

# Road Beat: Mazda 6 has looks, performance



Mazda 6 is more than a great looking car. Photos/Larry Weitzman

**By Larry Weitzman**

Mazda has almost always designed brilliant cars. Perhaps the new Mazda 6 is their best yet and one of the best-looking cars ever put in mass production. Stand back and look at the lines. An aggressive front end, sharp character lines shape the vehicle which terminates in a softer, smooth rounded rear. The window line lowers the vehicle by stretching the cabin size and making the dog house look sleeker (Toyota Avalon has almost the identical window line, and while still an attractive car, probably Toyota's best, the front end fails it).

If you go back to another great design, the sixth generation 929 or HD edition, you can see similarities in the smooth rear end and strong hips. It is disguised somewhat on the new 6 by a small trunk lip. You can even see some of the rear of the third generation RX-7 (FD) in the new Mazda 6 and the third gen RX-7, which was built from 1992 to 2002, is a modern-day classic.

But does it deliver? In spades, and hearts, clubs and diamonds, too. It remains the best mid-size ride in the class and that includes some serious and heady competition, especially from the Kia Optima. But be advised, there are almost no bad choices in this category of vehicles which is the bread and butter of all car sales. Mazda's size is pure midsize at a length of 192 inches, a width of 72 inches while standing 57 inches tall.

Introduced as a 2014 model, not much has changed in the mechanicals as well. The wonderful 2.5L DOHC 15 valve with Skyactiv technology (Mazda's name for what is basically direct injection) still pumps out 184 hp at 5,700 rpm and 185 pounds of twist at a low 3,250 rpm meaning it makes flexible power, up high and down low. It drives the front wheels via a six-speed torque converter auto cog swapper. If Mazda were to improve this power train it would be a world beater vehicle with their 2.5L blown 250 hp low pressure turbo motor found in the CX-9 with an all-wheel drive system. It would make the Mazda 6 a virtual supercar. Hint, hint.



## **Specifications**

**Price** \$22,780 to about \$34,530

### **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 3,305 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 7.36 seconds

50-70 mph 4.15 seconds

50-70 mph uphill 6.09  
seconds

Top speed 140 mph  
electronically limited

**Fuel economy** 27/35/30 mpg  
city/highway/combined.

Expect 32-33 mpg in rural  
country driving and over 40  
mpg on a level highway at  
legal speeds.

Performance remains identical to the prior 6 test two years ago with 0-60 mph coming up in 7.36 seconds and passing from 50-70 mph on the level and up a six percent grade taking 4.15 seconds and 6.09 seconds respectively. That is top of the class performance for a 4-cylinder non-blown mid-size sedan.

My tester also came with the GT premium package (\$2,500) which includes nine special features including i-EL00P which is "hybrid" system that stores electric power in a capacitor for later use in place of the alternator which takes a load off the engine. It also provides a lower final drive ratio with an overall improvement in economy of a claimed five percent. It works.

EPA rates the i-EL00P 6 at 27/35/30 mpg and as you might expect, it does better, much better. At 70 mph on a level highway it returned an average of 42.3 mpg and overall about 32-33 mpg during my 400 miles of testing. On my round trip to Carson City in very aggressive driving the 6 averaged 32.1 mpg. Fuel economy as you can see is excellent, especially for such a high-performance car.

But that performance doesn't end in a straight line, it

continues when the road bends, no matter how sharply or whether left or right or in quick transitions. Mazda 6 flat out gets it done in style. Suspension is state of the art four-wheel independent, the electric power rack is a quick 2.81 turns lock to lock, 19 x 7.5 inch wheels are shod with serious 225/45 rubber and the track is a wide 63 inches up front and 62 inches in the rear. This all adds up to handling like water in a hose with a flat attitude. And it does it effortlessly and tirelessly in the tradition of a Miata. Perfectly weighted, quick steering and a crisp turn-in makes the 6 one of the most communicative, confident sedans on the market.

Ride quality is equally good, soft enough not to break any teeth with a supple compliance that creates what is an almost perfect ride quality, at least for guys like me who love to drive. It is also a quiet ride with no wind, road or engine noise, unless you're at full tilt boogie trying to imitate the Space Shuttle at liftoff and then some engine noise enters the otherwise serene cabin. Engine speed at 70 mph is a low 2,000 rpm.

New for 2017 with the Grand Touring is Lane Keep Assist, besides the other acronyms which are standard like blind spot, rear camera and smart braking. LED headlights turn night into day with adaptive front lighting which turn with the steering wheel.

Inside is another improvement in this generation Mazda 6, with better looking, more comfortable seats. The contrasting piping with the soft Nappa leather gives the Mazda 6 an upscale luxury look and feel. Instrumentation is complete with a big tach left flanking a centered speedo and a right flanking trip computer and other ancillary gauges. With its big wheelbase, rear seating is copious and comfortable as well. The trunk is huge at nearly 15 cubic feet.

While the large info screen sits planted on top of the dash,

its operation is controlled by a mouse like knob on the console. After several Mazda's with this control system, I am finally up to speed. While it still is more difficult than some other systems especially with buttons and knobs, it has become tolerable and reasonable usable.

Pricing for the 6 Sport starts at \$21,945 with a 6-speed manual, adding \$1,050 for the auto cog swapper. The upscale Touring can also be had with a manual while my Grand Touring is auto only. Mazda is one of the few midsize sedans to offer a manual tranny. My tester was a Grand Touring automatic only issue that stickered for \$30,695 plus the obligatory \$835 for the boat ride from Hofu, Japan. Add the GT Premium pack which has the i-LOOP for another \$2,500 plus \$75 for the cargo mat, \$125 for the door sill trim plates and \$300 for the Machine Gray Metallic paint and the Monroney totals \$34,530 for a max loaded top of the line Mazda 6. Still the best of the best.

*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.*