



New Mazda 2

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Kim Henson takes a close look at Mazda's latest supermini...

Whichever way you look at the figures, the Mazda brand is going from strength to strength, with U.K. sales increasing at an exponential rate in recent times. In large part this is due to the rapid and comprehensive introduction of new models, all with with built-in 'buyer appeal'. In fact, with the launch of five new models planned during a six month period in 2015, the make has never seen such intense activity, and it is anticipated that interest in Mazda will continue to grow.

Amazingly, by September 2015 the oldest model in the line-up will be the most recent incarnation of the Mazda3, itself only introduced in 2013!

As Jeremy Thompson, Managing Director of Mazda U.K. explained, over each of the last few years, Mazda's sales have typically been increasing at the rate of 20 per cent per year - and it is expected that 2015 will show a similar rise. This is all the more remarkable when it is considered that the industry in general has seen 'flat' figures over the same timescale.

I was also interested to discover that of all the Mazdas bought privately these days, some 80 per cent are financed by Mazda, with two-thirds of these being funded using 'Personal Contract Purchase' or 'PCP' plans. This approach to financing the vehicles aids customer retention by Mazda.

At the same time, the firm has deliberately reduced the number of its U.K. dealers from 160 to 137, so higher numbers of sales are being made through a smaller number of larger dealers.



Contemporary design incorporating the latest Mazda family 'look' epitomises the new Mazda2.

Against the backdrop just described, Mazda is introducing the new Mazda2, the supermini which represents the smallest model in the firm's line-up.

The company already knows that the car will sell well... Two pre-production examples were each driven 6,000 miles in Britain, visiting dealers, who were thus able to show the new car to potential customers. As a result, at the time of writing (just a few days before the official launch on 20th March 2015) some 500 orders have already been taken, and it is anticipated that by 1st April, 1,000 examples will have been sold. (Sadly the two pre-production 'pioneer' vehicles that created the initial demand are to be scrapped!).

The newcomer is available in 16 variants, with 'on the road' prices ranging from £11,995 to £17,395.



Powering the new cars is a line-up of Euro 6 compliant SKYACTIV motors. Petrol versions include 75, 90 and 115 PS SKYACTIV-G units, and the 1.5 litre diesel SKYACTIV-D engine produces 105 PS. Engine efficiency is aided by a reduction in vehicle weight of seven per cent, compared with the previous Mazda2; this enhances fuel consumption and performance levels.

The new range designations start with 'SE', then rise progressively through 'SE-L', SE-L Nav', Sport and 'Sport Nav' versions.

In addition, to celebrate the launch of the new Mazda2, there's a special 'Sports Launch Edition' variant. Priced at £14,995 ('on the road'), this features the 90 PS petrol engine, and its comprehensive equipment list includes an integrated satellite navigation system, 16 inch aluminium alloy wheels, privacy glass, dusk-sensing lights, rain-sensing front screenwipers, rear parking sensors and (at no additional cost) Metallic/Mica/Pearlescent paint.

Standard on all variants is an array of safety features, including Anti-lock Brakes, Electronic Brakeforce Distribution, Electronic Brake Assist, Emergency Stop Signalling, Dynamic Stability Control, Hill Hold Assist, Traction Control and Tyre Pressure Monitoring.

A Lane Departure Warning System and Smart City Brake Support (which applies the brakes if the system senses imminent frontal impact) are fitted to SE-L (90 PS and 105 PS diesel variants), Sport, Sport Nav and the Sports Launch Edition versions.

SE-L Nav and Sport Nav models come complete with an integrated satellite navigation system (improved, and with three years worth of free map updates), and Sport versions have 16 inch aluminium alloy wheels, climate control air conditioning and 'smart' keyless entry.

Standard in SE-L and higher specification variants (but not the 75 PS SE-L) is a seven inch colour touch-screen, MZD Connect smartphone connectivity (which works with compatible iPhone and Android devices), rotary Multimedia Commander infotainment control and DAB radio.



Available as part of the optional safety pack on the 115 PS Sport Nav model only, is the 'heads-up' Active Driving Display system. This projects information on speed, turn-by-turn navigation instructions and vehicle warnings onto an instantly-visible small clear screen in the driver's line of sight, just above the dash (the display automatically adjusts according to ambient light conditions). The Mazda2 is the first car in its market sector to offer this technology.

Other features of the optional safety pack (for the 115 PS Sport Nav only) are High Beam Control, Blind Spot Monitoring and Rear Cross Traffic Alert systems.

The all-new platform ('chassis') incorporates a longer wheelbase than the outgoing Mazda2 (with small bodywork overhands at the front and rear), to optimise space inside the car. Mazda says that this approach has been complemented by improving shoulder room for travellers in the front seats, and providing greater knee room for rear seat occupants. The seats are said to have been made more comfortable too.

