

Mazda2 GS has the zoom zoom spirit of its bigger brother

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In the unlikely event of unintended acceleration, the system gives the brakes priority over the motor so it can be brought to a safe stop.

My tester, a GS, is the top trim model of the two with air conditioning (\$1,195 extra on the GX), four-speed automatic transmission (\$1,100) in place of the standard five-speed manual. The optional (\$895) Convenience Package on the GX is standard on the GS. This adds heated door mirrors, cruise and audio controls on the steering wheel, exterior temp gauge, trip computer and various bit of trim like body color door mirrors and handles.

The rest of what differentiates a GS from a GX is trim pieces notably 15-inch alloy wheels (steel on the GX) six speakers, rain-sensing wipers and a rear, body-colour spoiler to mention a few.

There aren't many options after that except Bluetooth connectivity (fitted at \$389) and accessories like a Pioneer in-dash multi-media centre, bigger alloy wheels and a suspension lowering kit.

Turned out in an iridescent green that drew a lot of comments, the as tested price was \$19,684.

There is one engine, a twin-cam inline four-cylinder producing 100 hp and 98 lb/ft of torque. Fuel consumption with the manual is 6.8L/100 km city and 5.6L/100 km highway. With the automatic, it is rated at 7.5L/100 km city and 6.0L/100 km highway.

Because the Mazda2 is based on an earlier sub-compact called the Demio which was not sold in North America, the engine, while very fuel efficient, is not as powerful as competitors like the Honda Fit and Toyota Yaris.

As described in my earlier story at the Montreal launch, Mazda engineers used what they call their 'gram strategy' for taking off the pounds to increase the power-to-weight ratio and thus improve performance.

Engineers shaved off 2.9 kg (6.4 lb) by optimizing the wiring harness and 22.6 kg (50 lb) by going to a 53 per cent use of high tensile steel in the body structure. And those are just two of dozens of examples.

The result was an overall 10 per cent reduction over the previous model for a curb weight of 1,042 kg, making it (with manual transmission) the lightest car in the segment.

Not only was the suspension lightened but it was re-tuned for increased handling and steering response.

This time I put almost 600 km on the clock including a 441.1 km round trip from my home to a resort area to the east.

The trip involved primarily super highways and rural two-lane blacktop. Average fuel consumption was 6.9L/100 km on the way to my destination. At a half tank, I covered 198.3 km with 288 km more to go on the tank according to the trip computer.

Coming back at a faster clip as I was trying to keep up to the flow of traffic and plus a subsequent 140.6 more km of pure city driving, the average went up to 7.4L/100 km.

So the Mazda2 does get better mileage than a compact but you'll find yourself stopping for fuel just as often. That's because the tank holds only 42.8 litres of fuel, much less than the average 55 litres in a compact or mid-size car.

Handling was great. Mazda always skews the ride to the sporty side as part of their 'spirit of a sportscar' design philosophy.

Power is not overwhelming but adequate and

keeping up with the others on the highway was no problem. Passing on the two-lane means making sure you give yourself adequate time. The engine kicks down smartly but does make a lot of noise doing so.

The steering is very sharp on this car. Coming out of a very large luxury car, I found I was over steering. I think this was because of the heft of the luxury car plus the fact I couldn't feel the great weight through the steering wheel of the luxury car caused me to over steer until I got used to the Mazda2.

Where this sharpness will aid the Mazda2 driver is in the city where being nimble is as important as being quick.

It may be little car on the outside but don't let that fool you. There is more than enough seat travel for a guy my

size and even with the seat all the way back, I fit fine.

Even though the rear door opens 90 degrees, the roof arch makes getting out a challenge. Oddly, getting in is easy.

Cargo volume is 377 litres behind the back seat and 787 litres when folded flat. As a test with the back seat up, I was able to put two recycling blue boxes in the trunk.

As this is being written, it was announced the compact Mazda3 has become the most successful nameplate in Mazda Canada's history, surpassing 300,000 sales in the past six years.

This bodes well as the Mazda2 has much of the 'zoom, zoom' spirit of its bigger brother and, based on how many Canadians have purchased Mazda3s, things looks rosy indeed for the Mazda2.

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