

FIRST
DRIVE

Mazda Premacy



YOU NEED A KEEN EYE TO SPOT the changes to Mazda's facelifted mid-sized MPV. There's a revised grille and a reshaped nose up front, while at the back, restyled lamp clusters grace its flanks. Inside, seat shaping has been revised and trim fabrics have been upgraded. End of story – well, visually anyway. There is, in fact, now a two-litre Sport version with front and rear air dams, side skirts and 16in alloy wheels with 50-Series tyres.

This new(er) model is powered by the most significant addition to the range – the 130bhp twin-cam two-litre engine from the 626. It's both flexible at low speed and a willing revver with a sporty note (bordering on the noisy) when pressed. Nevertheless, it's perked up the Premacy's performance to put it more on a par with 1.8-litre versions of the Scenic and Zafira.

Mind you, Mazda's own 1.8 engine continues to be a worthy, willing motor that's only 1.2sec slower from 0 to 62mph than the two-litre, but just 1.1mpg better in overall fuel consumption. In contrast, the non-common rail 2.0 turbo-diesel is good for an average 44mpg, but isn't the most refined of derv-burners – combustion harshness prevails. It's smooth and pretty lively with it, though, with pulling power coming on really strong at 2200rpm.

A stiffer bodyshell and revisions to the suspension result in tidy handling and a compliant ride that doesn't deteriorate with a full load. There is, however, a certain vagueness in the steering on the two-litre. The less extravagantly tyred 1.8 turbo-diesel feels more responsive to the helm.

Despite none too generous adjustments to seat and wheel, there's little to complain about with the car-like driving position. Clear all-round vision, bold instruments, well-placed major controls and an easy, accurate gearchange all play their part, too. A central panel contains convenient controls for the standard air conditioning and the audio system that can also be controlled from the steering wheel.

You will, however, look in vain for many of the Scenic's numerous storage areas and cubby holes or the Zafira's brilliant back-seat folding arrangement. Here, the three non-adjustable back seats (they don't slide or recline) double-fold forwards to extend the load space or lift out individually to open up a spacious, easy-to-load cargo area.

With five up, the outer rear passengers are too close to the hard door armrests. However, they sit high, with kneeroom and leg-stretching space comfortably similar to the class average, and with plenty of headroom all round.

VERDICT

These latest changes have made subtle improvements to Mazda's low-key, self-effacing Premacy, but haven't worked any magic. The impressive two-litre engine has given performance a boost, of course, but otherwise, it's pretty much the inoffensive mixture as before. It's a worthy five-seat family holdall that's strong on build quality, reliability and durability, but still short on sparkle and innovation.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Controls/displays	☆☆☆☆
Handling/steering	☆☆☆☆
Comfort	☆☆☆☆
Space/practicality	☆☆☆☆

THE PREMACY RANGE

size and type lower medium (mid-priced) MPV – 5 seats

trim levels GXi (1.8/2.0 diesel); GSi, Sport (2.0)

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.8 litre/99bhp, 4/2.0/129; diesel: 4/2.0/99

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (4-speed stepped automatic optional on 2.0GSi only)

notable features traction control (not diesel), roof rails, aldehyde air filter, temporary spare wheel, rear dark tinted glass (Sport), dynamic stability control (Sport), climate control (GSi/Sport)

VITAL STATISTICS (cm)

length x width (folded mirrors)	434 x 170
front – legroom	85–107
– av headroom (no sunroof)	105
rear – typical legroom	101
– typical kneeroom	72
– headroom	94
– hiproom	132
load space (all seats in use)	
(litres/cu ft)	410/14.5
load length (seats up/folded/out)	93/140/173
load width	98–130
load sill height (inside/outside)	3/59
boot/load aperture height	45/93

LIKES ...

low wind and road noise
five proper belts and head restraints
handy seatback tables with cup holes
reassurance of Mazda reliability

and GRIPES

front bumper rubbing strips deleted
poor wiper sweep for front passenger
suspension turrets reduce load width
"Sport" means mainly cosmetic changes