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Mazda6 Tourer

Published: December 2, 2013

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Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/mazda6-tourer/>



Tom Scanlan's 500 miles in Mazda's estate car impressed him...

At £24,115, the test car - a 2.2D SE-L Nav 2WD - offered a lot of car for the money, not that nearly £25K isn't a sizeable chunk in anyone's book.

Mazda's 'Skyactive' technology, involving carefully designed engine mechanicals combined with digital technology and the use of light weight but super-strong construction, produces a car that feels really good to drive, whilst offering competitive ecological efficiency without losing anything in accelerative performance - on the contrary, in fact, to some extent.

The statistics speak for themselves: 0-62 mph in 9.2 seconds whilst achieving an official combined fuel consumption figure of 61 mpg and a CO2 rating of 119g/km (only £30 annual road tax). Over more than 500 miles in the full variety of traffic situations, but a significant amount of motorway mileage, the diesel car trip computer actually recorded exactly 50 mpg overall.

On top of this warm feeling, driving the car is easy and enjoyable. All the main functions of



steering, handling and braking are right up to the mark in its class. Steering, particularly, may be an undervalued feature in car design (Alfa Romeo, for example, stands out as being one of a handful of manufacturers that seems to appreciate this), but the Mazda is precise and accurate and not too low-gearred, thus allowing a pleasing sensation of control and therefore security.

The engine itself is smooth and flexible, with good acceleration from as low as 1200 rpm in top gear and a real impression that, up to the unstrained maximum revs of 5500 rpm, it could well be a refined petrol engine under the bonnet. The 6-speed gearbox changes, too, are excellent: quick, light and precise.

The ride on optional 19" wheels was a touch on the firm side, but quite good over humps and bumps. Generally, the ride was very good, but it may be an idea to get your dealer to let you try a test car with smaller wheels. I had earlier tried a Mazda6 saloon on 17" wheels and found the ride to be particularly good. My driver's seat was very comfortable, with good lumbar support; a drive of nearly four hours non-stop allowed my not-so-young body to get out of the car without any stiffness or need to stretch!

The car's interior is smart and functional, and the finish seems of a good quality.

The all-important safety features on the test model included Dynamic Stability control and traction control, Smart City Brake Support that is a low-speed accident avoidance system, tyre pressure monitoring (ahead of the Euro compliance that has recently been mooted), front, side and curtain airbags and ESS, Mazda's emergency-stop signalling system. Front and rear parking sensors were another real boon.

The point of buying an estate car – presumably for its capability and versatility in passenger and load carrying – is not lost on Mazda. The Mazda6 Tourer has good rear leg-room and access into and out of the back. The fact that the rear seats can only be folded down from the boot is not top-end practice, but the space available when you've done this is impressively large and flat. There's a neat tonneau cover and extra storage space under the



main boot floor. The spare wheel is a space-saver.

Included in the price is satellite navigation displayed on a 5.8" touch screen; this was one of the more user-friendly ones, in my experience. Bluetooth is integrated and a dual-zone climate control offers the best of both worlds for driver and front-seat passenger.

VERDICT

At one point during my drive of the Mazda6 Tourer, I remember saying to myself, 'why buy a top German brand when you could get one of these a lot cheaper.'

Did that impression last? Well, not quite, but Mazda have certainly made a car that will make a potential buyer think carefully before going for one of those top marques.

In its own sector, this Mazda offers a very serious challenge to any other car in this price bracket.

