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Mazda 6, GT and i Sport

*Pretty Enough?***Rating: 7/10** *Very good, but not quite great*\$21,675 and \$31,490 as tested · [More info from Mazda](#)Reviewed by [Eric Tegler](#) August 15, 2013 | 8:39 pm | Categories: [Automotive](#)

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The 2014 Mazda6. Photo courtesy of Mazda USA

I think the [Mazda6](#) is the best-looking car in the mid-size sedan segment. That's a good start for Mazda — which needs a stronger competitor — since good looks always get customers into showrooms. And many of the other elements that go toward making a car a segment leader are here. But do good sense and a bit of flash give the Mazda6 enough momentum to overcome a few flaws?

I drove both the base model i Sport (\$21,675 as-tested) and the top-trim Grand Touring (\$31,490) Mazda6s. The former had a six-speed manual transmission and the latter a six-speed automatic. Both come with Mazda's SKYACTIV-G 2.5 liter four-cylinder engine which makes 184 horsepower and 185 pound-feet of torque. It's an efficient engine and until late 2013, it's the only one available.

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Mazda has done an impressive job hitting MPG targets with its normally-aspirated four. With the automatic transmission, it returns a class-leading 38 highway MPG. The EPA puts the both GT and i Sport at about 30 MPG combined. Over 750 miles of mostly highway driving in the Mazda6 GT, I saw an indicated 32.5 mpg. The i Sport averaged 25.6 MPG in mostly city driving. Unfortunately, the numbers are achieved at the expense of zoom-zoom.

Despite relatively light curb weights, the GT and i Sport (3275/3183 lbs) are always a bit short on power. The issue is exacerbated by an automatic transmission aggressively programmed to reach for top gear and stay there. Getting it to kick-down in passing situations requires slapping the accelerator nearly to the floor. There's a paddle-shifted manual mode but most drivers rarely think to use it. The three-pedal manual allows you to cope better but the 6 just isn't quick. It takes around eight seconds to get to 60 mph.

The power deficit isn't so much an issue in lower trim 6s but the range-topping Grand Touring competes with the Ford Fusion Titanium, Honda Accord EX-L, Nissan Altima 3.5 SL, Toyota Camry XLE V6 and Hyundai Sonata Limited Turbo — all of which offer more powerful turbocharged four-cylinders or V6s.

- 1 A complete failure in every way
- 2 Barely functional; don't buy it
- 3 Serious flaws; proceed with caution
- 4 Downsides outweigh upsides
- 5 Recommended with reservations
- 6 A solid product with some issues
- 7 Very good, but not quite great
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The 2014 Mazda6 in Grand Touring trim. Photo courtesy of Mazda USA

Add the 6's electric steering to its blemishes. It weights up OK, but is so strongly allied with the fuel economy mission that it provides almost no feel. The sense of numbness crosses over to the suspension. When you corner hard, the damping response feels slow. There's a laziness to it even though the body is decently controlled. The i Sport, riding on 17-inch wheels versus the GT's 19-inchers, is the nimbler, better handler. Ride quality is good however. Still, an Accord, particularly with the V6, offers similar grip and ride comfort, and it makes you want to corner a little harder.

If the dynamic fun is muted, there are other attractions beyond the Mazda6's looks and fuel frugality. While the interior doesn't have quite the bells and whistles of competitors like the Fusion, its relative simplicity averts drawbacks such as overly sensitive touch-screens, distracting digital displays, and likely-to-date chrome and smartphone-inspired dash flourishes. The 6's three-gauge instrument cluster, Audi MMI-like console controller and TomTom navigation are effective. Also, I liked the two-tone black/sand interior color combo of the GT.

Front seat comfort is quite good, while rear seat comfort and space are only adequate. The ability to fold both rear seats down as in a hatchback is great, yielding a pass-thru that accommodates long, low-profile cargo like my stand-up paddle boards.

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The Grand Touring trim offers driver aids including [Mazda Radar Cruise Control](#), forward obstruction and lane-departure warnings (often annoying), and a front collision-detecting [Smart City Brake Support](#) system which automatically applies the brakes at low speeds to avoid a collision.

Mazda gets props for offering a manual transmission. And the i Sport Mazda6 is not only attractive when compared with its mid-size competitors but with similarly priced high-content C-segment cars. I'd take the i Sport over a Hyundai Elantra or Dodge Dart any day. You might even prefer it to a Mazda3. If you want the 19-inch wheels and more info-tainment options, you can get them on the mid-level Touring trim with either transmission choice.



The GT again. Photo courtesy of Mazda USA

Without any gasoline powerplant distinction, the Grand Touring really is less of a value. That equation may change with the arrival of Mazda's SKYACTIV-D 2.2 liter four cylinder diesel in late summer. Said to offer a high amount of torque, the diesel would address the power deficit, return high MPG and further differentiate the 6.

In any trim, the Mazda6 is a looker. In my travels, it garnered compliments from guys and girls. The Takeri concept on which it is based was a winner, and the [KODO design language](#) it utilizes portends good things for Mazdas yet to come. It is pretty.

WIRED Hot looks for a mid-size sedan. Attractive inside as well. Fold-down rear seats trump pass-throughs. Class-leading highway MPG merges with competent handling and available manual transmission.

TIRED The GT needs power — a turbo, V6, rocket pack, anything. The steering should be sharpened. The black cloth interior is hot... as in sweaty. When's the last time you bought a Japanese diesel?

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