

Spot the Difference



Ian Lamming takes a look at the old and the new Mazda3

I LOVE playing spot the difference. Cheek by jowl, or at least wing by bumper, Mazda3s old and new sit next to each other. While I appreciate that not all redesigns are radical, this Mazda3 evolution definitely adopts the Darwinian approach.

Now the grille has changed a smidgeon and the badge has moved a fraction. Then there's the foglight bezel, that's another difference. If I get to ten, I get a prize.

At the back twin pipes either side become one on the left and the door mirrors get wraparound indicators.

Inside, the handbrake lever is ditched in favour of a switch, so there go the handbrake turns, though it does make a lot more space for storage. The trim and switches are better quality and the redesigned steering wheel is heated if you opt for the leather trim.

The bits you can't see have evolved too for the better with greater soundproofing and additional vibration damping, while the suspension has been tuned like a harp to perform even better than before. Can I have my prize now please?

New Mazda3 comes as a hatch or a fastback and with the choice of engines – 105 PS 1.5 litre or 150PS 2.2 litre diesels or 120PS and 165PS 2.0 litre petrol variants.

It also gets something called G-Vectoring Control, which does clever things to the wheels to optimise handling and comfort.

On the road all models drive well. They pull, cruise, sprint and handle with aplomb. They feel taut, high quality, comfortable and very capable, very Mazda in fact. They make driving feel fun, refined and dynamic.

Other technology includes a head-up display that is in colour this time and height adjustable which is fab when you are as short in the body as I am.

Old Mazda3 won high praise for setting the standards for its class. It felt upmarket and drove precisely.

The new model may not have changed so radically this time but the enhancements have definitely made a good car even better.

Fact File

- Engine: 1.5, 2.2 diesel or 2.0 petrol
- Power: 105, 150, 120 or 165PS
- Combined MPG: 74.3, 68.9, 55.4, -
- Transmission: Six-speed manual or auto
- CO2 g/km: 99, 107, 119, 129