

# MAZDA MX-5 1.5

By Jim Mc Cauley

Soft, round and adorable were part of the success of Mazda's long-running multi-award winning MX-5. But now the latest 2016 model has sharpened its appearance with more angular and assertive body styling in an overall form that is shorter, lower and wider than the previous model.



Although there are five trim levels on offer, the power choice is between just two engines and it was the smaller 1.5 litre unit that was the test vehicle choice. This 131PS engine offers a higher output than the outgoing 1.8 litre MX-5 while at the same time providing better fuel economy and lower emissions.

Driving the rear wheels through its 6-speed manual gearbox, the engine is red-lined at 7,000rpm and records its 0-62mph time in 8.3 seconds with the potential to top out at 127 mph. Against this, the 2.0 litre engine shaves just one second off the initial sprint time while gaining 6mph in overall top speed.

The engine snarls through the gears giving the impression that it is giving more than it is actually offering, but you are not short changed and the 1.5 litre engine responds beautifully, allowing the driver to take it to the red line to gain the required pace. The star in the process is the manual gear change with the superbly engineered precision of each shift adding to the quality feel of the car. Although the suspension set-up and tyre choice in the 2.0 litre model is overall firmer, I still felt that the set-up on the 1.5 litre car could be a little softer to better balance its response in line with the engine's power output. Whether this would also affect road noise intrusion remains to be seen, but while road noise on the test car could be lived with on shorter journeys, I found the rear tyre noise over a 150 mile round trip tiring, particularly so on coarser surfaces. However, the car is enjoyable to drive and the cabin in other respects is well insulated with regards to wind noise and front tyre noise.

With regards to manoeuvring, the steering poses no weight problems at lower speeds, and although the three-quarters rear view is restricted because of the nature of the hood, reversing sensors on the test vehicle helped to confirm that all was safe.

Accommodation-wise, the cabin is snug and would need to be tried for size by anyone over six feet tall to see if their limbs can be appropriately packaged. But for weekends away, the boot can now hold two approved size flight cases while the cabin has a lockable bin between the seat backs.

On the top 'Sport Nav' trim of the test car, the cabin was tastefully finished in black leather with red stitching detail on the seats, dash, manual handbrake and steering wheel. Door cappings in body colour add to the flow of the body lines, and the car looks good from any angle.

In this top level specification, the MX-5 comes well equipped with tyre pressure monitoring, lane departure warning, cruise control, heated seats and automatic lights and wipers. Twin front and side airbags are also standard with the seat mounted side airbags extending upwards on deployment to offer head protection. Available as an extra is the £350 safety pack which includes automatic headlight dipping and blind spot monitoring.



With regards to running costs, the car recorded 42.3mpg over a week's mixed driving, achieving an excellent 90% against the official combined figure of 47.1mpg. With a CO2 emissions of 139gms/km, the car is in Band E for annual car tax of £130.

While pricing of the MX-5 range opens at £18,495, the range topping 1.5 litre model in 'Sport Nav' trim is listed at £22,445 and is in Group 26E for insurance purposes. For business users, the model enjoys a BIK rating of 22%.