

Shifting Gears

[Mazda 6: The Zoom-Zoom Car](#)

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By Roger Witherspoon

The literature of automotive promotions has certain distinct characteristics. It comes in a glossy brochure, has a host of high quality photos, and wears out the standard thesaurus with multi-syllabic adjectives describing the quality of the vehicle's interior and the exhilaration that comes from driving a well made car.

Only the folks from Mazda have the notion that adults have enough on their minds without being reminded that, well, they're adults. And when they describe their cars in their glossy brochure, state up front that "children put it much better and simply call it Zoom-Zoom. It's why we build the kind of cars we do."

The kinds of cars I built as a kid were powered by rubber bands. There was one experiment with jet engines loaded with gunpowder and sugar. In the end, it literally flamed out. But for about 10 glorious seconds, it zoomed across the empty armory parking lot, at times seemingly airborne and, for my money, was the most wonderful thing on wheels.

The Mazda 6 has a 272-horsepower V-6 using regular gasoline instead of a rocket engine using solid fuel. Standing outside, the sound emanating from the twin exhausts is a low rumble, not a flaming roar. And from inside, there is no sound at all except for the melodic 88s of Keiko Matsui emanating through the Bose sound system, even when the world is flying by at 100 miles per

hour. And at times, it was easy to imagine that my jet car was back, bigger and better than ever, taking me on a long overdue ride with wheels barely touching the pavement.

In reality, of course, Mazda's don't fly and if the wheels aren't on the ground you are probably in trouble and need to slow down. But the 6 has a finely tuned independent front and rear suspension which seemingly puts a layer of cotton between you and road and gives the feeling of gliding instead of rolling along. It is, however, definitely a power glide – the 6 is intended to be a sports sedan and, for the most part, Mazda succeeds.

That power plant is mated to a six-speed automatic transmission with an electronic manual mode that responds about as quickly and effortlessly as an actual stick shift. The stability and traction controls help ensure a road-hugging trip regardless of travel and weather conditions.



On the outside, the designers took pains to give the 6 a sportier look than the average mid-sized sedan. So they borrowed cues from their RX-8 sports car, with the outsized hump over the 17-inch, aluminum alloy, front wheels to accompany a long, sloping hood. The curved grill is more of a grin than a sports car's grimace but this is, after all, a family car.



A lot of thought was given to the design of the interior to make the various controls extremely easy to see and use – day or night – in addition to being convenient and attractive. The controls for the entertainment and climate systems on the center console in the middle of dash were not only easy to see, but large enough so you could not miss them in the dark. The entertainment system, for example, with its backlit red light, featured FM/AM and Sirius satellite radio, as well as a 6-disc CD player, and auxiliary control for the iPod, USB and MP3 connections. If you touched one of the buttons, it was surrounded by a soft blue light. The 6's entertainment and Bluetooth systems can also be controlled or voice activated from the leather, retractable, steering wheel.

The test car, which had a price tag of about \$28,500, did not have a navigation system or backup camera. Adding those refinements – which tend to be expected in sedans these days – would push the cost up to the \$30,000 range, where it begins to have more direct competition with the Nissan Altima, Honda Accord, and Toyota Camry. The seats in this model were manually operated and cloth. But they were wide, comfortable, and easily adjustable. Having leather, power operated, heated seats would push the sticker price up further.

The interior also features a powered sun roof, which gives both light and a feeling of spaciousness to the car. The rear seats can fold flat in a 60/40 split, thus increasing an already large trunk. In

addition, there is enough leg and headroom in the back for pair of passengers who are well north of six feet tall to travel in comfort.

Mazda is still an also-ran in the mid-sized sedan market providing the all-purpose family car. But with the 6, Mazda does have a respectable contender.



2011 Mazda 6

MSRP: **\$28,405**

EPA Mileage: **18 MPG City** **27 MPG Highway**

Performance / Safety:

3.7-Liter, DOHC V-6 engine producing 272 horsepower and 269 pound/feet of torque; 6-speed automatic transmission with electronic manual mode; 17-inch alloy wheels; blind spot monitoring system; 4-wheel disc brakes; traction and stability control; dual chrome exhaust; independent front & rear suspension; fog lights; dual front airbags; side and side curtain airbags.

Interior / Comfort:

AM/FM/ Sirius satellite radio; 6-disc CD and MP3 player; iPod and USB ports; 6-speaker sound system; auxiliary audio input jack; power sunroof; tilt and telescope, leather steering wheel with fingertip audio, and cruise controls; Bluetooth.