

SOULFUL EVOLUTION. by Joe Sage

This Mazda6 was with us for only a short time, just a few days between business travel to Michigan and then to Hawaii. This turns out to have been appropriate, as the car we received, model year 2017.5, would also be with the world for only a short time, a holdover of the 2017 model until a new 2018 Mazda6 would be released just a month or two later. It gives us a chance for a good heads-up on what the new Mazda6 holds in store.

It's too bad we didn't have it longer. The Mazda6 is a fine car, always has been. We picked it up well after midnight, after a long couple of travel days in a hellaciously long couple of weeks, and finding all our controls and settings in the dark was easy, not the case with all too many even in broad daylight. Setup is all intuitive, a really clean design.

The about-to-be-released 2018 model is a refresh, as well as a bit of a recalibration, pushing things up the power curve and upscale in several key ways. Models from Grand Touring on up receive a new 2.5-liter turbo (similar to that in the big CX-9 SUV) packing 250 hp, a 35.9 percent gain from the 2017.5 Grand Touring (if you run on premium gas; on regular, it's 227 hp, up 23.3 percent, a tradeoff you can play either way at any time).

Did we say Grand Touring on up? Yes, whereas Grand Touring has traditionally been the top trim for many Mazda models, there will now be Grand Touring Reserve and Signature trims above that, which is in line with Mazda's recent directive to move things upscale overall in response to their analysis of their own shoppers and buyers, as well as industry and market trends. Inclusions change

in various ways, but the Grand Touring drops from 2017.5's \$30,695 to \$29,200, while Grand Touring Reserve and Signature run \$31,700 and \$34,750.

The power boost is most welcome, as the 184-hp spec is better suited to a smaller car, though it's not mandatory for your 2018 purchase—Sport and Touring trims still have the naturally aspirated 2.5L (up 3 hp, still 35 mpg highway), while Grand Touring and up receive the turbo. (And Sport still offers a 6-speed manual, which of course we wish were also available with at least one of the turbos.)

The 2018 Mazda6 also receives an all-new interior including ventilated seats, Nappa leather (including new colors), Japanese sen wood and UltraSuede NU finishes in the new Signature trim.

This adds up to it being a nice time to be shopping for the Mazda6. You will find many things to appreciate in the new 2018 model, available turbo power chief among them, while non-turbo buyers can now surely get a great deal on a 2017.5. ■

SPECS: 2017.5 GRAND TOURING

ENGINE	.....2.5L DOHC 16v 4-cyl / 2018: 2.5T turbo
DRIVETRAIN	.....FWD
HP/TORQUE	.....184 hp/185 lb-ft / 2018 turbo: 250/310
TRANSMISSION	.....6-spd SkyACTIV Sport w Sport mode
TOP SPEED	.....137 mph / 2018 turbo: 149 mph
SUSPENSION	.....F: indep MacPherson, coils, stblzr bar R: indep multi-link type, coils, stblzr bar
STEERING	.....speed-sensing electric power
BRAKES	.....diagonal hydraulic; electronic parking 11.7x1.1 vented front, 10.9x0.4 solid rear discs
WHEELS/TIRES	.....19x7.5 dk silver alloy / P225/45 R19
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....191.5 / 111.4
TURNING CIRCLE	.....36.7 ft
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....42.2 / 38.7 in
WEIGHT	.....3305 lb
FUEL / FUEL CAPACITY	.....regular unleaded / 16.4 gal
MPG	.....27/35/30 (city/hwy/comb) / 2018 turbo: 23/31/26
BASE PRICE (2017.5 GRAND TOURING)	.....\$30,695
MACHINE GRAY METALLIC PAINT	.....300
GT PREMIUM PKG:	i-LOOP regenerative engine braking, active grille shutters, shifter LED accent lighting, bright finish interior trim, Nappa leather trim, heated rear seats, heated steering wheel w stitching, black headliner..2500
CARGO MAT	.....75
DOOR STILL TRIM PLATES	.....125
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....875
TOTAL (2017.5 GT AS TESTED)	.....\$34,570



Shown are our recent 2017.5 Mazda6 in Machine Gray Metallic and, above that, the 2018 Mazda6 in Soul Red Crystal Metallic.