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PAGE 2



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PAGE 3



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Sports Car 4.0

2016 Mazda MX-5 Miata

DAN LYONS | text and photos
Special to the Times Union

As I've said before, we in the Northeast have four distinct seasons: Rain, Heat, Leaves and Sleet. We're currently in phase two of the cycle, and it's living up to its name. This is the Sweet Spot of Summer: days are long, pants are short. Sunburn tops the charts of our climate-related concerns. Wind chill doesn't even crack the top 10.

Summer is also high season for convertibles. Most are found with tops dropped early in the day or — my favorite — early evening. Nothing blows the stink off a



THE 2016 MAZDA MX-5 MIATA's 2.0-liter engine (left) is less powerful than the previous year's, but a lighter weight makes it even faster. This is a six-second 0-60 car, and the fourth generation Miata is as fun to drive as ever.

2016 Mazda MX-5 Miata
MSRP: \$24,915 · As Tested: \$31,330

lousy day faster than a cool convertible drive on a warm summer night.

Over the years, Mazda's Miata has built up a lot of street cred in the convertible ranks. It's perennially in the front row (of an admittedly tiny class) of open, two-seat sports cars. Periodically, serious contenders have emerged. Pontiac Solstice and Saturn Sky were truly competitive models, before they were forced into extinction in GM's restructuring.

The Toyota 86/Subaru BRZ twins were rumors on the radar, but convertible versions of these sporting hardtop coupes have never appeared. Contemporary challengers include the MINI Cooper Convertible, whose front-wheel-drive contrasts with the RWD



Miata. The newest entry in the class is the Fiat 124 Spider, which is part rival/part relative, sharing the same platform and much componentry with Miata.

All Miata models are equipped with a 2.0-liter, four-cylinder engine, rated at 155 horsepower (@ 6,000 rpm) and 148 lb.-ft. of torque (@ 4,600 rpm). That's a little less power (-12 and -10, respectively) than the previous generation car. But, the new Miata is appreciably lighter (about 150 lb.), and with less mass to move, it's actually a skosh quicker.

This is a six-second, 0-60 car; fast by any measure, and enormously so, compared to classic era sports

cars. The powertrains in the Miata and the Fiat 124 Spider share the same transmission choices, but their engines are different, with distinctive personalities. The Spider's turbo four makes more power, but it's pushing more pounds. Slightly slower from 0-60, its turbo engine has a peaky, power feel, while the Miata's four is much more linear. Fuel economy is estimated at 27 city/34 highway (manual); 27/36 (automatic).

The smooth stick shift has always been a hallmark of the Miata; a benchmark in the industry and a highlight

Continued on page 2

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