

More and Less

2017 Mazda6 Grand Touring

DAN LYONS | text
Special to the Times Union

Year four of generation three for the Mazda6 is marked by mostly minor changes. The 2017 edition of Mazda's midsize sedan is offered in three trim levels: Sport (MSRP \$21,945), Touring (\$24,195) and Grand Touring (\$30,695). My test drive car was a Grand Touring model, with an as-tested price of \$34,530.



The difference between starting sticker and final price on the test car was largely due to the addition of the GT Premium Package. The \$2,500 bundle — new for 2017 and only available on Grand Touring models

— targets luxury and fuel economy. For the former: Nappa leather-trimmed upholstery, heated rear seats and steering wheel, LED accent lighting and specific interior trim. For the latter: active grille shutters and the i-Eloop regenerative engine braking system.

2017 Mazda3 4-Door Grand Touring

MSRP: \$24,195 · As Tested: \$28,230

The last-mentioned items combine to bump the EPA fuel economy estimates to 27 city/35 highway/30 combined. That's a shade better than the non-Eloop automatics (26/35/29), which are in turn a couple of mpg's north of the standard transmission model (24/34/28).

There is no six in Mazda6; the model name has nothing to do with engine size. Unlike some competitors (Accord, Altima, Camry, Fusion, Passat) there's no step-up, six-cylinder option. The sole motor choice is a 2.5L four-cylinder, rated at 184 horsepower @ 5,700 rpm and 185 lb.-ft. of torque @ 3,250 rpm.

While my most recent test driver had the six-speed automatic, I've also driven the six-speed manual model extensively, so I can speak to both. The automatic-equipped car performs respectably, with above average mileage estimates for the class.

The engine is not turbocharged, and to get maximum performance you need to dig the spurs in. When you do, the transmission drops down a gear to respond to the request for giddy-up. This raises engine rpm's and engine noise, which is noticeable when you get into the throttle, but quiets at cruising speed.

Manual transmissions are more and more a rarity in automobiles and I applaud Mazda's support of stick shifts, which goes hand in (driving) glove with their "cars are fun" philosophy. Mazda makes their six speed manual standard issue on Sport and Touring trims. Grand Touring gets the automatic as part of its package, and it's also available optionally on lower trims for \$1,050. The shifter's action isn't as short and lickety-split quick as the one in the Miata, Mazda's benchmark sports car. But, the Mazda6 stick is smooth from gear to gear, and the Hill Launch Assist feature makes rollback anxiety a thing of the past.

The manual also responds to throttle requests for quick acceleration more smoothly than the automatic does. And while the stick versions have the lowest



As Mazda's front-wheel-drive compact, the 2017 Mazda3 is offered in four-door sedan or five-door hatchback body styles. Sport and Touring four-doors are equipped with Mazda's SkyActive 2.0L four-cylinder engine (left, below).

estimated mileage of the 6 family, I posted 36 mpg's in 1,200 miles of mostly highway driving with this drivetrain not long ago.

The added involvement of do-it-yourself shifting also aligns nicely with the Mazda6 suspension, which is tuned with a sporty bias. The Mazda6 corners confidently and while the chassis is stiffer than you'll find on most cars in this class, it's not uncomfortably so. Those who favor a softer ride are suggested to test drive the Sport model for comparison. The 17-inch wheels and taller sidewalls make for a more compliant ride than you'll find on the upper two trim levels, which are fitted with 19's. G-Vectoring Control has been added to all Mazda6 models for 2017. The new Mazda technology coordinates the throttle input, steering and suspension systems to improve cornering response and require fewer steering corrections. On paper, this means a fun to drive car is now easier to drive. But, it's subtle science. Absent back to back track runs with and without the technology, you'd be hard pressed to notice the difference.

The interior design is appealing; the materials, fit and finish all have a quality look and feel. I'm 6'1" and I wouldn't say no to another inch of front seat leg room here. The tail of the tape reveals that the Mazda6 is, at 42.2 inches on the low side of its segment in this

dimension; ahead of Camry (41.6 inches) and Malibu (42.0 inches); trailing Passat (42.4 inches), Accord (42.5 inches), Fusion (44.3 inches), Altima (45.0 inches), Sonata and Optima (both 45.5 inches). Six-footers can fit in back with like size folks in front, and here the Mazda (38.7 inches) is near the top of the class, trailing only Camry (38.9 inches) and Passat (39.1 inches), and besting the rest. Cargo capacity is down from the previous generation "6" (14.8 cu. ft., from 16.6), and the lowest of the models mentioned above. However, the rear seat-backs fold to a nearly flat floor, to accommodate long items. Interior storage spots are numerous, but small in size.

Visibility is generally good, and what can't be seen can still be accounted for. Blind spot monitoring and rear cross traffic alert are standard equipment on Touring and Grand Touring trim levels. Mazda's Connect infotainment system — standard on all models — is better than average in terms of ease of use and learning curve. All models get a newly designed steering wheel for 2017, and the roster of standard equipment items for Grand Touring cars is expanded to include a lane keep assist system.

Mazda's support of stick shifts goes hand in (driving) glove with their "cars are fun" philosophy.



TEST DRIVE
this vehicle at this preferred dealership:

ORANGE MAZDA
799 Central Ave., Albany, NY 12206
518-489-5414 www.orangemotors.com



**A HEALTHY DEBATE
MEANS A HEALTHY DEMOCRACY.
STAY INFORMED.
GET THE FACTS, WITH CONTENT YOU CAN TRUST.**