

HIGH-TORQUE TURBO

by Joe Sage

This is the fourth generation of Mazda3, or 12th if you count the whole Mazda 323 and GLC history preceding it since the 1960s. It's been a solid, handsome and popular little unit for the duration, and this latest model is no exception.

The current run was launched in 2018 as a 2019 model, in both hatchback and sedan forms. We spent a week with the hatch a year ago, giving its powertrain and handling high praise.

Our sedan is an automatic (as was last year's hatch), which is a given, as all Mazda3 sedans are equipped this way; only the front-drive Premium

trim level hatchback offers a manual.

This sedan also has the most noteworthy new-for-2021 attribute: a 227-hp 2.5-liter turbo, with a whopping 310 lb-ft of torque (or up to 250 hp and 320 lb-ft running on premium fuel). There is also a 186-hp/186-lbft normally aspired four in both the sedan and hatch, and the sedan (only) also offers one entry level trim with a 155-hp 2.0-liter engine. Lower trims are front-drivers, higher trims AWD.

In all, there are seven trim levels for the sedan, six for the hatch (without a 2.0L base model). As such, our 2.5 Turbo Premium Plus AWD is the top

model (other than the hatch at \$1300 more) and adds a tech and features list a mile long.

All those variables aside, the Mazda3 sedan (also known as the four-door) and hatch (also known as the five-door) are identical in specification, other than two attributes inherent in each—the hatchback has more interior cargo volume, and the sedan is about eight inches longer.

All these decision points can make your mission either complicated or easy, depending upon your

goals and flexibilities.

We've been impressed by Mazda's Skyactiv engines and transmissions since their dawn—if you see these units freestanding, shiny and clean on a show stand, as we do at new vehicle launch drives, they display all the complex wizardry of a Swiss watch, and much of its miniaturization. It's this compactness, which creates far less loss of mechanical advantage in operation, that lets an engine this small, with relatively moderate horsepower, bear about 50 percent more car-launching, road-hugging torque than you might expect.

Especially in this age of turbos and the occasional diesel, people have come to appreciate the once-neglected importance of a strong torque specification. This engine torque (mated to a perfectly matched and sequenced Skyactiv automatic) is a

huge factor in the Mazda3 2.5T turbo's impressive performance attributes. (The engine and transmission are so well integrated, it reduces our ability to bemoan the lack of a manual.)

Our notes for the week basically broke down into two categories: quick and exuberant notes about great performance and incredibly lengthy ones about details of the infotainment interface, more than typical on both. As always, an owner will have plenty of time to sort out the oddities of an interface (expect extra fun with radio presets), while the dominant drive experience will endure.

As the segment shrinks, a sedan may now be as much a specialty vehicle as a hatchback. Mazda has always serviced a smaller volume, and they've never abandoned specialty niches. That puts the Mazda3 right on top of its game. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Hofu, Japan
SEATING	five
ENGINE	2.5L SKYACTIV-G turbo-4
	16v alum/alum advanced dir injection
HP/TORQUE	(reg fuel) 227 hp / 310 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	10.5:1
DRIVETRAIN	(std w turbo) iACTIV AWD
TRANSMISSION	SKYACTIV-DRIVE 6-spd
	electronically controlled sport automatic
SUSPENSION	F: indep, MacPherson strut;
	R: torsion beam axle
STEERING	rack & pinion, elec pwr assist
BRAKES	F: 11.61 vented; R: 10.43 solid
WHEELS / TIRES	18x7J / 215/45R18 M+S
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	183.5 / 107.3 in
TURNING CIRCLE	37.3 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	(w mnrf) 38.0 / 37.3 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	42.3 / 35.1 in
CARGO CAPACITY	13.2 cu.ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	5.5 in
WEIGHT	3379 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	reg unl / (AWD) 12.7 gal
MPG	23/32/27 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$32,450
SOUL RED CRYSTAL METALLIC	595
PREMIUM PLUS PKG: leather seats, front & rear parking sensors, 360-degree view monitor, traffic jam assist, auto-dim exterior mirror, traffic sign recognition, Mazda nav system w 3-yr traffic & travel link trial, rear smart city brake support, rear cross traffic w braking, Homelink, black rear lip spoiler.....	incl
DESTINATION CHARGE	945
TOTAL	\$33,990



Our hatchback last year was in Machine Gray Metallic, one of three mildly upcharged colors from Mazda (\$495). Another is Snowflake White Pearl Mica (\$395). The sedan here is in our favorite: Soul Red Crystal Metallic (\$595), surely one of the finest red paints in the business.

