

Return of the rotary?

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Gearing down

The last gasp for the area's car shows.

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TEST DRIVE

## Last Call

### 2019 Mazda MX-5 Miata Grand Touring RF

DAN LYONS | text and photos  
Special to the Times Union

Rain, Heat, Leaves and Sleet. We've passed the half way point in these, the four seasons of Capital District weather. As I write this, the days are growing shorter, the heavy heat has passed. And when the wind blows, you can almost hear the leaves whispering, as they choose the worst, possible time to drop on your front lawn.



It's last call to double down on fair weather passions, before they're swept away by what follows. So it is this week that we grab the keys to a convertible, and head for the nearest twisty road. The Mazda Miata is always a willing accomplice, and our test

drive puts us in the latest edition flagship of the line — the 2019 Miata Grand Touring RF.

RF signifies Retractable Fastback, but it could just as easily stand for Really Fine, in terms of the car's



MAZDA'S MX-5 MIATA ROADSTER returns for 2019 with a Grand Touring RF level, featuring a retractable roof. This flagship Miata is powered by a 2.0L four-cylinder (below, left) with 181 horsepower, 26 more than last year's version.

**2019 Mazda MX-5 Miata Grand Touring RF**  
MSRP: \$26,645 (Sport soft top) · As Tested: \$36,325

visual appeal. The paint color on my tester was called Soul Red Crystal; a new age label for a \$595 option that would've been called Candy Apple Red, in another era. It's a shade so distinctive that it draws unsolicited comments from people, even if they're not car lovers. The retractable hardtop version of these fourth generation Miata's looks more European (and more upscale) than



do the soft tops. The flaring fenders and flying buttress roof line pack a lot of swoop into a small shape. With the roof panels removed, the look is less that of a convertible than it is a targa coupe.

The mechanical ballet that stows the roof panels below deck requires the touch of a button and 13 seconds to accomplish, in either direction. Windows down, it's a breezy cabin, even with the rear wind blocker deployed. Windows up is a more manageable proposition, and makes it easier to conduct conversations. Because the buttresses remain topside even in razed roof mode, the stowed panels barely eat into the cargo capacity. The RF's trunk holds 4.48 cubic-feet, vs. the ragtop's 4.59. In practical terms, it's a small space, with enough room for

a carry-on size rolling bag, and additional, soft storage tucked around it.

Miata's most significant change for 2019 is found under the hood. The 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine now makes 181 horsepower @ 7,000 rpm, and 151 lb.-ft. of torque @ 4,000 rpm. That's 26 more horses and 3 more lb.-ft., compared to 2018, and it's distributed over a wider rev range. Peak power arrives 1,000 rpm higher, and top torque is reached 600 rpm lower. The new cars are likely a tick or two faster than the former car was (6.0), going from 0-60. But the added output is less noticeable than the width of the power band. The amount of time that the engine is on the boil when throttled feels longer. Fuel economy slips a skosh.

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The Miata's Candy Apple Red shade is so distinctive that it draws unsolicited comments from people.

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