BEHIND THE WHEEL

I recently sampled two different examples of the new Mazda2, at the model's U.K. launch. In each case the long driving route provided a mixture of fast main routes, twisting country roads and deeply potholed 'tracks' in remote districts, plus some urban driving.

I found that the front seats of both the cars I drove were comfortable throughout each journey, and also I briefly sat in the rear seats, which I felt provided good head room and reasonable leg room for a compact car.

Boot space is reasonable for the size of vehicle, and luggage-carrying versatility is aided by the split-folding rear seat.

In both the models I tried the suspension provided a supple ride quality, even on the rough sections of road on the test routes, yet the cars' dynamic qualities of roadholding and handling were impressive too, with little body roll evident during enthusiastic motoring on



twisting cross-country roads.

PERKY PETROL...

My first drive was in the well-equipped 90 PS petrol-powered SE-L Nav model. The 'on the road' price of £14,395 for this variant was increased to £15,045 for the example I drove, which was finished in attractive Soul Red Metallic paintwork.

The 1.5 litre petrol engine delivered its eager performance quietly and smoothly, with more rapid acceleration than I had expected. My driving enjoyment was also helped by the slick-changing five speed manual gearbox.

The car was easy to drive in town, and to manoeuvre in tight situations, yet cruised as happily and serenely as a larger vehicle on motorways and main roads.

Pin-sharp, responsive steering (electrically-assisted) and highly effective (but not 'oversensitive') brakes were also plus factors in my book.

In short, a very pleasant motor car.



Smart aluminium alloy road wheels are fitted to all versions above 'SE' trim level; this car



is an SE-L version.



The SKYACTIV-G petrol engine is a smooth-running, willing yet frugal motor.



The comfortable interior feels well put together; this is the petrol powered SE-L test car.



Optionally available as part of a safety pack (but only on the 115 PS Sport Nav model) is this 'heads-up' Active Driving Display system.



Luggage accommodation is reasonable for a compact car.

TECH SPEC IN BRIEF

Mazda2 1.5 90 PS SE-L Nav Petrol (five door)

Engine: SKYACTIV-G 1496cc, twin overhead camshaft, four cylinder 16 valve petrol

Transmission: Five speed manual

Power: 90 PS at 6,000 rpm

Torque: 148 Nm (109 lb.ft) @ 4,000 rpm

0-62 mph: 9.4 sec

Top speed: 114 mph

Fuel consumption:

(‘Combined’): (‘Urban’): 47.9 mpg

(‘Extra Urban’): 76.3 mpg

(‘Combined’): 62.8 mpg

CO2 emissions: 105 g/km

‘On the road’ price (not including options) £14,395 (as sampled, with options, £15,045).



This is the attractive, diesel-powered 105 PS Sport Nav model that Wheels-Alive sampled.

DELIGHTFUL DIESEL...

I next sampled the 105 PS Sport Nav diesel version. Priced at £17,395 'on the road', the car I drove was fitted with an array of options (including 'body kit' enhancements) which brought the total figure up to £19,350.

In terms of ride, handling and roadholding characteristics I felt that this diesel Mazda2 was on a par with the petrol version I had tried first.

I found that the diesel motor was impressive in all respects. For a start it was quiet-running and refined, throughout the rev range. It pulled strongly at all speeds, and the prodigious low speed torque output was particularly pleasing, helping to make urban motoring less of a



chore (as fewer gearchanges were required).

Talking of gearchanging, this version of the Mazda2 is equipped with a six speed manual gearbox, and on the test car it provided especially smooth, easy and rapid ratio changes.

Acceleration from rest and on the move was hushed and relatively rapid. This vehicle is not a sports-car, but I found it was great fun to drive, helped by the strong torque delivery which continues through a wide rev band.

High speed cruising was relaxing and quiet, with the tachometer needle indicating just 2,000 rpm at 70 mph in top (sixth) gear. A low engine speed like this is good in terms of fuel consumption and low noise plus high refinement levels, plus in the long run, to minimise engine wear.

During my test drive I didn't get close to the official 'Combined' fuel consumption figure of 83.1 miles per gallon; the on-board computer was telling me more like 59 mpg (but this included some enthusiastic driving and some in-town motoring in queues).

This diesel model's low CO2 rating of just 89 g/km is important, not least because it means that the car qualifies for a zero rate of road tax.



The side profile of the new Mazda2 highlights its dynamic appearance, including the lines of the window 'sills', which rise towards the rear.



