

If you've got a niche, scratch it

by JOE SAGE

Simple as can be, in its basic form, the Mazda MX-5 Miata comes in fully twelve builds. Of these, eight are Grand Touring variants (itself one of four trims). Other variables include a 6-speed manual or 6-speed automatic, traditional soft top or RF (Retractable Fastback hardtop convertible), and with or without Tan Leather (see sidebar).

Mazda Miata (officially Mazda MX-5 Miata and at one brief point just MX-5) is an eternal favorite. A classic. (Originally a modern interpretation of the classics, it has now been with us long enough to be a classic in its own right.)

Our sample driven here is near the base level, great for the pure experience—a second-step-up Club 6MT soft top, bearing the glorious manual transmission and ragtop, a classic Miata through and through. Though close to one end of the list, at \$33,030 it is actually mid-lineup. To maximize the car's presence and credentials, ours came in Mazda's unmatched Soul Red Crystal paint.

It is said that "MIATA" stands for "Miata Is Al-

ways The Answer." While that always resonates in background, and we have driven many a Miata and enjoyed it, we did look at some details anew.

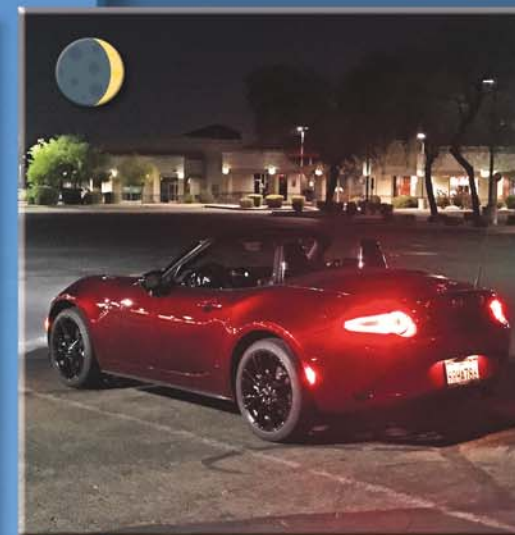
Timing is everything, and—unlike most normal places—summer is seldom convertible season in the Sonoran Desert. We had our soft top Miata in mid-August, during a stretch of 118-degree heat. A few days on the open road at cooler altitude could have been great, but that was not in the cards.

So hop in. While lowering and raising the top is a super quick, one-handed (if shoulder-torquing awkward) action—so fast, you won't even time it—the heart of summertime here means top-up, at least while the sun is out. In fact, it was hard to effectively cool the interior (a highly manual HVAC setup does offer maximum control) even with the thin, black fabric top up. Not the best timing.

Then again, there is always the RF hardtop. This has a very different style and feel, not as loose and free-spirited, but it is surely easier to cool during the daytime, with the cabin solidly closed.

Going nocturnal was really our only way to enjoy top-down in that heat. It was still 104° at 1:30 am, but it felt great once out of the direct solar oven.

We had been asked about Miata's suitability for a tall person, which we conveniently are. While any low car is a little harder for entry, you can easily reach in and lower the top before stepping in, and then it's easy. Little long-hooded roadsters often surprise people with their legroom, once seated. Miata is pretty good here, not extreme, its 43.1 inches not that different from an above average sedan. The fact that the seat surface itself is lower to the ground affects fit, however, as it takes a few tries to get (tall) leg action just right for clutch operation. All this basically just comes with the territory. What was a bit tougher, tough, was pedal space, as we also have big feet (size 13, usually). The three pedals are in a tight enough footwell to overlap your shoes at a critical moment, for which we were constantly trying to reposition our heels farther back between shifts, in preparation.



The message is as you would expect—you will want to try the car on for size, and if driving shoes might be the answer, bring those along. But don't forget, you WILL no doubt fine-tune your position over more time, and it will likely end up just fine.

Lower power and smaller size can both be noticeable on the mean freeways in town. Time and miles on a beautiful open two-lane can erase such feelings (though road tripping storage is limited).

Such details, though, are really only secondary. Universal purpose is seldom the realm of the most compelling vehicles. Clearly a bit of a niche vehicle—in many cases likely a second or even third car—Miata is better thought of as mission-specific. It's sporty, affordable and fun. You may think of other things that fit that formula. But given its classic style and format, Mazda Miata is still (and perhaps forevermore will be) a one of a kind. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Hiroshima, Japan
ENGINE/TRANS BUILD	.....Japan / Japan
PARTS CONTENT	.....Japan 85% / US/Can 0%
BUILD	.....monocoque unibody w backbone frame construction, front & rear suspension subframes
ENGINE	.....SKYACTIV-G 2.0L DOHC 16v 4-cyl, chain-driven DOHC, var intake valve timing (VVT), alum/alum, alum powerplant frame, enhanced engine response, single exhaust dual outlets, induction sound enhance
HP/TORQUE	.....181 hp / 151 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....13.0:1
TRANSMISSION	.....6-spd manual
DRIVETRAIN	.....RWD, torque-sensing asymmetric limited slip diff
SUSPENSION	.....F: dbl wishbone; R: multilink; monotube shocks (Bilstein on Club trim)
STEERING	.....rack & pinion, elec pwr assist
BRAKES	.....F: 11-in vented, single-piston; R: 11-in solid, single-piston alum
WHEELS	.....(Club & higher) 17x7 aluminum
TIRES	.....P205/45 R17 high-perf summer
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....154.1 / 90.9 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....(Club & higher) 5.32 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....30.8 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....(soft top) 37.4 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....43.1 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....(soft top) 4.59 cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....(soft top, 6MT) 2366 lb
WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION	.....(soft top, 6MT) 53:47
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....87 ok, prem rec / 11.89 gal
MPG	.....26/34/29 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	.....\$32,830
PAINT: Soul Red Crystal	.....595
APPEARANCE PKG FOR CLUB: front air dam, rear lip spoiler	.....incl
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1185

TOTAL\$34,610
Note: sticker price varies from info below.

2025 MAZDA MX-5 LINEUP

	.....Soft Top	.....RF
Sport 6MT	.....\$29,530-
Club 6MT	.....\$33,030	.....\$40,850
Brembo/BBS/Recaro Pkg	.....+4,900	.....(incl)
Grand Touring 6MT	.....34,830	.....37,550
Tan Nappa Leather	.....+300	.....+300
Grand Touring 6AT	.....35,750	.....38,520
Tan Nappa Leather	.....+300	.....+300