



WHEELS-ALIVE!

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New Mazda6

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by Chris

In the highly competitive executive sedan market, Mazda has traditionally fitted between the prestige and mainstream brands – but with its new Mazda6 it manages to encompass both.

The new third generation Mazda6 has the functionality and practical features of a Ford Mondeo alongside the technology, specification and style normally associated with a BMW 3 Series.

And on top of this it can claim the lowest emissions in its class and joint best fuel economy with its latest diesel engine giving both retail and fleet customers plenty of reasons to put it on their short-list.

Mazda6 is the second model in the Mazda range to get the SKYACTIV treatment – that’s a comprehensive review of every aspect of the vehicle designed to make it stronger, lighter



(by 50kg) and more efficient.

NEW LOOK – SALOON AND ESTATE BODIES

Visually, the new longer and wider Mazda6 carries the latest corporate Kodo design principles first seen on the CX-5 and it looks crisp and smart from almost every angle from the prominent five-point grille and sporting low front splitter, to the opposing crease lines in the side panel work and wrap-around tail lights.

In a major change from previous generation versions of the Mazda6 there isn't a hatchback body style as these have become less popular in the sector in recent years, accounting for just 25 per cent of sales.

Instead it comes as either a smart four door saloon (which will be chosen by 60 per cent of buyers) or a sporting Tourer, the latter with its carrying capability going from 506 litres to 1648 litres which is plenty for those who need the added versatility and carrying capacity in a vehicle that doesn't look heavy or cumbersome.

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The wide access saloon boot at 482 litres is about average in the class but it does have remotely operated 60/40 split folding seat backs that go almost flat and a full width load through section below a fixed parcel shelf, releasing up to 1632 litres. The only downside is that the seat locking mechanisms protrude from the seat backs and could snag luggage or shopping.

A longer 2.8 metre wheelbase means the Mazda6 has grown inside, releasing plenty of leg and head room even in the rear, despite the coupé like roof profile, and everything is finished in good quality soft-touch plastics and either piano black or metallic trim, which gives it a contemporary feel alongside well laid out instruments and controls, highlighted by a 5.8 inch colour touch screen.



The only disappointment is the less than intuitive menu selector dial and push buttons on the central console, that take some time to get used to.

SKYACTIVE ENGINEERING

New Mazda6 is offered with a choice of two SKYACTIV engines - shared with the Mazda CX-5 SUV - a 2.2 litre diesel and a 2 litre petrol, each with two power outputs. All come with i-Stop automatic stop-start and promise up to 16 per cent more power, 12 per cent more torque, a 20 per cent reduction in CO2 and a 21 per cent improvement in fuel economy.

The most popular, by some distance, will be the quiet and smooth 150bhp 2.2D which features lots of mid-range torque for snappy overtaking and a brisk response to the throttle, with over 65mpg possible, plus low emissions that will make it especially attractive for tax payers using it as a company car.

There is also a higher powered 175bhp diesel that is over a second quicker in the sprint and is the one to go for if performance is a priority.

The starter 2 litre petrol offers 145bhp but fails to match its diesel counterpart in any category, being slightly slower at 9.5 seconds to 62mph and having a 51mpg thirst for unleaded fuel.

Its higher powered 165bhp stable-mate is only slightly quicker and is heavier on the unleaded so has little going for it on paper.

One of the nicest features on both the engines is the slick, short-throw, six-speed manual transmission - there is also a six-speed DSG automatic with paddle shift controls.

The revised MacPherson strut front and multi-link rear suspension works well in conjunction with a stiffer body and chassis, to give a very comfortable ride - even on the 19inch wheels that are fitted to the Sport versions.

At the same time there is a confident feel from the electrically assisted rack and pinion steering, although its over lightness can lose some definition at speed.



One of the technological highlights transferred from the CX-5 is Smart City Brake Support – which automatically brakes the vehicle from low speed if it senses it is going to collide with an obstruction ahead. It also helps the Mazda6 to drop five insurance groups.

This is joined on the Mazda6 by a unique system called i-ELOOP – a regenerating braking system that uses a capacitor to capture energy under braking and uses it to recharge the battery.

In normal driving conditions, this energy recovery should be enough to run all the on-board electrical systems from the lighting and air conditioning to the windows and audio.

Because none of the power from the engine is being used to recharge the battery, all of it can be used to drive the vehicle, giving a saving of ten percent compared to a standard vehicle – this is one of the reasons why it beats all but BMW's Efficient Dynamics engines in fuel conservation.

This is such a simple and effective concept that you wonder why no one has thought of it before. By the way, there is a failsafe so that should the battery charge run low it can be topped up by the engine.

VERDICT – VALUE FOR MONEY

Compared with its rivals, the Mazda6 promises the best value for money when specification is assessed like-for-like, in some cases by as much as £10,000.

All get 17inch alloy wheels, air conditioning, trip computer, CD radio audio, with USB, iPod and auxiliary connections, Hill Hold Assist, Tyre Pressure monitors, that colour touch screen and cruise control.

The favoured trim will be the SE-L that adds in dual-zone climate control, privacy glass, power folding door mirrors, front and rear parking sensors, automatic wipers and headlights and Smart City Brake Support.



Topping the range are the Sport models that get 19inch alloy wheels, Bi-Xenon headlights, Adaptive Front Lighting, a reversing camera, full leather trim, powered front seats and a Premium Bose surround sound system with 11 speakers. Integrated TomTom satellite navigation is an option at all grades. Prices for the new Mazda6 start at £19,595 and rise to £28,045.

WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC. IN BRIEF

Mazda 6 2.2D Sport Nav Saloon

Engine: 2191cc four-cylinder diesel, six-speed manual transmission, front-wheel drive

Power: 150bhp @ 4,500 rpm

Torque: 380 Nm @ 1,800 - 2,600rpm

Top Speed: 131mph

0-62mph: 9 seconds

Fuel Consumption:

Urban - 55.4mpg

Extra Urban - 78.5mpg

Combined - 67.3mpg

Emissions: 108 g/km (VED Band B)