

Mazda5's sporty styling makes wagon appealing

by Mark_Maynard

Why is a traditional minivan boring to look at, but a mini minivan can be hugable?

Maybe it's the way Mazda puts together its Mazda5, which is either a tall wagon with sliding doors or a mini minivan.

Either way, it's a good idea at the right time. But it almost didn't happen.

MAZDA5 - The mazda5 has lots of conveniences, good styling and a multitasking fold-flat functionality. CNS Photo courtesy of Mazda.

"We never intended to bring this car to the U.S.," Mazda spokesman Jeremy Barnes says. "Our team members were unconvinced there was a market here because of its size."

But as gasoline prices rose, so did interest.

Mazda had access to this diminutive van from its Japanese version, Premacy, which was based on what was sold in North America as Protege.

But Premacy never struck anyone's fancy in the United States, Barnes says.

The Mazda5 replaced Premacy and was designed and engineered for Europe and Japan with the possibility of export to the United States.

"When our management team saw the vehicle, they decided maybe they could make something out of it," Barnes says. The team had been looking for a smaller, more clever vehicle.

"Ultimately, it cost us very little money to bring it to the U.S." Barnes says. "Just some re-engineering for emissions and crash testing."

The team chose to bring over the sportiest version and sell it with 17-inch alloy wheels (larger than in other markets) and the Sport package from Europe and Japan. The Sport package adds different front and rear bumper treatments, different headlights and the clear-background taillights.

Pricing ranges from \$18,230 for the base Sport model, \$20,645 for the Touring and \$21,895 for the Grand Touring, today's test vehicle. The Grand Touring comes with all factory options, except the navigation system, which doesn't include a backup camera.

The van's sliding side doors are hugely popular in Europe and Japan because parking spaces are tiny, Barnes says. They are less of a benefit here, with spaces to fit Expeditions and Hummers, but still practical.

A sliding door is lightweight and it allows entry and exit in a tight parking spot.

Barnes says a lot of "structure" went into the rear end to make it meet crash standards in Europe and Japan. He says the Mazda5 meets a 50 mph offset rear impact cash test with an occupant in the third-row seat.

The Mazda5 is a handy family vehicle with three rows of seats. The second row seats don't fold into the floor and they can't be removed, but both rows can be folded for a flat load floor from bumper to the back of the front seats.

The cabin area is compact and seating space can be tight for large occupants.

It's the vehicle, Barnes says, for people who don't want to admit they need a vehicle that starts with an "M" (minivan).

Copley News Service SPECS

2007 Mazda5 Grand Touring

Body style: midsize, six-passenger wagon

Engine: 157-horsepower, 2.3-liter, DOHC four-cylinder with variable valve timing

Transmission: four-speed automatic

EPA fuel economy estimates: 21 mpg city, 26 highway (22/27 five-speed manual)

DIMENSIONS

Front head/leg/shoulder room: 38.9/40.7/55 inches (with sunroof)

Middle head/leg/shoulder room: 39.2/35.2/55.6 inches

Rear head/leg/shoulder room: 37.1/30.7/49.2 inches

Length/wheelbase: 181.5/108.3 inches

Curb weight: 3,389 pounds

FEATURES

Standard equipment includes: remote locking, power moonroof, automatic climate control with pollen filter, height adjustable driver's seat with lumbar, halogen headlights and fog lights, power windows and mirrors, six-speaker and six-disc CD audio system, tilt and telescopic steering column with audio controls, cruise control, fold-flat second row seats, second-row under-seat storage, second row fold-out table with storage, 50/50 split fold-down third row carpeted floor mats, rear wiper-washer, 17-inch all-season tires on alloy wheels, engine-speed sensitive power steering (turning circle, 34.8 feet), 24-hour roadside assistance

Safety equipment includes: dual-stage front air bags, three-row side-impact curtain air bags, front side air bags, anti-whiplash front seat design, power-assisted four-wheel disc brakes with ABS and electronic brake force distribution

PRICING

Base: \$20,610, including \$560 freight charge; price as tested, \$23,040

Options on test car: Sirius satellite radio, \$430; navigation system and tire pressure monitoring system, \$2,000

The competition: Kia Rondo

Where assembled: Hiroshima, Japan

PLUSES: Treasure chest of convenience features, good styling, multitasking fold-flat functionality

MINUSES: Fuel mileage could be better; suspension not up to sporty driving.

Make a Smart reservation

The Smart Fortwo doesn't go on sale until early 2008, but registered insiders at Smartusa.com can get a jump on preordering their car.

The \$99 Reservation Program opened March 19. Orders for the general public began April 2. The reservation fee is more like a deposit and will be applied to the final sale.

There will be two coupe models and a convertible to start.

The entry level Smart Fortwo Pure has a starting price of \$12,000, without freight charge, tax, license and registration. Standard equipment includes five-speed automated-manual transmission, remote locking, two-spoke leather steering wheel and radio-ready console. Air conditioning, power windows and alloy wheels are optional.

Safety features include electronic stability program, anti-lock brakes and four air bags.

The uplevel Fortwo Passion starts at \$14,000 and adds a panorama roof, alloy wheels, air conditioning with climate control, three-spoke leather-wrapped steering wheel with shift paddles, power windows, electric and heated side mirrors and radio with CD player.

The Fortwo Passion Cabrio will start at less than \$17,000. The power-operated soft top can be adjusted to any position while driving at any speed.

The changeable body panels are available in six colors. Black, light yellow and crystal white are standard. Blue metallic, red metallic and silver metallic are optional colors.

Fabric colors will be gray in the Pure; black, red or beige in the Passion. Leather upgrades will be for available for the Passion.

More options and pricing details will be announced later.

Place your order at: www.smartusa.com/smart_art_reservation.html. WOLFSBURG EDITION PASSAT:
\$26,990

The Wolfsburg Edition Passat is available at Volkswagen dealers for a suggested price of \$27,630, including

a \$640 freight charge.

Standard equipment includes a 200-horsepower, 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine with a standard six-speed automatic Tiptronic transmission.

Features include 17-inch alloy wheels, a four-spoke leather wrapped multi-function steering wheel, leather wrapped gearshift knob and boot, 12-way power driver seat, six-disc in-dash CD changer with MP3 capability, heated front seats, power sunroof, fog lights, heated windshield washer nozzles, Sirius satellite radio and "Wolfsburg Edition badging.

Safety features include six air bags standard four-wheel disc brakes with ABS, Brake Assist and disc-wiping to keeps the brakes clean and dry. Two rear side air bags are a \$350 option.

Electronic driver aids include an electronic stabilization program with anti-slip regulation and electronic differential locking. PIRELLI AND DUB

Pirelli is now the official tire of DUB magazine, which has begun its seventh year of car shows with top name entertainment. With Pirelli on board, DUB shows ahve two new awards categories: "Best Dressed DUB Vehicle on Pirelli Tires" and "Best Dressed Sport Compact on Pirelli Tires."

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