

# SOLID NUMBERS SOLID STYLE

BY JOE SAGE

## TRY THIS BABY ON FOR SIZE



2013 Mazda6



Mazda Takeri concept

The Mazda6 hung onto its prior style a little longer than it might have. The Mazda3 and CX-5 had already updated their sheetmetal to the KODO "Soul of Motion" design language a couple of years ago. And the Mazda6 in other parts of the world had evolved about halfway to that.

For 2014, the all-new Mazda6 delivers both. Start with that styling. At left, you can see the prior retail model and the Takeri concept car shown at the New York auto show in 2012 (and in Tokyo shortly before). Most often, we can only dream of a show car going into production true to its concept. And it takes awhile. But Mazda has delivered an extremely high percentage of what you saw then, and in short order.

The production grille is one of the best-proportioned in the current lineup. We admired its clever chrome trim (below)—outlining the lower edges, then cleverly defining the juncture of headlights, fascia and hood. The only thing cooler was the

approach in that Takeri, where it splits the headlights. Aside from that, about all that's missing are the slim side mirrors and LED front running lights. Close enough for now. Our test model even showed up in the same Soul Red paint used at the Tokyo and New York shows. And under the hood, fuel-saving but potent SKYACTIV technology is now fully implemented.

The midsize sedan segment is one of the most competitive. So what does the Mazda6 bring to the contest? Lots of style. And great numbers—both price and fuel mileage. Our top of the line Grand Touring sample, fully equipped right out of the box, has a base price in the 20s (barely, at \$29,695). There are two models below that—a mid-range Touring model at \$23,645 or a Sport model at just \$20,990. Sport and Touring come standard with a 6-speed manual transmission. For Sport, the automatic adds \$1705 and for Touring \$1050. Grand Touring is automatic only. The automatic delivers better fuel mileage—one additional MPG in each category.

All models have the same 184-hp SKYACTIV four-cylinder powerplant. Differences among trim levels are in the feature list, and even the base Sport model is extremely well equipped—with

auto halogen headlights, filtered A/C, power mirrors, variable wipers, power windows and doors, cruise, keyless entry and start, 6-speaker audio and more. Touring replaces 17-inch wheels with 19-inchers, plus adds leatherette seats with 6-way power driver's seat, climate vents in the rear, blind spot and rear cross traffic alerts, Bluetooth phone/audio plus a 5.8-inch touchscreen, HD and Pandora. At the Grand Touring level, the 19-inch wheels are upgraded, there's a rear lip spoiler, headlights are bi-xenon and LED running lights are added, along with leather-trimmed seats (heated in front), navigation, an 11-speaker Bose surround sound system and more.

The instrument panel and controls, including steering wheel, console and screen, are all well laid out, visually and tactilely pleasing.

A strip of highly polished, deep cherry-colored wood across the center of the dash in the Grand Touring model adds a healthy dash of class.

At an outside temperature of just 97, we had trouble keeping the cabin cool when set on automatic, even at a lower-than-average 68—we had to instead rely on lots of manual fan override.

The juncture of style and function presented us with a few paradoxes. The sleek, almost four-door-coupe-like design carried forward so faithfully from the concept car does reduce inside visibility a bit, although the overall occupant feeling is of openness, at least with this light-colored almond leather interior. Your correspondent is a couple of inches north of six feet, and kept finding himself trying to move the seat back, only to find

it was already back. We bumped our head or hand on the inside rear view mirror many times. And with an elbow on an open window sill, the window frame was too tight to reach a hand up top.

The Bose system sounded kind of average, even after carefully tuning, although average has certainly gotten pretty good. Satellite station acquisition was very slow, and information read-out even slower. We plugged in an iPod nano and were glad we hadn't brought a Classic, as every time we reentered the car, it compiled the entire contents again, then started off at the first alphabetical song again (Smashing Pumpkins: 1979). This type of behavior can sometimes result from evolving cable compatibilities, though ours are up to date. Ultimately, we turned it up and decided it was no concert hall knockout, but that most people would be tapping their toe along just fine.

We had kind words for the car where it matters most—driving. It's a very smooth handler, with fluid power and well-spaced shifts. The car tracks well, especially for a front-driver—it doesn't wander or stray. The SKYACTIV's 184 horses are efficiently directed to the drive wheels, feeling like much more.

Depending upon your own ergonomics, you will want to try the car on for size. We hope it fits, because it's a fine machine if it does. ■

### SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	...SKYACTIV-G 2.5L DOHC 4-cylinder
TRANS	.....SKYACTIV 6-spd sport auto
POWERTRAIN	.....front-wheel drive
POWER/TORQUE	.....184 hp, 185 lb-ft torque
FUEL MILEAGE	...26/38/30 MPG city/hwy/comb
(FYI MODELS W/MANUAL	.....25/37/29 MPG )
BASE (GRAND TOURING)	.....\$29,695
• Soul Red paint	.....\$300
• Radar cruise / forward obstruction pkg	.....\$900
DESTINATION	.....\$795
TOTAL AS TESTED	.....\$31,690

