



Mazda 6 SportBreak (2002 - 2008)

Hit for six

Car review | Why a test of the Mazda6? After all, the car has already been on the market since 2002. On the face of it a test at this time has no novelty value. However, there are two good reasons to take the Mazda6 out for a spin once more. The first is a radical facelift. This doesn't only consist of the usual changes to the exterior but it has also changed the road holding qualities for the better. Moreover, the Mazda6 is still our favourite in its category and therefore it is a pleasure to put the car through its paces again.

Large business cars are available in roughly two flavours: comfortable or sporty. Marketing departments of almost all car makes add the "sporty" label to any car that you can think of. Only a handful of cars are truly worthy of the title. These are mostly rear-wheel drive fun machines with a price tag that is a lot less funny.

The Mazda6 has always been an exception. The car has no special technology on board, has front-wheel drive, has a modest price tag and still offers cart-loads of driving pleasure. The lively character of the engine, the feel of the car through the steering wheel, the responsiveness of the brakes and of course the road holding (also in the rain!): they have all been tuned in a way that makes every drive in the Mazda6 a pleasure.



Sporty

The secret of the Mazda6 can not be explained in all the individual features. It is particularly the bringing together of all the different parts, from hub-cap to headrest, that determines its character. The driver

isn't invited to lazily lounge back behind the wheel but the Mazda-driver automatically sits up straight behind the wheel in full control of the car. This way the steering wheel and the gear stick are perfectly aligned. Through the steering wheel it is obvious what is going on under the front wheels. Even the gear stick gives a subtle hint of the forces that go from the transmission to the wheels. The result is a car that feels very different from the average business car.

The facelift hasn't taken anything off the driving experience but it has made the "6" more comfortable. Where possible, extra insulation has been fitted to reduce driving noises. Extra rubbers in the suspension prevent unwelcome vibrations being passed on. The feeling that these changes provide takes the car to a higher level. That is also thanks to the more affluent equipment. From the basic model up the Mazda6 is now equipped with air-conditioning, a steering wheel that is adjustable in height and distance to the driver, an audio system (no mp3), an on-board computer and cruise-control.



Technology

The engines have become more powerful and at the same time cleaner and/or more economical. The diesel engines have benefited most from the changes. The test vehicle however has the smallest petrol engine in the range. The 1.8-litre 4-cylinder has not changed. Still, the car acts differently from its first introduction. The first few miles the engine ran very irregularly but even before the cause of the problem

was discovered it seemed to solve itself. After that the typical Mazda Zoom-Zoom feeling was back completely. Mazda said never to have experienced this problem and during the following test days the engine behaved exemplarily.



Especially for a basic engine this 1.8 performs quite rewardingly. This is partly because of a well-chosen gearbox ratio. The engine is almost automatically kept in the revolutions range where it provides the most power.

Furthermore, the car has a fast feel to it and it is the driver's perception that there is an enormous reserve. Only when exceeding 60 mph it becomes apparent that this is not quite a muscle man. The car takes its time to get from 60 to 80 mph. Overtaking on the motorway requires changing down a gear. Once up to speed the gearbox ratio again has been chosen well: in fifth gear the number of revolutions is low, which makes travelling very comfortable.

Looks

Apart from the adjustments to the equipment and technology, its looks have literally benefited from the facelift. New materials have been used for the side panels and the dashboard. The silver coloured central console has been replaced by a black one; this is not a real improvement but at best a change.

What remains is the considerable luggage space of this SportBreak in which the so-called "Karakuri"-system makes folding the backseat very easy. On the contrary to the Mazda5 this system isn't used to create extra seating. Instead, "Karakuri" makes it possible to fold the backseat in one single movement. One push on the handle is sufficient where-after a spring lays the backrest flat. The

headrests can stay in place, which makes it very easy to create extra luggage space. The boot is so big that the SportBreak is more than an image-car but in this category there are estate cars that are considerably larger. Beneath the floor is a few useful "hidden" compartments to be found.



To the exterior of the car the facelift is limited to new headlights, different bumpers and an adjusted grille. These are all extremely subtle changes that only really become clear when the test vehicle is parked next to the "old" Mazda6. Why such little changes? According to Mazda this is because research amongst Mazda6-drivers showed that they were a 100% satisfied with the exterior.

Conclusion

During the test period the Mazda6 has been able to prove itself in all imaginable ways. Planned test drives with photo shoots are standard, but added to that were rushed journeys to and from airports, moving house parties because there finally was another estate car at the editors and many different appointments in and around the country. And every time the difference with other business cars was obvious from the first miles: the Mazda6 provides more driving pleasure in many different ways without forgetting comfort or safety.

This estate model, or "SportBreak" how Mazda calls it, is very practical. The "Karakuri"-system is least of all revolutionary, but it does make life a lot easier. The final verdict therefore is a lot more than 6 out of

10. Maybe the facelift was unnecessary, but the test drive proved that the Mazda6 is still our favourite in its class. ■



Specifications

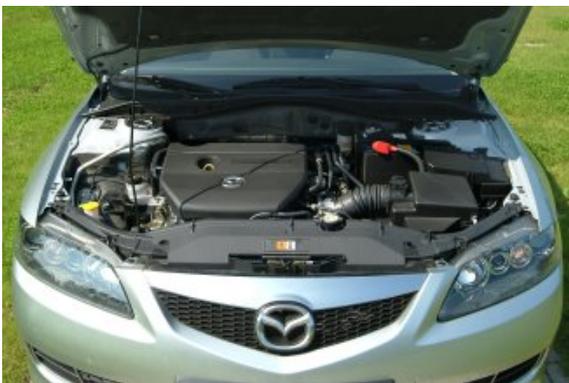
Mazda 6 SportBreak (2002 - 2008) 1.8i TS 5d

Size and weight



Length x width x height	467 x 178 x 144 cm
Wheelbase	268 cm
Kerb weight	1.245 kg
Trailer	unknown
Trailer - braked	unknown
Fuel capacity	64 l
Luggage space	500 l
Tyre size	

Engine and performance



Capacity	1798 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/4
Max power	120 PS @ 5500 rpm
Max torque	165 Nm @ 4300 rpm
Drive	front wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	10.7 secs
Top speed	197 km/h
Average mileage	8 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	INF l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	INF l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	unknown

Price

Price	Â£ 15,180
Price base model	Â£ 14,180