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Mazda6 2.5 GT Sport saloon – Road Test

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Priced from £23,195 to £33,585, the latest combined Saloon and Tourer 6 range runs to 25 models across four trim levels, in ascending order: SE-L Nav+, SE-L LUX Nav+, Sport Nav+ and GT Sport Nav+.

“With new powertrain technology, fresh premium design details inside and out, revised model grades and more standard technology, the new Mazda 6 is a thoroughly re-engineered and refined update of our stylish flagship,” trumpets Jeremy Thomson, boss of



Mazda Motors UK.

How to choose between the two five-door body shapes, each with cosmetic touch-ups? Well, the stylish coupé-like saloon is longer and lower than the estate-like Tourer, with more leg but less headroom in the rear seats. Shoulder room is about equal.

Boot capacity? With all five seats in use, expect 480 litres (16.95 cu.ft) in the saloon and 522 litres (18.43 cu.ft) in the Tourer. Fold the rear seats and the saloon will take items up to 1,750 mm (5.74 ft) on its sloping extended floor according to our tape; the Tourer up to around 1,650 generous litres (58.27 cu.ft) atop its more practical flat through-deck.



There's something new under the bonnet for British buyers. Matched exclusively to the priciest GT Sport Nav+ trim, Mazda's 2.5 litre SKYACTIV-G 194 PS petrol engine makes its



UK debut in the 6, having already been seen elsewhere in their big CX-9 SUV and the CX-5.

It seamlessly switches between four and two-cylinder operation, aiming to improve real-world fuel economy at no cost to performance. Exhaling through two purposeful tailpipes and paired with Mazda's own smooth six-speed automatic gearbox in both Saloon and Tourer models, it emits a stirring note when given full rein, suggesting the 0-62 mph sprint claim at just over eight seconds might be modest. Overall return fuel-wise in our hands was a shade over 40 mpg.

The 2018 car adopts a fresh frontal design focused around a new grille, which has the mesh positioned deeper. Half close your eyes and the front lip of the bonnet could be from an Aston Martin – really. At the rear, the Saloon has a remodelled boot lid, while both the Saloon and Tourer feature cleaner rear bumper styling with more body coloured areas.

While the Tourer/estate continues to appeal, it's the latest saloon version in top trim we drive here. On the face of it, it's a traditional two-box design with a sizeable separate boot nearly four feet (about 1.2 metres) long and almost as wide, plus generous recessed side panniers inside the rear wings.

Just mind your head when you duck into its cave-like recess to retrieve your luggage – it's a quite shallow opening, and of course without the suspended lift-up rear sill of a hatchback. However, check the user-friendly pull-toggles either side of the opening, to angle forward the rear seatbacks, hatch-style.

New cabin furnishings and design touches deliver an ambience and comfort level above its class and price bracket. The flagship GT Sport Nav+ we drove boasts such exotica as "Japanese Sen Wood trim, Nappa leather and suede". Plus front seat ventilation as well as heating, a 360-degree view camera, adaptive LRD headlights, rear Smart City Brake Support and Driver Attention Alert.

There's heating for the outer pair of seats in the rear and between them, a natty pull-down work-cum-play desk with its own USB docks, oddments tray and drinks holders.



Highlights across the range include a larger eight-inch centre display screen and a full colour windscreen projected Active Driving Display. Seeing your actual speed and current legal limit bracketed in a clear head-up display could save you points.

On the road, all versions of the 6 now feature Blind Spot Monitoring with rear cross traffic alert, Radar Cruise Control, Lane Keep Assist and Advanced Smart City Brake Support.

As we have reported before, when it comes to alternative power, “vroom vroom” and tek-savvy Mazda declare themselves to be “concentrating for the time being on further evolution of the internal combustion engine”, adding: “We are a small company on a quest to make the best in the world.”



To that end, they have already disclosed work on an exclusive new power unit combining the high-revving and cleaner exhaust of petrol – in Mazda terms their SKYACTIV-G technology – with the superior take-off response and economy of a diesel – their SKYACTIV-D. So the cross-over SKYACTIV-X now under development is a next-generation petrol engine harnessing petrol-type spark to diesel-type compression ignition – a first.

Meanwhile Mazda are hedging their bets by jointly developing with Toyota an electric car for 2019 and a plug-in hybrid for 2021.

And driverless? They insist: “We believe people will want to go on driving cars and we will continue to build cars which people want to drive.” (Witness the superb MX-5 two-seater, recently given a power boost).

VERDICT

Bearing in mind the above comments from Mazda, in respect of its driving qualities, in its own sector the latest Mazda 6 does not disappoint.



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Mazda 6 Saloon 2.5 GT Sport

Family saloon; five doors; five seats.

Dimensions: □Length 4,870 mm (15.98 ft); width 1,840 mm (6.04 ft); height 1,450 mm (4.76 ft); kerb weight 1,607 kg (3,543 lb); towing weight max 1,500 kg (3,307 lb).

Load compartment: Length 1170 mm (3.84 ft) extending to 1750 mm (5.74 ft); min width 1,020 mm (3.34 ft); volume 480 litres or 16.95 cu.ft (seats up).

Engine and transmission: Petrol; four cyl; 2,488 cc; front wheel drive; six speed auto.



Power and torque: 194 PS @ 6,000 rpm; max torque 258 Nm (190 lb.ft) @ 4,000 rpm.

Performance: 139 mph; 0-62 mph in 8.1 sec.

Fuel consumption: On test 40.5 mpg; official Combined 41.5 mpg; tank 62 litres (13.64 imperial gallons).

Emissions: 156 g/km; Euro stage 6 emissions compliance.

Wheels and tyres: 225/45 R19; alloy rims; puncture repair kit.

Insurance: Group 29A

Warranty: 3 years/60,000 miles.

Servicing intervals: 12 months/12,500 miles.

Price: £30,795 (as tested, with extras £31,675).

Rivals: Ford Mondeo; Vauxhall Insignia; Hyundai i40; Skoda Superb; VW Passat.