Mazda MX-5 Convertible (special edition) – Road Test

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Mazda MX-5 R-Sport SE...

...the modern classic tested by Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

As a modern classic, the Mazda MX-5 has just become more exclusive because the new MX-5 R Sport Convertible is limited to 150 examples in the UK. The MX-5 range has consistently led its sports car sector since the 1990s with revisions and upgrades.

This stand-out MX-5 Convertible version features free-of-charge Polymetal Grey metallic paint and a grey soft-top hood, while 16-inch RAYS gunmetal alloy wheels and piano black mirrors finish the unique exterior look of this special edition version to the range. Inside the

R-Sport features burgundy Nappa leather seats with silver stitching, and ensures the interior has the same bespoke feel as the exterior.





Based on the 1.5 litre Sport, the R-Sport's standard equipment tally includes navigation, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, cruise control, heated seats and climate control.

Its arrival means these are now eleven possible MX-5 models from which to select, five soft-tops and six Rigid Fixed coupés with choice of 132 hp 1.5 or 184 hp 2.0 petrol engines and optional automatic gearbox on the more powerful models.

Keeping it simple with the 132 hp R Sport for this test means a wonderfully responsive engine with a slick "flick of the wrist" manual gearchange and a very agile, safe handling chassis.



The balance of the car has to be experienced because it's so responsive to throttle, steering and brakes, it is a track-car you can enjoy on any road in safety. Over 30 years ago when developing the MX-5, the Lotus Elan was the benchmark but while the British sports car disappeared, the Japanese successor took over.

Both were engineered from the outset to be lightweight and put the driver at the heart of the action to enjoy it to the full, and it's succeeded over the last 30 years.

The Japanese concept of oneness of horse and rider or Jinba ittai is straightforward and has remained the core of the creation of the four generations of the MX-5 so far.

Updates to the powertrain have been made over the years and the latest Skyactiv-G engine

embodies Mazda’s i-ELOOP and i-stop kinetic recovery and stop-start technology to stretch out economy to a remarkable extent.

The engine is an immediate starter, pulls well and fairly quietly until it’s stretched in the higher rev range, but keep within the best power band and it is composed, quiet, and very frugal.

But when the mood takes you, you can make the most of the power thanks to that close ratio gearbox, snap changes and sensible ratio spacing. I also liked the footbrake feedback and the handbrake was effective too, and had good feel as it was applied.

For me it’s the steering which really impresses. Sensibly sized wheel for turning quickly with constant indications of where the road wheels are pointing at any moment, the feeling was precise and the effort required minimal when parking with a good turning circle as well. There was no kickback over bad surfaces either.



The suspension does a good job at soaking up poor roads' bumps and it was very compliant so you could cover long distances without tiring.

Doing that was assisted by the small but finely hugging wrap around leather covered seats.

Oddments space was a bit challenging with very small door bins and console trays although you have a box compartment between the seatbacks and I think most items would end up on the floor, behind the seats or in the boot. That's only suitable for shopping or possibly a golf-bag and there's no spare wheel, just a repair kit, which can be inconvenient.



When erect the small window in the soft-top really limited what could be seen and you end up relying on the twin mirrors as there’s no reversing camera, just sensors.

Wipers and wash were good and the headlights were bright and wide spread but did not seem to have a long range beam on country roads at night.

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The MX-5 is compact and that meant most of the secondary controls were closely placed around and on the steering wheel spokes or column stalks and operated with a satisfying

click.

Heating and ventilation was excellent. The soft-top easily opened or closed, power windows were quick and the temperature, fan and distribution rotary switches were backed up by the heated seats' buttons so you could easily select what you preferred.

Tacho and speedo were clear if not big, backed by the fuel and other warning gauges, a changeable display for cruise and trip settings was straightforward and you were never in doubt about any readouts.

The MX-5 with fabric roof seals really well to keep out water and wind noise and made the interior very snug.



VERDICT

What really pleases any driver of the little sportscar is the way it goes, willingly, easily, with good handling and predictable strong grip. Excellent road manners mean you know how far you can push it and how quickly it comes back on line is reassuringly safe.

For the Mazda MX-5 there is really nothing on the market to beat it for satisfaction with a big smile and that is a very rare feature at any price.

For: Lively performance, brilliant handling, surprisingly comfortable for a sports car, excellent powertrain and gearchange, very economical for fuel.

Against: Small oddments and boot space, restricted rear vision with hood erect, no spare wheel, occasionally stiff ride, just two seats and small infotainment screen, ungenerous warranty.

Mini Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Mazda MX-5 R-Sport SE – Two seat sports car.



Price: £27,700.

Mechanical: 132 hp, four cylinder, 1,496cc petrol, six speed manual, rear wheel drive.

Performance: 127 mph, 0 – 62 mph 8.3 seconds, Combined MPG: 44.8, CO2 emissions 142g/km.

Tax costs: VED First Year road tax £215, £150 Standard rate, BiK company car tax rate 31%.

Insurance Group: 28E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 3.92 m (12.86 ft), W 1.74 m (5.71 ft), H 1.23 m (4.04 ft), boot space 130 litres (4.59 cu.ft) approx, two doors/two seats.