The sporty road wheels on the 1-5 PS Sport Nav test car were enhanced by red highlighted sections.



An interior view of the 105 PS Sport Nav diesel test vehicle.



Leg room is reasonable (rather than generous) for rear seat occupants; there's plenty of head room throughout the interior.

TECH SPEC IN BRIEF

Mazda2 1.5 105 PS Sport Nav Diesel (five door)

Engine: SKYACTIV-D 1499cc, twin overhead camshaft, four cylinder 16 valve petrol

Transmission: Six speed manual

Power: 105 PS at 4,000 rpm

Torque: 220 Nm (162 lb.ft) @ 1,400 to 3,200 rpm

0-62 mph: 10.1 sec

Top speed: 111 mph

Fuel consumption:



('Urban'): 74.3 mpg

('Extra Urban'): 88.3 mpg

('Combined'): 83.1 mpg

CO2 emissions: 89 g/km (so the car qualifies for a zero rate of road tax)

'On the road' price (not including options) £17,395 (as sampled, with options, £19,350).

KIM'S VERDICT

Well done Mazda. The new Mazda2 is likeable, practical and cost-effective. It's versatile for a wide range of motoring tasks too. Although it is a handy supermini, so therefore compact enough for everyday town driving, I would be equally happy to take one on longer trips as well, on a frequent/regular basis.

TOM SCANLAN'S VIEW...

Tom also drove the new Mazda2 supermini on its U.K. launch, here are his thoughts...

Mazda are almost running amok.

This year they will launch four all-new cars and two heavily-revised versions. The oldest car in their line up, the Mazda3, was introduced only fourteen months ago.

Now they present the new Mazda2.

This is their smallest car (don't count the MX5 sports car), in what the industry calls the B Sector.

Prices range from £11,995 up to £17,395 in this 16-car range. The top seller will be the



90PS 1.5-litre petrol-engined manual. There is a diesel, but apparently only about 10% of these will be the buyers's choice.

Mazda says the important points across the range are the generous standard equipment and the premium quality and craftsmanship. If they are right with that, the pricing is not perhaps as high as you might at first think. They don't go big on the car's looks, but it is, I think, quite a pretty machine.

The first of three types that I drove was the SE-L Nav version of the 90PS fitted with an automatic gearbox that added 'Sport' and ordinary driving mode settings. The Sport mode really seemed to do nothing much other than keep the revs up. the gear changes were very smooth, almost imperceptible.

The 5-speed manual car with the same engine was fun to drive. Some particularly stiff hills were included in test route and the car struggled to keep going unless I went down to second gear - peak torque only comes in at 4000 rpm, but the gear change itself is excellent to use, with sharp and precise movement. Once at speed, the cars handled really nicely, with virtually no roll at all. The steering was excellent, being accurate and nicely-weighted. The ride was outstandingly good and as this is such an important part of travelling in a car, I forgave it its lack of power.

Out on the motorway, the car is relaxed at 70 mph, with the engine revving at only about 2400 rpm, hence it was nice and quiet inside and long journeys should be no problem. helping in this regard were the very comfortable seats.

As a B Sector car, the inside is quite roomy - the wheelbase is longer than before - and the boot is short but deep (no spare wheel under the floor); when the rear seats are folded there is quite a step up in the extended floor space.

The fuel consumption, as indicated by the cars' trip computers, on the test routes varied from 40.4 mpg in the auto to 48.9 mpg in the manual. The 1.5 diesel was also driven and over a busy and hilly 60-mile route in South Devon indicated 56.8 mpg; the official combined



consumption figure is 83 mpg.

The diesel was more at home in the conditions experienced, thanks of course to its much greater torque at much lower revs. Once the engine was warm, the car was quite quiet, with a touch of transmission noise - probably because it was a brand-new car.

The satellite navigation system was not intuitive enough: when I missed a way-point, there seemed no way that 'the voice' wanted to do anything other than get me back to what had been missed, even when it was instructed to go on to the final already-entered destination. It said the destination was already in the system (obviously) and asked 'OK', from which point on all that came up was the destination point and no map or guidance. Apart from that, it was OK. Because Mazda points out its cutting edge technology is another major selling point to attract customers to its already best-selling model, then it's worth pointing out that that's all fine, but that the designers need to ensure simplicity of operation. (Having got that off my chest, I suppose it's true to admit that, over time, an owner would get to learn how everything worked.) On the other hand, controls such as the air conditioning and vents were very nicely designed and felt nice to use...quality! And the dashboard, particularly in the sport version with its stitched leather to the front, was another attractive feature.

Mazda2 will no doubt continue its current success story. Although a small player in the overall market, Mazda sales tend to increase about double that of the industry as a whole in Britain.