

Mazda's Skyactiv is truly different

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Skyactiv because it has the Skyactiv-G engine and transmissions but it uses the standard Mazda3 chassis and body.

Also the Formula One style 4-2-1 exhaust system that lets the engine run at a compression ratio of 13:1 is not used.

Nonetheless, the 2.0-litre in the Mazda3 GS-Sky runs at 12:1, the same as a Ferrari Italia. The GS-Sky uses regular gasoline not premium.

As tested the Skyactiv-G engine produces 155 hp and 148 lb/ft of torque versus the 148 hp and 135 lb/ft of torque for the 'normal' 2.0-litre in the GX.

For comparison, the 2.5-litre, four-cylinder in the GT makes 167 hp and 168 lb/ft of torque.

The new six-speed automatic is a big step forward from the five-speed in the 2011 Mazda3.

Like all the modern six-speed autos today, it is difficult to feel any perceptible gear changes until you have your foot hard on the gas. What I did notice was the pedal felt stiff. I know some carmakers do that to artificially deter drivers from using too much fuel and thus improving gas mileage.

Off the line the GS-Sky felt sluggish and on the highway I found I had to push down on the gas to get up to speed.

I mentioned this to Mazda engineer David Coleman saying I own a 2010 Mazda3 with the 2.5-litre.

With a smile he said he was not surprised. The pedal on my Mazda3 is set so almost all the torque is available in the first 20 per cent of pedal travel, which is why it feels so swift at launch.

With the Skyactiv engine the response has been changed to be more linear. In other words the further you push down the more torque is delivered for what Mazda feels is a more measured response and better for fuel consumption.

I'd like to tell you I experienced a 15 per cent increase in fuel efficiency but the fact is I don't know.

When I picked up the car at Mazda Canada I did not notice the tank was down by one-eighth. Ergo, I failed to top up.

Also, the Skyactiv I drove was not equipped with a driver information display which would have solved my problem with digital instant and average fuel consumption readouts.

tion readouts.

So I'll have to go with the Transport Canada numbers of 7.7/5.0L/100 km city/highway with the manual and 7.1/4.9L/100 km city/highway for the automatic.

Note the automatic is slightly better on gas than the manual, which shows how much better this new generation of automatics have become.

Other than the engine and transmission, the GS-Sky differs in no other way from the other Mazda3 models.

Like all Mazda products, it is a driver's car and very agile and that includes the Skyactiv version.

My tester came with the automatic thus I didn't try the new six-speed manual to find out if it is indeed as light and fast as that on the MX-5 Miata.

The layout of the instrument panel is identical to all other Mazda3s. However, the signature amber gauge illumination on the GX and GT is replaced on GS-Sky models with soft blue gradation with white centre.

In keeping with the blue theme, there are azure surrounds on the headlights which gives off a bluish cast.

On the outside the only difference is a small Skyactiv badge on the rear.

Depending on trim levels, pricing ranges from \$18,995-\$22,390 not counting a \$1,595 shipping fee.

When it comes to going green, Mazda is truly marching to a truly different drummer with Skyactiv.

But just remember, this is the company that made the rotary engine work when industry giants like GM could not.

Mazda3 GS-Sky 2012 (at a glance)

BODY STYLE: Compact sedan or five-door hatchback.

DRIVE METHOD: front-engine, front-wheel drive.

ENGINE: 2.0-litre DOHC inline four-cylinder (155 hp, 148 lb/ft).

FUEL ECONOMY: Regular, manual, 7.7/5.0L/100 km city/highway; automatic, 7.1/4.9L/100 km city/highway

CARGO: 335 litres

TOW RATING: NA

PRICE: \$18,995-\$22,390 not counting a \$1,595 shipping fee

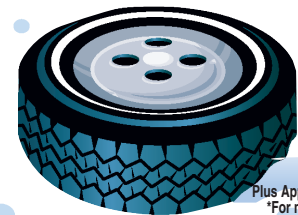
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