

# Perennially popular

BY JOE SAGE

To paraphrase classic Sara Lee baked goods advertising, everybody doesn't like something, but nobody doesn't like the Mazda MX-5 Miata. Since its arrival on the scene in 1989—30 years ago, in a time when the simple two-seat droptop sports car seemed gone forever—its simple formula of affordable fun and lightweight performance has generated endless smiles and positive reviews.

A classic two-seat, front-engined, rear-drive open car, its appeal has always been immediate. It no longer stands alone in the segment, but with many of its competitors pricey German models, its value remains solid (starting at just \$25,730).

The soft-top model already has a nice weight distribution (52:48 manual, 53:47 automatic), maintained over time through materials lightweighting overall, even as engines have grown. The RF (Retractable Fastback) was introduced in 2017 (see our Sept/Oct 2017 cover feature), replacing a prior hardtop convertible (which mimicked the soft-top's shape) with a new coupe-styled profile (but more of a T-top open experience than full convertible). One thing we sunk our teeth into in 2017 was that the manual RF's weight distribution was a perfect 50:50 (while the automatic's was 51:49). Flash forward to today, and the newest model sits at 51:49 with either transmission.

That removes an (admittedly almost imperceptible) advantage of the manual in the RF, but we would still prefer that transmission, not only for our own fundamental preferences, but because we experienced quite a bit of surging in this automatic, even unexpected shifts while at constant speed on straight freeways (we had similar experiences in normal or sport modes). Of course, if automatic is your preference, there's always the manumatic mode, and again, now with weight distribution as good as the manual's.

We noted a few nitpicks during our week with the car—it was a rainy stretch, and the backup camera is very susceptible to image-blocking globs of water; an audio device continues to play when you think you've turned it off (but have only muted it, a one-button affair, while turning it off requires a screen dive); some shortcomings in interior storage space, even for a small roadster; that odd shift behavior; and a trunk that's small, as expected, but sort of bucket-shaped, not too handy for quite a few certain loads, like our clean shirts.

Our Grand Touring is the top trim (above Sport and Club), priced at \$30,780 for the soft top model, versus Club at \$29,590. All trims are well outfitted with keyless entry/start, power windows and many other details. Club has Recaro seats, Grand Touring full leather. Sport has AM-FM audio, while Club and Grand Touring have a decent 9-speaker Bose system. Automatic climate control kicks in at the Grand Touring level. All have Bluetooth.

Whether to kick in for the RF model may be a

## SPECIFICATIONS

<b>CONSTRUCTION</b> ...	monocoque unibody w backbone frame
<b>ENGINE</b> ...	SKYACTIV-G alum 2.0L DOHC 16v 4-cyl w VVT, chain-driven DOHC, 4v/cyl, variable intake valve timing
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b> .....	RWD
<b>HP/TORQUE</b> .....	181 hp / 151 lb-ft
<b>TRANSMISSION</b> .....	6-spd auto w paddles (6-spd short throw manual avail)
<b>SUSPENSION</b> .....	F: double-wishbone; R: multi-link; gas-filled monotube shocks front/rear
<b>STEERING</b> .....	double-pinion electric power assist
<b>BRAKES</b> .....	pwr-assist vented front / solid rear discs
<b>WHEELS</b> .....	17x7 alum alloy dark silver
<b>TIRES</b> .....	205/45R17; puncture repair kit
<b>LENGTH / WB</b> .....	154.1 / 90.9 in
<b>TURNING CIRCLE</b> .....	curb-to-curb 30.8 ft
<b>GROUND CLEARANCE</b> .....	5.3 in
<b>HEADROOM / LEGROOM</b> .....	37.4 / 43.1 in
<b>CARGO CAPACITY</b> .....	4.48 cu.ft (soft top M/T 2745 lb)
<b>WEIGHT</b> .....	2892 lb (note: soft top M/T 2745 lb)
<b>FUEL / CAPACITY</b> .....	reg 87 ok, prem 91 recmd / 11.9 gal
<b>MPG</b> .....	26/35/30 (city/hwy/comb)

**INCLUSIONS:** advanced keyless entry, Bose 9-speaker audio w headrest speakers, Bluetooth phone and audio streaming, adaptive front lighting system.

**RF INCLUDES:** Retractable Fastback power convertible hardtop (13 seconds to open or close), 4.6-in color TFT display (Club and Grand Touring models only).

**NEW FOR 2019:** standard tilt-telescope steering column, standard rear camera, metallic black wheels (RF Club trim only), new traffic sign recognition and available Smart City Brake (RF Grand Touring only).

<b>BASE PRICE</b> .....	<b>\$34,410</b>
<b>INTERIOR PKG FOR A/T:</b> alloy pedals, red engine oil cap w MX-5 logo, stainless steel door sill trim plates .....	425
<b>DESTINATION CHARGE</b> .....	895
<b>TOTAL</b> .....	<b>\$35,730</b>

factor of budget, but even beyond that will factor in your preferences in styling and perhaps your desire for the additional security of a hard top. ■

