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Auto Group
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Automobile

REVIEWS:

First Drive: 2010 Mazda MazdaSPEED 3

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By Andrew Yeadon

Photography by Andrew Yeadon

There's one thing missing in love-it-or-hate-it cars like the MazdaSPEED 3: apathy. Whether you adore its tire-shredding, blistering acceleration or loathe its torque steer and turbo lag, you'll never get out of this hatchback feeling nothing. Redesigned for 2010, the MazdaSPEED 3 remains the muscle car of the hot-hatch world, and just like the last Speed, it remains the ultimate polarizer of the [Mazda](#) family.

For example, one could easily criticize the new Speed for offering no more power than last year's car. We won't. Word behind the scenes is that engineers experimented with more power (the engine will reportedly handle 300 hp with no problem) and even all-wheel drive, but the lessons of the late RX-7 stopped that thinking dead in its tracks. The RX-7 became too complex and too expensive, resulting in its demise. Demise is bad, so the MazdaSPEED 3 stays simple, cheap, and fast.



And that means it remains a hot hatch with a turbocharged four-cylinder engine furiously spinning the front wheels. The unibody is similar to the one in last year's car, with only slight structural enhancements made possible by the selective use of high-strength steel. The new Speed is roughly the same size as its predecessor, and weight has increased by only about 100 pounds. Even its electronically limited 155-mph top speed remains the same. So what's different?

Well, perhaps you've noticed the styling. And by "styling," we could only be referring to the Speed's freakishly happy yet uncomfortably sinister mug. Love it or hate it, the grille opening is roughly the same shape as the one on the standard version of the happiest car on the planet, but with a slightly perverse, almost Joker-esque, insert. Circular lenses replace the rounded-trapezoid fog lights from the regular 3, and the front fenders are flared to house tires that have grown in width by one size. A hood scoop tells other would-be racers that this Mazda means business.

The functional scoop routes cold air directly to the top-mounted intercooler. The previous Speed 3 used ducting in the hood to feed the intercooler, which left no room for cold-air plumbing for the engine. The new configuration not only provides for better airflow to the intercooler but feeds the engine with chillier intake air as well. The better cooling results in higher engine output in hot conditions and at low speeds, such as when sitting in midsummer traffic.

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With that said, the Speed 3's front seats feel less laterally supportive than last year's big-bolster affairs, and they lack thigh support, even compared with the power seats in the regular 3. And the optional navigation system, which [Mazda](#) appropriately names "compact navi," has a screen no bigger than that of an iPhone. Infuriatingly, its controls are placed on the steering wheel, meaning that only the driver can operate them, and destination addresses can be entered only while the car is stopped. How annoying.

We're also disappointed that many features available on less powerful 3s aren't offered on the Speed: you can beg, plead, or even hug your dealer, but he

won't be able to get you a MazdaSPEED 3 with a sunroof, seat heaters, rain-sensing wipers, LED taillights, or swiveling HID headlights.

Then again, we think the Speed 3 ranks high on the bang-for-the-buck scale: at a base price of \$23,945, it comes standard with dual-zone automatic climate control, Bluetooth, and that monster engine under the hood. Even fully loaded, your Speed 3 will barely break the \$26,000 mark. You can love or hate its silly face and its distinctly turbocharged personality, but there's not much to discuss when it comes to price - if you like a whole lot of horsepower for your pennies, the MazdaSPEED 3 offers much to love

MazdaSpeed 3

BASE PRICE \$23,945

Powertrain

ENGINE Turbocharged DOHC I-4

DISPLACEMENT 2.3 liters (138 cu in)

HORSEPOWER 263 hp @ 5500 rpm

TORQUE 280 lb-ft @ 3000 rpm

TRANSMISSION TYPE 6-speed manual

DRIVE Front-wheel

Chassis

STEERING Power-assisted rack-and-pinion

SUSPENSION, FRONT Strut-type, coil springs

SUSPENSION, REAR Multilink, coil springs

BRAKES F/R Vented discs/discs, ABS

TIRES Dunlop SP Sport 2050

TIRE SIZE 225/40YR-18

Measurements

L x W x H 177.6 x 69.7 x 57.5 in

WHEELBASE 103.9 in

TRACK F/R 60.4/60.0 in

WEIGHT 3245 lb (per manufacturer)

EPA MILEAGE 18/25 mpg

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