

# ARIZONA DRIVER

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MX-5

Mazda MX-5 Miata RF

VEHICLES • EQUIPMENT • TECHNOLOGY • PEOPLE • EVENTS • DESTINATIONS • ATTRACTIONS

# All heart.

The perfectly balanced retractable fastback version of this perennially popular sports car welcomes anything you can throw at it. by Joe Sage

We drove the Mazda MX-5 Miata PRHT—a power retractable hard top variant of the ever popular roadster—exactly three years ago, just before the car's third generation gave way to the fourth for its 25th anniversary. We noted then that the hard top provided several things—power (the soft top is manual, though quick and easy), security when parked, more soundproofing, added body rigidity and longer materials life. That PRHT added 82 pounds, with fuel mileage unchanged. Those 82 pounds also gave the already well-balanced roadster perfect 50/50 weight distribution.

Mazda now has a new scheme for the same mission: meet RF, the retractable fastback. This

adds 113 pounds to the car (with manual transmission, or 104 automatic), again achieving perfect 50/50 front/rear distribution (with manual; 51/49 with automatic), versus 53/47 for the soft top with either transmission.

We were glad to have scrutinized the specifications early in our week with the MX-5 Miata RF, as that 50/50 spec gave us mathematical affirmation of the superb handling we were experiencing.

The MX-5 Miata RF comes in two flavors: Club and Grand Touring, starting at \$31,555 for a manual transmission Club (a win-win-win for four-limb drivers: not only can you get a manual, and not only is this the one with perfect 50/50 weight distribution, but it's less expensive than the automatic—\$730 less on the Club, \$1205 less on Grand Touring). RF eschews the base Sport trim of the soft top Miata—which starts at just \$24,915, a \$6640 advantage for entry-to-entry soft versus RF comparison—though Club and Grand Touring models differ by just \$2755 and \$2555 from soft top to RF.

The RF also adds a 4.6-inch color LCD with compass, drive information and an entertaining real-time roof operation graphic. The RF offers one color

all its own, a luminescent Machine Gray, though it's darn hard to beat the signature Soul Red of our test sample (either paint is just \$300).

Starting at Club level gives the MX-5 Miata RF such inclusions as sport-tuned suspension with Bilstein dampers, shock tower brace, limited slip differential and induction sound enhancement (those for manual only); 17-inch gunmetal alloy wheels and high-performance tires; front air dam and rear lip spoiler; piano black seat back bar trim; Bose 9-speaker audio with headrest speakers; Mazda Connect® color touchscreen infotainment; upgraded door trim and handles; blind spot monitoring; and rear cross traffic alert.

The manual shift Club has so many features, it's just \$1065 more to move to Grand Touring—which actually makes a strong case for going with either one. Moving from auto-shift Club to Grand Touring adds \$1540. Grand Touring adds noise insulation, automatic climate, heated seats, body-color heated side mirrors (auto-dim on driver's side and inside mirrors), rain-sensing wipers, auto on/off headlights, dark silver wheels, lane departure warning, alarm and a few other details.



Some retractable hardtops gobble up the entire trunk when the top is down. Some just part of it. The new #Mazda MX-5 #Miata RF's top does not take up any at all. (There's a difference of 11/100ths of a cubic foot, same up or down, presumably from a tiny volume for a motor or strut or something... totally negligible.)

The RF's top is a one-button operation, under 15 seconds up or down (and operable up to 6 mph). Its motor reduces trunk space negligibly, from 4.59 cu.ft. in the soft top to 4.48 in the RF, while the stowing of the dropped top does not intrude upon the trunk whatsoever. The buttresses may look like a roll bar, but they in fact separate from the body during retraction. Rollover protection comes from behind-the-seat hoops as on the soft top. Rear glass stows as part of the drop, for a flow-through open air experience, unlike a targa or T-top. The soft top Miata has that totally open car feel when down, but in online debate, some drivers suggest the RF when open feels more spacious to them.

To say we enjoyed our week with the Mazda MX-5 Miata RF would be an understatement. Its ride is sports car firm and responsive, and you have to feel the 50/50 balance to fully appreciate what the numbers imply (beating even the mid-engine Porsche Boxster's ratio). The shifter is per-

fectly gated for a sure and easy intuitive click as intended, with eyes on the road (a rarity).

It's not only the kind of car we don't want to give up, but, at least in theory, if you could own just one vehicle, you might be willing to give up your pickup truck or four-door's utility for just this.

The Mazda MX-5 Miata RF is an updated, upgraded version of the basic formula Miata has delivered since day one—a fun, affordable, stylish and not overly-spec'ed sports car. Features, yes; killer horsepower and other things that just add weight, no. The philosophy is more in line with the classic sports cars of the '50s and '60s, but built with fully modern features—and quality control. If they had made them like this then, and were not making this one now, you would happily pay a substantial price for a showroom perfect classic at auction today. Instead, you can just go buy a brand new Mazda MX-5 Miata from under \$25,000 to this line-topping RF at just over \$30 grand. ■

## SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	.....SKYACTIV-G 2.0L DOHC 4-cyl
HP/TORQUE	.....155 hp / 148 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	.....6-spd manual
DRIVETRAIN	.....RWD
BRAKES	.....F: 11-in vented, single-piston; R: 11-in solid single-piston, alum calipers
STEERING	.....double-pinion elec power assist
SUSPENSION	.....F: double wishbone w/ aluminum arms & monotube dampers R: multilink w/aluminum bearing support & monotube dampers
WHEELS/TIRES	.....17" alloy / P205/45R17 high-po
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....154.1 in / 90.9 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....30.8 cu.ft
CARGO VOLUME	.....4.48 cu.ft
WEIGHT / DISTRIB	.....2445 lb / 50/50
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....min 87/ rec 91 / 11.89 gal
MPG	.....26/33/29 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	.....\$32,620
INCLUDES:	Leather-trimmed seats and wheel w/control buttons, power locks/windows, power top, wind blocker, rain sense wipers, blind spot & rear cross traffic alert, lane depart warn, 7" touchscreen, nav, Bluetooth, Bose 9-speaker audio, auto A/C, alarm/immobilizer, much more
SOUL RED METALLIC PAINT	.....300
KEYLESS ENTRY SYSTEM	.....130
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....835
TOTAL	.....\$33,885

