

Road beat: '16 Mazda 6 has style, performance



The 2016 Mazda 6 does not disappoint. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Mitchell Weitzman

Let's be clear on this, buy a new Mazda 6 and you won't be disappointed. It's possibly the best car in this heavy segment of boring and bland mobile human-transporters, and for many good reasons. If you're on your way now to pick up a new Camry, you ought to be kicking yourself for not first test driving the new Mazda 6; it would've saved you a trip to the Toyota dealer.

A Mazda what? Six, the oft overlooked other Japanese sedan that your neighbor three doors down has. And he's the only one in the neighborhood with one. Now in its umpteenth iteration,

the 6 is back better than ever, with svelte, swooping yet sharp curves as if sculpted by a katana. In fact, if a Camry is the car equivalent of store-bought, prepackaged California rolls, the 6 is fresh, samurai-cut sashimi; nothing else compares.



Specifications

Price \$21,495 to about \$33,400

Engine

DOHC, 16 valve inline 2.5L
four 184 hp @ 5,700 rpm
185 ft-lb of torque at 3,250 rpm

Transmission

Six Speed torque converter automatic, with paddle shifters

Configuration

Transverse mounted front engine/front wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 111.4 inches

Length 191.5 inches

Width 72.4 inches

Height 57.1 inches

Track (f/r) 62.8/62.4 inches

Ground clearance 6.7 inches

Weight 3,232 pounds
Weight distribution (f/r)
58/42%
Fuel capacity 16.4 gallons
Cargo capacity 14.8 cubic
feet
Passenger volume 99.7 cubic
feet
Steering lock to lock 2.81
turns
Turning circle (curb to
curb) 36.7 feet
Wheels 19X7.5 inch alloys
Tires 225/45X19 all season
radials
Co-efficient of drag 0.26

Performance

0-60 mph 7.32 seconds
50-70 mph 4.10 seconds
50-70 mph uphill 6.38
seconds
Top speed 140 mph
electronically limited
Fuel economy 28/40/32 mpg
city/highway/combined.
Expect 32-33 mpg in rural
country driving and over 40
mpg on a level highway at
legal speeds.

First, what car in this \$30K and under segment is prettier? Got one? Nope? Thought so. The Mazda 6 is the type of sensual object that requires a double take. Grant you, it's no Aston Martin, but in the style per dollar stakes it's tough to best. The way they use chrome to connect the headlights around the grill and also another strip to join together the rear taillights is a coherent master class.

And it doesn't stop there. Open the door and the designers clearly did not spend all their time on just the outside. With the optional Grand Touring package, an abundance of leather is employed throughout. Most important, all the materials do not feel cheap, possessing the invaluable touch of luxury everywhere in the cabin, from the dash to the plush leather seats. The interior is easily the best of its segment and rivals German's that cost \$50K. In fact, this car does Mercedes better than Mercedes themselves did with their similarly priced CLA250. But this isn't any CLA on the inside; we're talking E and S class here. Though for this one, you don't need to second mortgage your home.

So what's it actually like to drive? In short, brilliant. The 6 easily fulfills the requirement of being idiot-proof for all drivers, while also offering an extra level of fun unheard of in this segment for those that seek it. It likes to be driven hard, in other words. The chassis exhibits wondrous characteristics of neutrality coupled with more grip than anyone sane will ever need. The ride is spot-on too, not being too firm to be harsh, but neither floundering about, with great body control if things do get too out of hand. On a good twisting country road, it just begs to be driven harder than you would first think, with swift, communicative steering, asking for more. Though some enthusiasts may deride it for being front-wheel drive, torque steer is minimal, and if anything, the power to the front wheels invigorates the electrically assisted steering with feedback and feel. Give it the beans and the 6 then reveals it's true character: An Armani-clad sports car disguised as a family sedan. Subtle, sporty, classy elegance.

What about Jeremy Clarkson's favorite, the power? The 6 has a 2.5-liter inline-4 producing a healthy 184 HP and 185 pounds of peak torque, both delivered fairly early in the engines rev range. This results in a very flat power curve, helping the motor belie its modest firepower and capacity, almost giving

the impression that it's boosted by a low-pressure turbo. Though not the last word in absolute speed, giving up 7 seconds to reach 60, it delivers easy drivability and never a wanting for more speed or power, especially when connected to its quick, foolproof 6-speed automatic cog-swapper, keeping it in the wide powerband whenever you ask it. A manual is also available for purists seeking the ultimate driving connection. Would more power be nice? Sure, but it's wholly unnecessary, that is, unless Mazda decides to create another Mazdaspeed 6. That reminds me, Mazda, please build a Mazdaspeed 6. Fuel economy is exceptional also, burning a measly 32 mpg in everyday driving and returning 42 on the highway at 70. How the motor is able to combine still respectable performance with such efficiency is a stellar piece of the bargain, and maybe attributable to the trick i-ELoop system. This acronym recovers kinetic energy from braking and turns it into electricity to power all components the alternator usually would, relieving the engine of this tedious task when back accelerating and resulting in increased fuel economy.



All the modern convenience's
at the driver's fingertips.

Sure, a V6 Camry will blow its doors off, but that's about the only thing exceptional a V6 Camry can do. And when exactly is speed important in cars of this class? These are family sedans after all. You're not taking this to the Sunday morning drag races; you're taking it to work, picking the kids up from school and running to the store. Doubtless with the 6 though,

you'll always be taking the longer route. But also, whenever you and your friends are carpooling places, they'll all want to take this one every time, again because of the class-oozing interior. But do remember, 7 seconds to 60 means it will keep up with a BMW E30 M3 just about, and that's regarded as one of the greatest drives ever.

So, to sum up, if you're looking to buy a sedan for around the \$30K mark, buy one of these and you won't regret it. You'll only regret buying something else, something safe, something because it's a Toyota. Oh, and that fast V6 Camry? That'll cost \$35K when properly equipped, or, \$5K more than the 6. I would even say that because of the superb upscale interior and exuberant styling, the closest rival to the 6 is the new, also front-wheel drive Mercedes CLA 250, which starts at about the same price as the top-level 6 ends. Except, surprise, surprise, buy the 6 instead. Sure, the CLA offers greater straight-line performance, and only in a straight line, but that's about all besides badge snobbery, and it's neither as nice to look at or be in. While Mercs are a status symbol, the 6 is the car for those who care about driving. Would you rather have the nicest Mazda sedan you can buy, or the cheapest, basest Mercedes? Thought so. Don't even think about that Camry.

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