



Mazda MX-5

Dreams come true

Review | Real petrolheads are easy to recognise. They talk about cars all day and they dream about that one unreachable sports car during the night. Lacking the necessary financial means, that dream car will remain a dream. Smart petrolheads are also easy to recognise: they drive a Mazda MX-5. If they have something to wish for, it's a new MX-5.

The Mazda MX-5: a dream machine? No way! A dream car is a fire breathing, mighty monster on wheels by an exotic carmaker. A dream machine boasts hundreds of horsepower and impressive looks to match.

The MX-5 on the other hand, is a compact, modest Japanese runabout. At least, that's how it seems. But for starters, the MX-5 is a convertible and that makes it more fun from the get-go. And the MX-5 is a "roadster", which means emphasis is on sheer driving pleasure.



Convertible

The MX-5 driver doesn't hide under a metal top. Instead, the MX-5 has a basic drop cloth which can literally be opened in one move (and with one hand). Officially, this has to be done when the car is stationary. While Mazda will never admit it, the construction has been tested thoroughly so that it won't break down when one "forgets" to stop the car before opening the roof occasionally.

The new MX-5 is shorter (-8 cm) than previous generations. That makes the car lighter and more manoeuvrable, but for tall drivers the new MX-5 is now less suitable. As a general rule: if the headrest sticks above the driver's head, the MX-5 will be highly uncomfortable at speeds above 60 mph. With the roof closed, tall drivers have to twist their necks to fit. To make matters worse: the bottles in the cup holder may poke their armpits.

To save weight, Mazda opts for a basic roof which means wind and other outside noises are clearly audible in the car; even with the roof closed.



The passenger has an extra problem. The catalytic converter is mounted in the centre console. It takes up valuable legroom and the heat from the catalytic converter can be felt around the knees.

Again, Mazda has a good reason for this design: the closer a catalytic converter is mounted to the engine, the more effective it is. So by locating it almost in the cabin, a smaller unit sufficed, making the car lighter still.



Storage space in the cabin is minimal. There's no glove box, nor do the doors have any pockets. The biggest "storage spaces" are tiny cubbies behind the seats which are just big enough for sunglasses and a phone. Thanks to the simple construction of the roof, the boot measures 130 litres (enough for two small trolleys) whether the roof is closed or not.

Trim levels

When it comes to safety and creature comfort, Mazda didn't economise. The MX-5 should be fun to drive every day, not just on that one sunny holiday.



That's why the MX-5 has keyless entry, climate control

and the mandatory audio and satnav unit. To enjoy music with the top down, speakers have been mounted in the headrests. Therefore, the sound is powerful, but not natural at all.

Safety is improved by blind spot detection, lane keeping assist and automatic high beam.



Handling

It takes about one corner to understand why Mazda make such an effort in reducing the weight of the car. The new MX-5 ("generation ND") is agile, dynamic and almost perfectly balanced. Despite the power steering and other electronic driver's aids, the communication between driver and mechanics is sublime.

The expression has been over used, but the MX-5 is the type of car one doesn't get into but one puts on. The cabin is cosy and the occupants sit low and exactly in the centre of the car. Do note the paintwork which extends into the car. By doing this, Mazda has reduced the distance between the inside and the outside.

The underpinning isn't rock hard like in a sports car, but it is firm and responsive. Steering is light, yet direct. Just like with a pure-bred sports car, the MX-5 comes alive with the sporty driving style. At the same time, this roadster isn't tiring to drive on long distances, so it can be used daily. Despite the lightweight body and the absence of a roof, the bodywork is perfectly rigid.



Engines

The MX-5 is available with two engines: a 1.5 and a 2.0-litre petrol engine. Both have four cylinders and are naturally aspirated. According to Mazda turbos and such are too artificial and disturb the pure feeling of the car. Also, a turbo engine is said to peak too soon, while a naturally aspirated engine gives a lengthier thrill.

Despite the chosen engine, its power is transferred to the rear wheels. In that way the feeling in the steering wheel isn't affected by the torque of the engine. The clutch is short and bites hard. The extremely short gear lever makes it easy to shift gears quickly and exactly. These things might seem like details, but together they make the MX-5 feel just right.

The 2.0-litre engine develops 160 PS / 200 Nm, which is more than enough for the 1,090 kg weighing car. In theory, the maximum output is only available at very high engine speeds, but in real life the "2.0 SkyActiv-G" is always smooth and torque strong.

Only when the car is really provoked, the MX-5 shows a mean side. Those who really want, can make the rear step aside. Even with the electronic stability programme (ESP) turned on, the MX-5 still allows some oversteer (sliding of the rear wheels). When driving calmly, the MX-5 will never surprise its driver.



The 1.5-litre engine seems less powerful (131 PS / 150 Nm), but in fact it's more fun than its bigger brother. Thanks to the more lively disposition and more exciting exhaust noise, it inspires the driver to go faster still. It's only at high speeds (above 60 mph) that the smaller engine is a bit less convincing, but because

of the huge price gap the bigger engine isn't worth the extra money. Because the smaller engine has to work harder, it isn't more economic than the bigger engine.

Compared to a "real" sports car the MX-5 isn't as fast, but thanks to the pure character it is just as much fun. The real difference is of course in the price, because this is a dream that can come true!



Conclusion

The first MX-5 from 1988 was meant as a fun car for the average man. In due time the MX-5 grew bigger, became more comfortable and thereby less fun. With this fourth generation, Mazda went back to basics.

Everything was done to make the car lighter, without affecting safety or creature comforts. Only for tall drivers this is bad news: they hardly fit in and that can be a serious deal-breaker.

Thanks to its compact size, the new MX-5 is notably more dynamic. Thanks to the low weight, performance has improved as well. Also important: the communication between driver and mechanics is sublime. The new MX-5 even looks better than ever before. And aren't those all features of a dream car? ■



Specifications

Mazda MX-5 SkyActiv-G 131 Sport

Size and weight

Length x width x height	392 x 174 x 129 cm
Wheelbase	231 cm
weight	1.050 kg
Trailer	unknown
Trailer - braked	unknown
Fuel capacity	45 l
Luggage space	130 l
Tyre size	190/50R16

Engine and performance



Capacity	1496 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/4
Max power	131 PS @ 7000 rpm
Max torque	150 Nm @ 4800 rpm
Drive	Rear wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	8.3 secs
topspeed	204 km/h
Average mileage	6 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	7.9 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	4.9 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	139 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 21,845
Price base model	Â£ 18,495