

# Road beat: Mazda makes a true minivan



The Mazda5 is the last true minivan on the market.  
Photos/Larry Weitzman

**By Larry Weitzman**

In this day and age, about every minivan in the U.S. market has a footprint the size of a full-size SUV. Length and width average about 202 inches and about 78 inches, respectively. They even stand about 68-inches tall or more. Who's kidding who, the age of the minivan is gone, except for one and that is the Mazda5.

Still with three reasonably roomy rows of seats, the Mazda5 is a true minivan with a length of just 180 inches, a width of 69 inches and a shorter height of 64 inches. That's about the

footprint of your average compact car. And even better is that the Mazda5 splits the wind with a co-efficient of drag of just 0.30.



### Specifications

Price \$22,060 to about \$27,000

Engine 2.5L DOHC, 2.5L 16 valve inline four cylinder  
157 hp @ 6,000

163 lb-ft of torque @ 4,000 rpm

Transmission

Five speed automatic

Configuration

Front engine/front wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 108.3 inches

Length 180.5 inches

Width 68.9 inches

Height 63.6 inches

Track (f/r) 60.2/59.8 inches

Ground clearance 5.5 inches

Weight 3,457 pounds

Weight distribution (f/r)

56/44 percent

GVWR 4,685 pounds

Fuel Capacity 15.9 gallons  
Cargo capacity (third row folded flat) 44.4 cubic feet  
Steering lock to lock 2.9 turns  
Turning circle 36.7 feet  
Wheels 17X6.5 inch alloys  
Tires 205/50X17 All-season  
Performance  
0-60 mph 8.48 seconds  
50-70 mph level highway 5.02 seconds  
50-70 mph up six percent grade 8.96 seconds  
Top speed Do they race Minivans yet? They already race lawn mowers  
Fuel economy 21/28/24 mpg city/highway/combined.  
Expect 25-26 mpg in rural driving and 31-32 mpg on the highway at legal speeds.

That remarkably low CD becomes evident in examining the Mazda5's slick profile. Watch how you drive it as you could get arrested for cheating, cheating the wind. Its shape and proportions are just right with the main standout detail being the Nagare flow waves created in its three subtle character lines along its flanks. Other impressive details can be seen in the headlights and front fenders. Remember when discussing looks, we are dealing with a minivan, not a Mazda6, which is perhaps the best looking midsize sedan currently on the market. No, I wasn't paid to say that, it's an empirical fact.

Lifting the rather long hood will expose a Mazda 2.5L inline, DOHC, 16 valve four cylinder engine that is used in the Mazda6 and some Mazda3s. However in the 5 it doesn't get the SkyActiv

treatment of direct injection and the ultra high, 13:1 compression. In the Mazda5 its has a rather low 9.7:1 compression with a port injection system so the production numbers are lower making a still respectable 157 hp at 6,000 rpm and 163 pounds of twist at 4,000 rpm. The SkyActiv engine cranks out 184 hp at 5,750 rpm and 185 pounds of torque at an even lower 3,500 rpm. That is a demonstration of the benefits of direct injection/higher compression; more hp and torque at a lower rpm.

Power is sent to the front wheels via a five speed auto cog swapper. It is not only smooth, but also intuitive. Drive it hard and you will find it downshifting as you power through a corner or drive it easy and you will find it upshifting sooner to maximize fuel economy and engine efficiency. Straight line performance is about what you would expect from a Mazda, better than expected as a standing start 0-60 mph run required just 8.48 seconds, not bad for a nearly 3,500 pound, 2.5L four cylinder true minivan. Passing times are adequate with a 50-70 mph simulated pass taking 5.02 seconds and the same run up a six percent grade extending that time by nearly 4 seconds to 8.96 seconds. Throttle response is sprightly. Fifteen years ago those numbers would be on par with a V-8 powered Lincoln Town Car.

Most big minivans average about 21 mpg overall and 27-28 mpg on the highway. Mazda5 does a lot better. With about a liter less motor and at least 500-1,000 pounds less weight, the Mazda5 is projected by the EPA to achieve 21/28/24 mpg city/highway/combined. Overall the Mazda5 averaged about 25 mpg while on a level highway at 70 mph it returned 31.6 mpg or about 4 mpg better than the full size minivan. Fuel capacity is a good size 15.9 gallons, giving a highway range of almost 500 miles. The engine spins 2,350 rpm at 70 mph.

Being a Mazda you can expect state of the art suspenders with MacPherson struts up front and a multilink system in the rear. Seventeen inch alloys are shod with 205/50 series rubber and

the steering rack is an electro-hydraulic unit that is quick for even a sporting sedan at 2.9 turns lock to lock. Even the turning circle is a tight 36.7 feet. Track front and rear is 60 inches. The result is one tight handling minivan. Pushed hard you could even get the Mazda5 to rotate a bit in the tighter corners. About the only complaint is some body roll. But steering is benign, turn in crisp, front to rear weight balance is good (56/44) as well as the grip. You would be surprised at what the Mazda5 can do when the road bends. It would stay glued to the butt of many sedans and do it easily. It is certainly more nimble than any full size minivan.

The highway ride is smooth. However, there is slightly more road noise than a sedan. Overall, the vehicle has a controlled, compliant ride over bumps big and small. Being a smaller four cylinder it runs at a little higher rpm, so expect a little more noise when pushing hard. However, in normal, easy driving the Mazda5 acquits itself well.

Four wheel discs of a foot in diameter with all the appropriate acronyms do the stopping chores. From 40 mph forward progress is arrested in a very good 41 feet. Of course it has all the safety features you would expect, a plethora of airbags and even back up sensors.

Another positive area is in the interior. First the leather adds a touch of class and comfort. Perhaps even more important are the extraordinarily, well bolstered, comfortable front seats and second row captain's chairs. More good stuff is in the simplified instrument panel. The binnacle has a big tach and speedo with the trip computer and radio and HVAC info contained in the center stack. No touch screen or distracting insidious mice, just wonderfully clear buttons and knobs to operate everything.



The mini van practically has room for a whole team.

Rear sliding doors offer easy access to the second and third row seating. Third row seats fold away to a flat floor and almost 45 cubic feet of cargo capacity. Total interior volume is a whopping 142 cubic feet, not bad for a vehicle the size of your average compact car. Perhaps because of its small size there is less of a minivan "stigma" connected to the Mazda5. It is just an extremely practical vehicle at an even better price.

Pricing starts at \$21,240 plus \$820 for the boat ride from Hiroshima, Japan (and no it doesn't glow in the dark). My loaded (all standard equipment) Grand Touring model stickered for \$25,640 with destination. The only extra charge was \$75 for a rear bumper guard cover. Everything else including moon roof, full power (except seats) and xenon headlights were standard. The optional equipment list is short with the most expensive item being an overhead DVD system. In reality the Mazda5 rates about an 8.5 to a 9.

*Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.*