

Miata is the largest selling sportscar of all time



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From front page

... fittings and trim, and the Miata that started out so humbly 12 years ago, is not immune.

All Miatas come standard with power windows and locks that would have driven sportscar purists of the 1950s to outrage, never mind a convertible top with rear heated glass window. The SE, as tested, has air conditioning, something undreamed of when I bought my first sportscar, a 1961 Sunbeam Alpine.

The SE also comes with six-speed manual transmission, limited slip differential, the Sports suspension with Bilstein gas shocks (an option on the other Miatas), beefy strut tower bar, and special 16-inch wheels and a sexy Nardi three-spoke steering wheel. Features unique to the SE include special blue cloth seats and convertible top, Titanium Grey Metallic paint, the normally dealer-installed aero package (spoilers and side skirts), and a Bose sound system which I confess I never turned on, preferring to listen to the music of the tuned exhaust.

Slipping into the Miata is best done with the top down. With the fixed steering wheel (odd there's no tilt in this day and age), the best method is to swing the right leg over the seat and then plunk yourself down much as you would get

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ting on a western saddle. A woman wearing a tight skirt might have even more of a challenge.

The three pedals are well positioned for heel and toe driving if you're so inclined and there's that perfectly placed shift lever, just a hand's reach from the steering wheel. The six-speed gearbox packs a lot of cogs and levers into not a lot of space, ergo you should not speed shift. I still find the five-speed box (only available on the base Miata) slicker to use. However the advantage of sixth gear as an overdrive is not to be sneezed at in these days of higher fuel costs and premium is recommended on the SE.

I had a week of glorious fall sunshine in which I, and the little Miata, revelled. One night when I couldn't sleep, I went to the garage at about 2 a.m., put the clever wind blocker up and the heater on low and went out for a drive.

With the waning moon above and traces of ground fog on the road, I hummed along without noticing the time. It was cozy in the cockpit but I could smell rain in the air, all the more reason to keep going and find what the night was hiding over the next hill. After about an hour, reluctantly, I turned around and headed home. Pausing to look around at the Miata now snug in the garage, and still making cooling down sounds, I remembered back almost 40 years to my old Sunbeam Alpine when I did just the same thing then for the joy of nothing more than the feeling of being free and young. Ah yes, you can't go back, but it's good for the soul to remember now and then.

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And that's because the Miata isn't just a sportscar for all seasons. It's also a sportscar for all reasons.

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