



Mazda3 SKYACTIV-G 2.0 litre 120 PS Sport Nav manual

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Tom Scanlan gets behind the wheel...

Mazda's 'SKYACTIV' technology is once again to the fore in its all-new Mazda3 range. SKYACTIV, says Mazda, involves carefully-designed engine mechanicals with 'world-beating' compression ratios, sophisticated chassis technology and the use of light weight but super-



strong construction.

Two body styles are available: Hatchback and Fastback, and engine options include 1.5 petrol, two 2.0 petrols and 2.2 diesel for the hatchback, plus 2.0 petrol and 2.2 diesel for the fastback.

Mazda's aim is to bring CO2 levels down to those of an electric vehicle. The new Mazda3s' CO2 levels mainly range from 104 g/km up to 128 g/km, so owners will pay as little as £20 per annum road tax to a maximum of only £95 for the most powerful version with automatic transmission - a manual version would save £65 here. There's one 165 PS version of the 2.0 petrol for the hatchback, 135 gm/k, £115 per annum.

Standard equipment across the range includes air-conditioning, aluminium alloy wheels, power-folding heated mirrors, a trip computer, leather covered steering wheel, six-speaker audio and 7-inch touch screen, plus USB/iPod connectivity and Bluetooth hands-free. Apparently, thanks to further information technology and built-in apps, you could access any one of around 40,000 radio stations around the world, plus Twitter and Facebook, as you would anywhere else.

Mazda says that the best-selling model will be the petrol 120 PS 2.0. This version proved to be very enjoyable to drive. The car, rear-wheel-drive that it is (rather uncommonly), was sure-footed over a variety of roads in the far north of Scotland, sometimes in wet and near-ice conditions. The precise steering was a pleasure, the brakes were totally up to the mark, both in normal conditions and in an emergency stop. Also part of the sense of security was the SCBS: Smart City Brake Support, Mazda's automatic brake application if the driver is distracted at speeds from 3 to 19 mph. And there's HHA (Hill Hold Assist) helping to prevent the car rolling back on inclines. Helping towards fuel economy is Mazda's i-stop idle-stop system, which is its version of start-stop on other cars and is the smoothest of them all.

The manual gearbox was excellent, thanks to clean, simple and quick action and the all-



important ride was particularly good. High marks, then, for the way this car behaves on the road.

From the outside in, the Mazda3 is a stylish design, smart, neat, and seemingly well-built and feeling strong. The interior layout is very good; soft-touch materials are welcome and, for the driver, so too are the clear instruments and switches and levers in the right place (not always the case, surprisingly, with today's cars) and set into a shiny black dashboard.

The driver's seat is adjustable for height and for lumbar support. The rear-view mirror is auto-dimming. Visibility all around is typical of this type of car: OK, but with that thick front windscreen pillar slightly in the way. At night, the Bi-Xenon headlights provide very good visibility for those drives along unlit roads.

There is quite good space for four adults and getting into and out of the back was not a particular problem. Once in, the new Mazda3 has more room than the previous model. The boot is also bigger than the outgoing version's and of course, there's the 60/40 rear seat folding system, very easy to use. (By the way, the Fastback has more luggage space than the hatchback.)



If you want satellite navigation, then unless you have your own portable Garmin or TomTom or whatever, you have to go for the top-of-the-range Sport Nav version. This also comes with a head-up display, so you get your speed and your route instructions low in the windscreen;



this is a good safety feature, allowing eyes to be kept on the road ahead.

An impressive range of anti-skid technology is standard on the new Mazda3 and is in part the reason for the car achieving the full five stars in the independent EuroNCAP tests.

The only disappointing aspect of the test run was the fuel consumption; the drive was reasonably varied and the car was only driven hard in short bursts. There were a few stops along the way, a couple of small towns to negotiate and no motorways, but opportunities to reach 70 mph on occasion. With that, the trip computer revealed that the consumption was 36.3 mpg.

However, the lasting impression was of a most appealing car, possibly one that might even attract a BMW or Audi owner to save a few bob.



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Mazda3 SKYACTIV-G 2.0 litre 120 PS Sport Nav manual (petrol)

Drivetrain: Front engine, rear wheel drive

Engine: 1998cc double overhead camshaft, 16 valve four cylinder direct injection petrol



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Power: 120 PS @ 6,000 rpm

Torque: 210Nm (155 lb.ft.) @ 4,000 rpm

0-62 mph: 8.9 seconds

Top speed: 123 mph

Fuel consumption, 'official' figures:

'Urban': 43.5 mpg

'Extra urban': 65.7 mpg

'Combined': 55.4 mpg

Actual figure achieved during our road test: 36.6

PRICE ('On The Road'): £22,795

Warranty: 3 years/60,000.