

► TOW TEST

Mazda 3 gets Zoom Zoom treatment

By Derek Lawley

Photographs by Godfrey Castle



For the past 83 years the Mazda car company has been producing vehicles that have always had a leaning towards the sportier lifestyle, with many of them firmly entrenching themselves as leaders in their particular fields. We can all remember the days of the rotary powered Mazda RX7 sports car, the legendary MX5 roadster that went on to become the best selling roadster ever built and more recently the rotary powered Mazda RX8. Not to mention the company's 1991 victory in the gruelling Le Mans 24 hour endurance race.

From this sporting background Mazda recently decided to use the term Zoom Zoom as the theme of their latest marketing strategy to promote their current range of vehicles. This range now includes the sporty little Mazda 3 which we were given to test.

Unfortunately the model that we received was only their 1.6-litre derivative, although we were hoping to be on the schedule for the more powerful 2.0 version. But this did not faze our intrepid team of road testers who immediately decided to adopt their very own Zoom Zoom approach to this stylish little sedan.

If the Zoom Zoom philosophy is to get out there and tackle the challenges and extremities, that was exactly what we were going to do with our Mazda 3.

Due to the current boom in caravan sales nationally there has been a shortage of test units available locally especially when it comes to the smaller sized unit, so it was a large Jurgens Fleetline with a gross vehicle mass of 1390 kg that was finally selected and hooked to the rear of the vehicle.

On the road

The Mazda 3 1.6 produces 77 kW at 6 000 rpm and torque of 146 Nm at 4 000 rpm running through a manual five speed gearbox, so it was clear from the outset that we would need to keep the revs up to keep the pot on the boil. Driving solo en-route to collect the caravan it was evident that this was a car that liked to operate in the upper zone of the rev. counter.

Once we had cleared the suburban traffic, with the Fleetline sitting firmly behind the car, and hit the highway we were soon up to speed and cruising comfortably along the N1 at just under 100 km/h – generally a speed that the magazines recommend to readers as the ideal cruising speed for both safety and economy – in fourth gear. Fifth gear we found was too highly geared for towing purposes and served more as an overdrive option - fourth was where she was really happy.

Getting away from the robots once again required the engine to be revved somewhat, although she did get from 0-60 km/h in just over eight seconds, it did take 23 seconds to reach the 100 km/h mark. Speeds through the gears recorded 50 in first, 95 in second, 125 in third and 143 in fourth. When cruising at 80 km/h and you need to overtake one of the many long haul trucks that seem to be congesting every major road in the country at the moment due to the state of our once very efficient rail system, it will take you roughly nine seconds to reach 100 km/h using third gear.

Hill climbing ability seemed a little bit down on the Mazda 3, although it's important to take into account the fact

that we were towing a caravan with a GVM of 1 390 kg. Our test programme has been evolving over many years and since our recent move to new offices at the base of Ou Kaapseweg we have decided to use this historic pass as part of our programme. Starting from the bottom we have pegged out a 2 km hill climb which the Mazda 3 raced through in 1 min 53 seconds - we can use the term race because at the time of testing the Mazda 3 was the first vehicle to be used for this new addition to our testing and as such is currently the record holder with the fastest time. Something that is in keeping with the Mazda racing background!

While performance may be one important aspect when selecting a ◉



The Zoom Zoom character is written all over the Mazda 3's styling and isn't just resident in its engine.



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The Mazda 3 1.6 produces 77 kW at 6 000 rpm and torque of 146 Nm at 4 000 rpm, with a manual five speed gearbox.

tow vehicle, safety is something that must also be a critical factor if you and your family are to reach your holiday destination in one piece and here again Mazda seem to have done their homework.

Even before we had hooked up the caravan it was the stopping power of the vehicle that really caught our attention. The Mazda 3 features disc brakes on all four corners with the front end boasting 278 mm ventilated discs while the rear is shod with 265 mm versions, which is a vast improvement over the previous generation model. The brake system uses ABS with electronic brake distribution (EBD) combined with a brake booster that has been tuned to shorten pedal travel for a more instantaneous stopping ability. The front suspension features a MacPherson strut type layout while on the rear there is a multi-link designed along similar lines to that used on the Mazda 6 to give larger car handling characteristics and improved handling performance.

With the Fleetline in tow the brakes brought the rig to a stop from 100 km/h in just under three seconds, a fact that was really impressive considering the size and weight of the caravan.

Front driver, passenger and side impact airbags are standard as are pre-tensioning seatbelts, collapsing steering column, while for the kids the car is fitted with ISOFIX child seat anchors on both rear seats. Other handy, but not essential safety features, include rain sensor wipers, lights that turn on automatically when entering a tunnel or at sunset and radio control buttons

strategically placed on the steering wheel for ease of operation.

Seating in the vehicle was comfortable and stylishly finished and blends in well with the matching door trims, centre console armrest and other often-used areas which are all finished with soft-touch materials. A transponder immobilizer system with an alarm and a keyless entry system with remote central locking and power door locking are also standard features.

The instrument panel is clear and uncluttered with a prominent three-metre cluster and is finished off in a metallic finish to further endorse the sporting character of the vehicle.

Packing and storage space in the vehicle is also plentiful from the eight litre glove box which has a capacity to store sixteen CD's, the centre console right through to the luggage compartment that boasts an impressive 419 litres capacity which can be further extended by making use of the rear seat's 60/40 split.

In summing up the Mazda 3, we were really impressed with the solo ride performance, handling and economy although with the large caravan it was really a case of having to give it plenty of Zoom Zoom to get up to pace, but once there it would be happy to cruise even the longest of hauls. So with hindsight we set it a really tough task and in the end it passed the test!

The Mazda 3 comes with a designated 15 000 km service interval together with a three year/100 000 km warranty, as well as the Mazda Motion five year/60 000 km maintenance plan with curbside assistance. ●

Alex says



The Mazda 3 is a zippy, classy little car – I like it! The sporty-looking hatchback derivative appealed to me particularly: full of energy and practical for outdoor adventures, be they beach picnics or hiking trips.

Writing from a woman's perspective, I should probably talk about space for children and a baby's seat, not to mention shopping bags... but I'm not quite there yet (give me a few years!), so I'll just let you know that it's got great acceleration and a lot of attitude.

Perhaps I should mention though that there are ISOFIX child seat anchors on both rear seats, as well as the fact that I appreciate that this smallish sedan has driver, passenger and side impact airbags as standard. The Mazda 3, designed for those who simply love to drive, competes well with other vehicles in its class in terms of specs and price.

Say my home was suddenly designated for that overdue family reunion and after a long, hard day at the office I had to go past the supermarket to pick up endless supplies (give me strength!) Well, all I can think is that doing so in a Mazda 3 would surely ease the pain and put a sweet smile on my tired face. (Plus I'd have the assurance that I could denude Pick 'n Pay and still have room for a bulky gym bag in the boot.)

This vehicle is, after all, designed with the Zoom Zoom joy of driving for driving's sake. So I'd take an extra lap around the block before heading for home.

