Mazda MX-5

Featuring 1.8iS

SCORECARD

Overtaking / pulling power
●●●●○

Fuel economy
●●●○○

Handling / steering
●●●●○

Comfort / ease of control
●●●●○

Interior space / practicality
●●●○○

Accident / injury avoidance
●●●●○

Costs in service
●●●○○

Depreciation prospects
●●●●○

WHEN MODERN SAFETY AND EMISSIONS rules seemed to have killed off classic sixties sports cars like the Lotus Elan, Triumph Spitfire and MGB, it took an adventurous Mazda to show that affordable drop-top two-seaters needn't be a thing of the past.

Launched in 1990, the MX-5 marked the rebirth of the classic open two-seater. It encapsulates all the feel and spirit of a classic British roadster, yet offers bang up to date handling, safety features and refinement, but above all, reliability.

The MX-5 enjoyed a near monopoly for several years, and its increasing popularity eventually persuaded other makers to re-introduce sports cars of their own. But to keep newer rivals like the Fiat Barchetta, BMW Z3 and the MGF at bay, Mazda gave the MX-5 a cautious update around the middle of 1998.

The new version retains all the feel and flavour of its predecessor, but is stiffer, faster and better equipped, yet barely any heavier. Sadly, the trademark "pop-up" headlamps and chrome door handles have gone, but the former zip-out rear window is now a proper (albeit now fixed) heated glass pane. The softer sprung, more firmly damped body rides better than ever and the steering's a shade quicker, while a bigger, more usefully shaped boot now comfortably swallows weekend luggage, if not a set of golf clubs.

Dynamically, the MX-5 delights as much as ever, with its racy pace, taut handling, compliant ride and wind-in-the-hair motoring taking twenty years off your age before you get to the end of the road. The heater works well, creature comforts get more of a look in and, as before, the snug, draught-free hood can be raised or lowered in a trice.

On top of all this there's a three-year/60,000-mile warranty, reasonable (group 11-13) insurance, 30-plus mpg economy and undemanding ownership. And despite increasing availability on used-car forecourts, genuine, well cared for MX-5s still retain their value better than most.

Parts prices can be a bit steep, and beware of the near-identical (but unofficial import) Eunos roadster if contemplating secondhand purchase. New or used, though,

HOW THE MX-5 COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes† best stop (m/kg)	Maximum legroom - front (cm)	Typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	Steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
MAZDA MX-5 1.8iS	**1839/140**	**3560**	**8.1**	**21.4/14.7**	**32½**	**25/20**	**110**	**N/A**	**2.7/9.6**	**398**
Alfa Romeo 156 2.0 Twin Spark 4-dr	1970/155	3310	7.8	22.6/15.7	31	26/22	106	95/76	2.2/11.4	443
Audi A3 1.6 3-dr	1595/101	3520	10.0	21.6/15.9	36	25/16	110	95/68	3.0/10.4	415
Ford Puma 1.7 16v 3-dr	1679/123	3565	8.6	18.9/13.2	37	24½/32	109	95/67	2.8/10.3	398
Peugeot 206 2.0 GTi 3-dr	1997/137	3430	7.2	16.7/12.4	35	25/20	108	94/66	3.1/10.8	384
Subaru Impreza 2.0 turbo 4WD 5-dr	1994/215	2890	5.2	19.7/10.8	23	25/22	108	95/67	2.8/10.9	434
						† all with ABS			(p) all power-assisted	

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS	1.4	3.1	5.3	8.1	
IN 5TH GEAR	5.0	9.9	15.3	21.4	
IN 4TH GEAR	3.5	7.1	10.9	14.7	

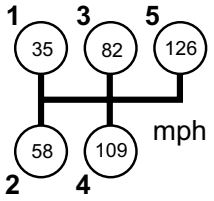
20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES	10.2/7.2	10.3/7.4	9.9/7.1	11.5/7.	

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st 2nd 3rd	4th	5th
	6850*	6850*	6410

** for best acceleration*

Gearing gives 19.7mph per 1000rpm in top gear = 3560rpm at 70mph



FUEL CONSUMPTION

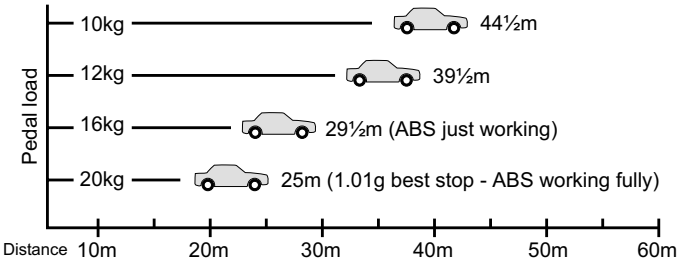
Fuel grade: unleaded Premium, 95 octane	
Type of use - air conditioning off*	**mpg**
In the city - heavy traffic	19
In the country - quiet driving	45
Typical mpg overall	**32½**
Realistic tank range† miles	42 litres/300

**with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2–4% in winter and 4–8% in summer*

BRAKES

Pedal feel ●●●●○	Behaviour in an emergency ●●●●○	Handbrake ●●●○○

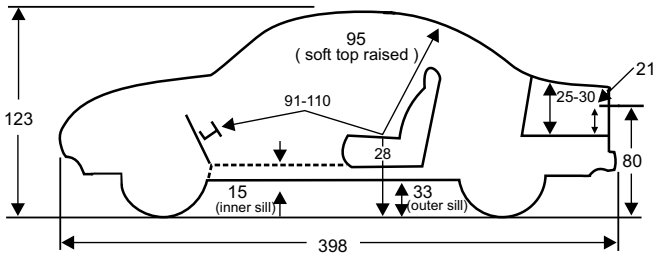
Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with standard ABS)
(A good-to-average best stop is about 26m at 15-20kg pedal load)

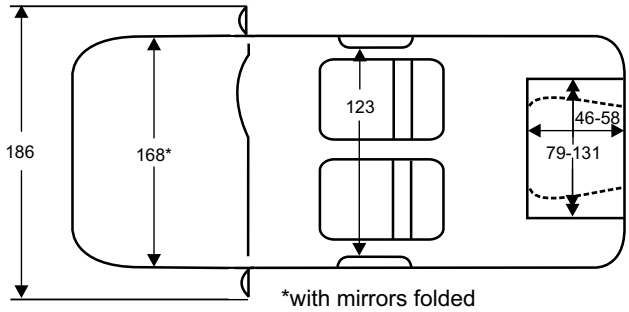


Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/75g) stop:
13kg at start of test, 14kg at end of test *(Ideal brakes show no change)*

MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres — Two-seater





*with mirrors folded

LIKES AND GRIPES

Classic, low-slung sports roadster "feel"	...	but climbing aboard not for the aged or infirm
Cosy and functional interior sets just the right tone	...	but restyling loses some of original's compact simplicity
Faultless, hood, now has a heated rear glass	...	but pity its zip-out convenience has been lost
Open-top appeal, combined with everyday safety, practicality and refinement	...	but strict two-seater nature confines appeal mainly to singles, "dinkies" and empty-nesters
Virtually everything	...	apart from 1.8iS looking a bit pricey, very few

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