

PURE FORMULA BY JOE SAGE

Mazda MX-5 Miata was born in an era when little two-seat convertible sports cars were years gone, not expected to be seen again. Its popularity spawned a resurgence from many brands, generally pricier, but Mazda has stayed true to its formula: fun and accessible, starting in the \$20s and capping out just over \$30 grand, as in the top-trim soft top we're driving here. (This year, both the soft and RF retractable hardtop are available.)

The 2021 Miata is a carryover model from 2020, which had a number of upgrades ranging from tech interface to seat stitching, while the top trim Grand Touring with manual shift we're driving here received notable drivetrain and chassis upgrades—limited-slip rear differential, sport-tuned suspen-

sion, a new front shock tower brace and Bilstein dampers. And it's all still just above \$30 grand.

Little roadsters take a moment to get used to if you're tall, but we remind ourselves they are a pure experience kind of on a par with backpacking, where minimalism is your friend. Storage and stash space is sparse—other than cupholders, a bin between the upper seatbacks, an awkward reach, is about the only place for a sunglasses case.

Fifteen seconds is our benchmark for convertible top operation. In the Miata, it takes about one second either up or down: unlatch, grab, drop, push-click into place; unlatch, grab, raise, latch.

Cargo volume is under five cubic feet, but of such proportions that it looks and feels (and func-

tions) like more. (Notably, trunk space is almost just as generous in the retractable hardtop.)

Purposeful and fun at the same time, suspension can feel skateboard-stiff on rough surfaces, but skateboard-lively and maneuverable in all conditions, and this is a great thing. Fun is job one.

We used our Miata as a daily driver during most of a week of record rains. On our final day, Valley skies cleared and it was still a bit cooler, a rare combination for a convertible in August in the desert. Just heading to the corner store, we instead turned onto the boulevard for a few feel-good top-down miles—which turned into the full length of that road, then another, till we were at the irresistible Beeline Highway. Why not just a few miles of this? We can turn around any time. You can guess the rest: our quick run to the store turned into lunch in Payson—and this is just that kind of car.

We drove up with the top down, but then the rains came again, so we drove back down with the top up. 181 hp may not sound like a lot, but Miata weighs just 2341 pounds even in this top trim. Its lightweight Skyactiv engine thus provides plenty of pep, the manual transmission is smooth and accurate, traction remained great in heavy rain at highway speeds through mountain twists and turns, and we can vouch for great brakes, as one truck who perhaps forgot they were towing a trailer almost took us out with a sudden lane change.

We once boasted to a dealer's service advisor about the low mileage on a roadster of our own, to which they just laughed and said everybody has low mileage on these—it's almost always somebody's second or third car. This is likely especially true in the Miata, given its still highly advantageous price. Even in top trim, no buyer should expect a \$100k or even \$60k luxury car for \$25-30 grand. Instead, expect as much fun as a day at the beach and a carnival ride, with top roadability.



Suitably useful on a daily basis, Mazda MX-5 Miata really shines when you slip behind the wheel and hit the open road—on a whim and for as long as you feel like. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Hiroshima, Japan
SEATING CAPACITY	.....two
ENGINE	.....2.0L SKYACTIV-G 4-cyl EFI, alum/alum, 16v DOHC, induction sound enhancer (MT only)
HP/TORQUE	.....181 hp / 151 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....13:0
DRIVETRAIN	.....RWD (w torque-sensing limited slip diff, MT only)
TRANSMISSION	.....6-spd manual, short throw shifter (6-spd auto w paddles avail)
SUSPENSION	.....(some details are MT only): Brembo brakes red calipers (GT); gas monotube Bilstein shocks (MT); F: dbl wishbone, shock tower brace (MT only), stblzr bar; R: multi-link, stblzr bar
STEERING	.....double pinion elec pwr assist
BRAKES	.....F: 11" vented, single piston; R: x1" solid, single-piston
WHEELS	.....17x17 aluminum
TIRES	.....P205/45 R17 high-perf summer
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....154.1 / 90.9 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....curb to curb 30.8 ft
HEADROOM	.....37.4 in
LEGROOM	.....43.1 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....4.59 cu.ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....4.7 in
WEIGHT	.....(MT) 2341 lb
WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION	.....(MT) 52/48%
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....87 ok, 91 recm / 11.89 gal
MPG	.....26/34/29 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	.....\$31,770
SNOWFLAKE WHITE PEARL PAINT	.....395
GRAY SOFT TOP	.....200
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....945
TOTAL	.....\$33,310

Another Grand Touring-only option is the grey top on ours (just \$200, see photo on page 3, table of contents), which—along with our sample's Snowflake White Pearl paint (just \$395)—not only gives the car a sharp and sort of nautical look, but is probably a good choice in our desert sunshine, less likely to show fading.

MAZDA MX-5 MIATA LINEUP 2021

SOFT TOP		
Sport	.....2.0T 181 hp	.....\$26,830
Club	....."	.....30,290
Grand Touring	....."	.....31,770
RF RETRACTABLE FASTBACK (HARDTOP)		
Club	....."	.....\$33,045
Grand Touring	....."	.....34,525

