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Mazda3 2.0GT Sport – Road Test

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This refreshed and revised mid-sized hatchback model has an appeal with its restrained but attractive styling, purposeful fittings and ultra efficient powertrains. Oh and a growing list of awards, particularly with a “family” cachet to them.

Perhaps, not surprisingly, its economy has won praise from those canny Scottish motoring



journalists north of the border and at the other extreme in mega-rich Dubai in November it was voted “Supreme Winner” at the 2019 Women’s World Car of the Year awards. Could any awards offer a wider contrast?

Certainly, no other car this year has achieved this unusual duo celebration. Which just goes to show the Mazda3 is a car full of not one but many characters. Even hybrids power some of them, such as our 2.0 Sport version delivering 180 ps.



The UK range is heading towards 30 models in four trim levels, manual and automatic transmission, saloon and hatchback body styles, cutting right into the heart of the UK buyers’ market.

Starting from £20,595 the 28 model Mazda3 range features hatchback models powered by



the 122 hp Skyactiv-G and 180 hp Skyactiv-X petrol engines, while the stylish Mazda3 Saloon is exclusively powered by the ground-breaking Skyactiv-X engine.

Featuring Mazda's unique Spark Controlled Compression Ignition technology, Skyactiv-X is the world's first production petrol engine to exploit the benefits of compression ignition.

Providing drivers with the free-revving performance of a petrol engine combined with greater efficiency, the 2.0 litre four-cylinder 180 hp Skyactiv-X engine features the highest compression ratio for a production petrol engine in the world, while its lean burn capabilities ensure outstanding fuel economy and low emissions.

Behind the wheel of the 180 hp Mazda3 five-door hatchback it's a delightful experience with the power instantly available, the pull is strong and continuous and the gearchanges are velvet-smooth. It really is a different driving experience from most similar sized petrol engines, even from prestigious marques.

It often felt a bigger-sized engine, so smooth and eager were its responses, and its economy was very good while emissions were also very low. That engine refinement continued through the six-speed gearbox and lever which was conveniently positioned and had a light direct action with a smooth and progressive clutch underfoot. The throttle was neatly weighted and the footbrake was strong with good feedback contrasting with the electronic parking brake and its on/off feel.

Secondary controls all fell to hand and fingers without groping but there's a lot to take in and markings may be on the small side for some older eyes, not helped by an overwhelmingly black interior finish throughout.



By contrast, the driver's display in front was very big, clear and easy to read and included a selectable panel of information. A modest sized screen to the left and over the central console was the infotainment display which operated with a mixture of touch-screen and large control knob behind the gearlever. This display could be quickly changed and refreshed.

Thankfully, the car's heating and ventilation was controlled by rotary and push buttons immediately below the central screen and it worked very well, quickly, comprehensively and thoroughly for all occupants to benefit. Powered windows were quick on the four doors.

Oddments provision was good throughout with door bins, trays, cubbies, glovebox and seat pockets to serve a family on the move and the boot was reasonably sized and not difficult to load.



For driver and passengers the access was unobstructed, the seats neatly shaped and supporting all but the most long-legged occupants. I appreciated their variable heating ability with heated wheel on some cold days. The front pair had a reasonable range of adjustment including power lumbar for the driver but their actual buttons for adjustments were on the small side. Leg, shoulder and headroom were good.

Visibility was good to front and sides with good headlights and wipers but over the shoulder when pulling out or reversing it was more restricted by the roof pillars, and the rear window was shallow.

The engine noise was muted most of the time, became a bit thrashy with rising revs through the gears but once cruising on the motorway it was more composed. What was always



present was a distant road rumble and sometimes a pothole could be heard.



In fairness the impact was rarely felt and the Mazda3 did ride very well over nearly every road we used. Mazda3 links with its family stable of sporting convertibles and coupés could explain the precision of its handling, its grip, its vice-free character, and reassuring confidence on the road.

VERDICT

This likeable Mazda really has a lot going for it with nothing seriously detracting, so no wonder it's been pulling in the awards.

For: Very refined powertrain with good delivery and economy, sharp handling and strong



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brakes, comfortable ride.

Against: Very dark interior so easy to misplace items, excitable thrashy engine note and constant road rumble, some over the shoulder blindspots, ungenerous warranty.



Mini Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Mazda3 2.0GT Sport Hatchback 180 hp.

Price: £27,465 as tested.



Mechanical: 180 hp, four cylinder, 2.0 litre, petrol hybrid engine, six speed manual gearbox.

Performance: 134 mph, 0-62 mph 8.2 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined cycle 45 mpg.

Emissions and taxation: CO2 emissions 103 g/km, VED First Year road tax £150 then £145 Standard rate, BiK company car tax 24%.

Insurance Group: 23E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions: L 4.46 m (14.63 ft), W 1.80 m (5.91 ft), H 1.44 m (4.72 ft), boot space 358 litres (12.64 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.