

Road Beat: Latest Miata is sleek and supple



The 2017 Mazda Miata MX-5 should be a Nobel Prize winner. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

If there were a Nobel Prize for fun and motoring enjoyment, the Mazda MX-5 would be the hands down winner. No if, ands, or buts. Now in its fourth generation, the more time I spend in the left seat (the right seat ain't too bad either), the more I want one. In my week of thrashing this MX-5 Miata through an athletic regime at full tilt boogie, most of the time throwing some caution to the wind, the Miata averaged between 35 and 36 mpg. It is more economical than most every other car I have driven, except for some hybrids.

Its body is edgy, muscular and looks to be shaped by a

Samurai's sword. During my week of testing, this car received more compliments of any test vehicle in recent memory. Some people rolled down their windows wanting to know about the car. There is no question, the "Kodo" school of design is the winner among manufacturers, think, Mazda 3 and 6 and their three CX models.

Miata has gone back to its original roots, being much smaller and lighter than its prior generation with a length of just 154 inches or about your basic Mini Cooper. But it is wide (for its length) at 68 inches affording a track of 59 inches front and rear while standing just 49 inches tall.

Under its beautiful bonnet sits a longitudinally mounted 2.0, high tech four-cylinder Atkinson cycle engine driving the rear wheels via a six-speeder manual tranny, that's so smooth, upshifting rarely requires the clutch, nice if you have a lazy left leg. Down shifting requires more skill. Atkinson cycle engines have extremely high compression (13:1) and late closing intake valves which improve engine efficiency by expanding the compression and power stroke ratios. See paragraph one as to overall fuel economy proof.



Specifications

Price \$24,915 to about \$33,000 plus \$820 for the boat from Hiroshima, Japan

Engine

2.0L inline four-cylinder

D0HC, 16 valves 155 hp @
6,000 rpm 148 lb.-ft. of
torque @ 4,600 rpm

Transmission

Six-speed manual

Six-speed torque converter
automatic

Configuration

Longitudinal front
engine/rear wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 90.9 inches

Length 154.1 inches

Width 68.3 inches

Height (17-inch wheels) 48.8
inches

Ground Clearance (17-inch
wheels) 5.32 inches

Track (f/r) 58.9/59.2 inches

Fuel Capacity 11.9 gallons

Trunk volume 4.6 cubic feet

Turning circle (wall to
wall) 32.9 feet

Steering lock to lock 2.7
turns

Wheels (std/opt) 16X6.5/17X7
inches

Tires (std//opt)
195/50X16//205/45X17

Weight 2,332 pounds

Weight distribution (f/r)
53/47 percent

Performance

0-60 mph 5.91 seconds

50-70 mph 3.32 seconds (3rd
gear)

50-70 up hill (6%) 4.53

seconds

Top Speed Estimate 140 plus
mph (have ear plugs)

Fuel economy EPA rated
26/33/29 mpg
city/highway/combined.

Estimate 30-32 mpg in
suburban driving, 35 mpg in
rural driving and 40 plus
mpg at 70 mph on level
ground.

Power output is still very good at 155 hp at 6,000 rpm along with 148 pounds of peak twist at 4,600 rpm. Performance is absolutely world class with a 0-60 time of 5.91 seconds backed up with a level simulated pass time of 3.32 seconds and an uphill pass of 4.53 seconds. Nailing the throttle will pin your backside to the seat. Miata rocks, especially third gear. Although not a 500 hp 5.0L powerhouse, this 2.0L mill gives you good power in the lower gears from 1,500 to 2,000 rpm. Throttle response feels like its connected to your brain.

While the fuel tank is just 12 gallons, your range will be limited by your own physiology as this Miata averaged 42 mpg on the highway at 70 mph, meaning an easy 400 miles. EPA rates the Miata at 26/33 mpg city/highway meaning a combined number of about 29 mpg. But while they are the government mandated test numbers, I achieved much higher numbers, my round trip to South Lake Tahoe and back averaged 40.1 mpg using full throttle in at least 15 of the passing zones up and down Highway 50.

Handling is the real Nobel effort of Mazda. The laws of physics have been redefined by Miata. Suspenders are state of the art, steering is a quick double pinion power rack (2.7 turns) and while wheels are 17X7 inch alloys the tires aren't huge meats at 205/45. Those tires make the Miata more playful.

Also, which needs mention is the under 33 foot turning circle and its more important light weight of 2,332 pounds. Changing directions in a Miata is about the most fun you can have either in the vertical or recumbent position. Not much else comes close. It does exactly what you want and nothing you don't. And if your exuberance gets the better of you, your corrections can even be more fun and satisfying. It loves to rotate and getting the rear end out will not cause you a five-yard penalty of back field in motion.

Ride quality is firm. But you won't be braking any fillings and it is well controlled. And it is remarkably quiet, even with the top down. But don't expect it to be a CX-9. The engine spins 2,900 rpm at 70 mph.

Safety includes most of the acronyms including the braking ones, even lane departure warning, along with four-wheel discs. Headlights are fabulous made even better by the adaptive front lighting and automatic high beam.

Within the confines of my Grand Touring roadster (soft top) is a rather luxu interior, with plenty of leather on the seats, steering wheel and shifter, plus full power except for the seats. Instrumentation is about perfect and now that I have had plenty of seat time with Mazda's multi-function commander control, I have finally got it down. It's still not the best, but it works, but there are still too many steps involved in the control system.

The other thing missing is luggage and interior storage capacity. The small trunk is actually quite usable and although it only holds 4.6 cubic feet, it is well shaped. If you golf however, Fed Ex or Ship Sticks will be pre-programmed into your phone or computer. No glove box or center console storage, either but there is a little compartment between the seatbacks which is basically inaccessible while seated, unless you are a member of Cirque du Soleil.

Pricing for your basic Miata starts at below \$25 large, but my "loaded" Grand Touring model stickers for \$30,065, plus \$835 for the boat from Hiroshima, japan. It's a lot of fun for the money, but be careful how you have your fun as the penalties are more than five yards. Miata is about driving enjoyment. Did I forget to mention it's also an economy car designed for the long and windy way home.

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.