Mazda3 Saloon 186 PS Exclusive-Line – Road Test

Published: February 10, 2025

Author:

Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/mazda3-saloon-186-ps-exclusive-line-road-test/

Robin Roberts (and WheelsWithinWales) test drives the Mazda3 saloon…

While every maker wants to be distinctive and have desirable cars they also tend to follow fashion and sometimes end up with dull models which look no different to one another, but thankfully the Mazda3 range offers an alternative.

Its range has developed from saloons to hatchbacks and cross-over models, but among them is a hidden gem in the shape of the classic saloon.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

Yes, a car with a boot which does not break the bank has been retained. The Mazda3 has been in production since 2003 and four generations have rolled off lines across the Far East.

In some societies, a saloon is viewed as an upper-class car removed from the workaday and workmanlike hatchbacks or estates so it has a cachet.

The Mazda3 saloon today is available as a sole survivor among the range's hatchbacks and crossovers which have been comprehensively reworked with new engines and the latest in-car technology to satisfy a sophisticated driver.

The 186 PS e-Skyactiv X engine is retained unchanged, featuring Mazda's unique SPCCI Spark Controlled Compression Ignition technology. It produces 186 PS at 6,000 rpm and maximum torque of 240 Nm (177 lb.ft) at 4,000 rpm. The clever unit features a 15.0:1 compression ratio, optimised combustion control, uniquely shaped pistons and the innovative SPCCI combustion technology.

The e-Skyactiv X engine delivers a broader operating band of combustion efficiency, which ensures e-Skyactiv X not only delivers higher maximum engine torque but also improved real-world fuel economy.

In addition, the Mazda M Hybrid mild-hybrid system’s software ensures torque

reactions that are quick enough to flatten the torque curve, so the engine feels even smoother during acceleration.

An instant and silent starter, it pulls well from rest, has a good spread of power for acceleration and flexibility and the electric motor assistance is seamless. It packs a punch in a velvet glove.

Matched to that our test car had the six-speed manual gearbox, with a light and progressive clutch and one of the best changing actions and ratios you'll find anywhere. It was a flick of the wrist change every time so even heavy traffic posed no problems or tiredness.

Underfoot, the all-disc brakes needed only slight pedal pressure to bring about a very well controlled and rapid stop without any drama or noise. The electronic parking brake worked on the steepest slopes with auto-hold being particularly useful in queues.

Mazda has always prided itself on steering and handling and for a comparatively inexpensive saloon it felt like a much more luxurious sporting car with its feedback, grip and responsiveness. It was agile and safe.

Secondary controls on the wheel spokes needed familiarisation but the most common heating and ventilation controls have sensibly been kept out of the 10-inch infortainment display and have a neat panel beneath it.

The screen holds the sound system, mapping and communications among other features and these now include voice activation familiar to many as

Alexa.

The car’s climate controls and system worked well although some may wish for larger rotary controls, with good directional, temperature and fan settings backed up by a big sunroof and four powered windows. Condensation and frost quickly cleared and the wipers had huge arks to sweep.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

We liked the very bright intelligent headlights with long range and wide beams.

You sit quite low in the Mazda3 and there are a few small blindspots behind the pillars and bootlid, but you also have some good sensors and a reversing camera to assist, as well as overtaking alerts built into the mirrors.

Access was very good to the cabin with nicely shaped seats infront but no tilt adjustment of the passenger seat and the rear seats were quite flat. Those behind would also find legroom a bit tight.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

The rear seatbacks drop down almost flat and with a 60:40 split to increase the bootspace if used just two-up, and have useful release pulls in the luggage compartment which is behind a deep sill but also has a flat and wide floor.

Ride quality is very good over all manner of surfaces even if you can hear the suspension and tyres on the tarmac.

It never gave any cause for concern when pressing on through twisting lanes and it could be precisely placed.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

VERDICT

As a compact saloon, the Mazda3 was completely satisfying and when you look at the economy it achieved without any effort it brought an added smile to our faces.

You don’t get such a sophisticated all rounder at this price.

For: Good powertrain, comfortable seats & ride, nice handling, extremely economical, Alexa voice technology.

Against: Small aperture boot, some road noise, limited rear legroom.

FAST FACTS

Model: Mazda3 Saloon 186 PS Exclusive-Line

Price: £30,155

Mechanical: 186 PS 2.0 4 cyl petrol-electric, 6 speed manual

Max Speed: 134 mph

0 – 62 mph: 8.1 secs

Combined MPG: 52.8

Insurance Group: 23E

C02 emissions: 123 g/km

Bik rating: 29%**,** £275FY, £180SR

Warranty: 3 years/ 60,000 miles

Size: L 4.66 m (15.29 ft), W 1.80 m (5.91 ft), H 1.44 m (4.72 ft)

Bootspace: 450 to 1,138 litres (15.89 to 40.19 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 1,407 kg (3,102 lb)

© ***WheelsWithinWales***