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Mazda5

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reports...

Surveying the variety of people carriers, or 'multi-purpose vehicles' (MPVs) offered by today's mainstream motor manufacturers, you could be forgiven for thinking that in some cases styling has not been a major consideration in their development. While these vehicles may be effective for the job that they have to do, they are hardly eye-catching, and often lack the 'wow' factor. By contrast, like a breath of fresh air, the new, seven seater Mazda5 has deliberately been given a more dynamic, flowing appearance, thus providing style appeal as well as all the practical aspects which are so essential to MPV buyers.

The new model is the first vehicle from Mazda to feature the 'Nagare' design language, said to be inspired by the flowing elements found in nature. This is most prominent along the cleverly sculpted body sides, incorporating changing contours plus styling lines that run at varying angles along the vehicle. These result in its appearance changing significantly according to light levels and the angle from which it is viewed.



Further striking features of the bodywork design include Mazda's contemporary five point front grille, sharply angled headlamps and a steeply raked windscreen. The distinctive rear window (incorporating a 'V' profile at its base) plus wrap-around rear lamp units complement the other styling cues. The overall effect is impressive and unmistakable; this is definitely a sleek-looking people carrier that is far more individualistic than most of its rivals

PRACTICALITIES

While good looks are desirable, for MPV buyers they count for very little if the vehicle does not also deliver in the practicality stakes...

So to start with, this new Mazda needs to be family-friendly in terms of carrying large numbers of people. No problems there, for it has seven seats divided between three rows (two in the front, three in the centre and two in the rear). In truth the rearmost two seats don't provide over-generous space for their occupants, but are fine for short trips or for use by children. By contrast, leg and head room is abundant for passengers in the forward and centre rows of seats.

Access to the interior is excellent, thanks to a large sliding door built into each side of the vehicle. The doors slide rearwards, revealing usefully large apertures that ensure easy entry to and exit from both the centre and rear rows of seats. A deliberately low step-up height and wide step make life easier for people of all ages getting into and out of the vehicle.

One of the major benefits of the twin sliding doors is that they can be fully opened even if the vehicle is parked in 'tight' situations.

A single piece tailgate, opening high from bumper level, provides unimpeded access to the wide, flat-floored luggage compartment. With just the front two rows of seats occupied, the 'boot' is long, wide and deep. If the rearmost two seats are in use, the available luggage space is significantly reduced, since the seats encroach on it.

With just two people on board, and all the rear seats folded/moved, the carrying capacity of



the Mazda5 is huge. It is quite capable of swallowing large items of furniture, etc. if ever this is necessary.

Mazda engineers have provided a wide variety of options in terms of varying the layout of the car between seating and luggage carrying. The seats are easily 'flipped', folded or moved as required. Handy 'out of sight' stowage compartments are built-in, beneath the centre row of seats and also at the rear of the load compartment.



The driving compartment is comfortable and well-equipped. Visibility is good too. The vehicle is physically large but on the TS2 version, parking is aided by standard-fit reversing sensors.



Twin sliding side doors give easy access to a plush, spacious second row of seats, plus a third row of seats with slightly less generous head and leg room.



With the rearmost seats stowed, the luggage compartment is truly cavernous - ideal for a



family's holiday apparel, for example.

WHICH VERSION

Three trim levels are offered, entry-level TS, TS2 and 'Sport'. All incorporate a multitude of safety and convenience systems, including Dynamic Stability Control (DSC), a Traction Control System (TCS), cruise control, front and rear electrically-operated windows, and so on.

TS2 buyers gain (among other additional features) a trip computer, rain-sensing screenwipers, a Bluetooth hands-free kit with voice control, automatic climate control air conditioning, and rear parking sensors.

Notable additional features forming part of the range-topping Sport specification include power-operation for the sliding doors, leather upholstery and heated front seats.

Engine choices for the new Mazda5 include 1.8 and 2.0 litre MZR petrol units, or a 1.6 litre MZ-CD turbo-diesel (all are 'Euro 5' compliant, and all drive the front wheels via a six speed manual gearbox).

The 115PS 1.8 litre petrol engine has been re-engineered compared with the previous unit (with new pistons and connecting rods, plus an electrically-operated throttle valve), resulting in a four per cent improvement in petrol consumption and a reduction in CO2 emissions of six per cent.

The 150PS 2.0 litre petrol motor is a Direct Injection Spark Ignition ('DISI') unit, and incorporates fuel and emissions-saving idle stop/start technology ('i-Stop'). Compared with the 2.0 litre engine used in the previous Mazda5, fuel consumption has improved by 14.2 per cent ('Combined' figure, 40.9 mpg), and CO2 emissions have been reduced by 15 per cent (to 159 g/km).



The 1.6 litre turbo-diesel variant is the most frugal model in the line-up. Employing third generation common rail technology, a turbocharger plus a particulate filter, the engine used in this version returns 54.3 mpg on the 'Combined' cycle.

ON THE ROAD

I tried the 2.0 litre petrol powered TS2 version, on a variety of roads varying between main road dual carriageways and narrow, twisting lanes, with plenty of undulating 'B' roads in between.

I found that the engine was a smooth-running, refined unit, delivering lively performance throughout the rev range. It pulled strongly from low rpm when required, and cruised at 70 mph in a quiet, effortless manner. It was complemented by a slick-acting gearchange, adding to driving pleasure in all situations, especially in the built-up areas and hilly sections on my test route.

The 'i-Stop' automatic idle stop/start system worked well, and proved to be unobtrusive and foolproof during my test drive (far better than some rival systems I have experienced). Its potential for saving both fuel and emissions is significant.

The suspension (MacPherson struts at the front, space-saving multi-link type at the rear) proved to be very supple over rough surfaces, and the ride was well-controlled. I felt that cornering was impressive too, for a large vehicle. Good all-round visibility, plus the standard provision (on the TS2) of reverse parking sensors, aided manoeuvring in tight spaces.

After my test run of approximately 90 miles, the on-board computer showed average petrol consumption of 27.9 miles per gallon. This was not as frugal as the official 'Combined' figure of 40.9 mpg, but to be fair to the vehicle, most of my driving had been on demanding country roads in hilly areas, with much gear-changing required.



Useful hidden stowage compartments are built-in beneath the centre row of seats, and towards the rear of the 'boot'.



Perfectly complementing the dynamic styling of this Mazda, the 10 spoke sports road wheels are attractive yet remain easy to clean.

VERDICT

Well done, Mazda. The new Mazda5 is distinctive and stands out from the crowd, yet at the



same time is a highly practical family vehicle, with a well thought out interior. It drives well, feels solidly engineered and promises to return good mpg figures.



The Mazda5's tailgate window incorporates a 'V' profile at the bottom, and the wrap-around rear lamp units follow the styling cues around the vehicle.

TECH SPEC IN BRIEF

Mazda5 TS2 2.0 litre petrol

Engine: 1998cc overhead camshaft 16 valve four cylinder

Power: 150 PS @ 6,200 rpm

Torque: 191 Nm @ 4,500 rpm

0-62 mph: 11.0 sec

Top speed: 120 mph

Fuel consumption ('Combined'): 40.9 mpg

CO2 emissions: 159g/km



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'ON THE ROAD' PRICE: £18,895.

(Note: The Mazda5 range starts at £17,695 and runs to £21,495).