® Available
	\$300 ²⁵ mo.	\$257 ²³ mo.	

2003 EXPLORER XLS 4x2

2003 model year, Aspen green clearcoat, 10-speaker Bose® audio system, 10-speaker Bose® audio system, 10-speaker Bose® audio system, 10-speaker Bose® audio system. (Stock #13182) MSRP \$24,900

\$19,459⁵⁷ OFF LEASE BUT

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WINDSTAR	\$0	\$2000
TAURUS	\$0	\$2000
RANGER	\$0	\$2000
MUSTANG	\$0	\$2000
EXPLORER	\$0	\$2000
F-150	\$0	\$2000
EXPEDITION	\$0	\$2000

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