

MAZDA3 120PS

By Jim Mc Cauley

Mazda has asserted its design excellence in the new Mazda3 range which endows the practicality of a mid-range 5-seater hatchback with a rare example from any manufacturer of the body beautiful. With a straight line nowhere to be seen, the new Mazda3 teases the eye to follow its many curves

and marvel at the tension with which they envelope the form.

Available in a wide choice of engine options, trim levels and two bodystyles, test choice was the 2.0 litre petrol model finished in top Sport Nav specification. Slip into the interior and it becomes apparent that the benchmark target in quality achievement was the leading German manufacturers as the cabin could grace any of the top Teutonic trio.

Fire up, and the dominant rev counter mounted centrally in the instrument binnacle spins into life as the digital inset confirms the road speed, duplicated on this model on the head-up

display. A few miles on and it is not just the interior that aspires to German quality as the build quality and competent chassis of the car confirm; this 3rd Series model now runs on a brand new platform with no commonality with Ford as on the previous generation. The word 'quality' simply streams at you with the sweet 2.0 litre petrol engine ever willing as you pace through the 6-speed manual gearbox. Despite its performance you feel that the chassis can cope with more, even beyond the higher output 2.0 litre engine.



This lower output engine is rated at 120PS and can take the car from rest to 62 mph in 8.9 seconds with the potential to reach 121 mph. Mazda use a lot of in-house descriptors for their engineering applications and collectively refer to their high compression engines, efficient transmissions and lightweight body and chassis construction as 'SKYACTIV' technologies. In particular, the use of high-tensile steels results in a bodyshell that sees a 31% increase in torsional rigidity for a stronger and more impact resistant structure and a contributing factor to the car's 5-Star EuroNCAP rating.

The cabin reflects the quality design of the exterior with a driver-focused position behind the wheel and acceptable room for up to three rear seat passengers.

Equipment levels across the range top those from most competitors and include 16-inch alloys, air conditioning, power folding heated mirrors, leather steering wheel, trip computer and audio system with 7-inch colour touch screen, USB / iPod ports and Bluetooth connectivity.



Asserting its technology lead, the new Mazda3 uses the Harman developed Aha internet connectivity platform to bring web based infotainment content into the car via a free smartphone app. Menu control is via the car's central touch screen or the console mounted rotary knob.

Overall, the 36-strong new Mazda3 line-up is designed to recoup a substantial slice of this lucrative sector of the market with a car that stands out in appearance, performance and standard equipment levels. In its 2.0 litre, 120PS petrol guise it has an official combined fuel consumption of 55.4 mpg, and with a CO2 emissions of 119 gms/km is in Band C for annual car tax of £30. The model tested is listed at £19,895 and is in Group 18/50 for insurance purposes. Like all Mazda models, the new range is covered by the company's 3-year / 60,000 mile warranty.