

Mazda MX-5

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First classic The Mazda Pantera **Best drive** The length of the A1 in my MGB GT V8 (Your classic, August 2010)

FIRST LOVE GETS SOME ATTENTION

In the depths of a snow-laden winter of '94, the marketing men at Mazda were plotting a full-frontal assault on the new MGF to ensure continued high sales of their Light Weight Sports concept, released in '89. The detuned, 90bhp MX-5 was launched in the UK in spring 1995 to tempt the aspiring soft-top owners out of a fiver under thirteen grand, and was limited to three solid colours and cloth trim only.

One such customer picked up their Chaste White 'back to basics' convertible on the day of the Summer Solstice, a couple of months after this variant's release, and I am now its third owner.

My 'First Classic' story started when the car was driven out of an Oxfordshire Mazda showroom full of gleaming new '03' cars on registration day, 1 March of that year. My girlfriend's Volkswagen Polo was part-exchanged for another non-power-assisted car, much to her disgust. Little did she – or I – know that I would thank her six years later with a nice modern, and tenure of the MX-5 would be gratefully transferred to me.

Over the years, the car has given me a staple diet of simple, fun motoring, having been used for commuting, carrying large dogs to the vet and trips as far down as Tuscany and across to Austria. I would be deluding myself if I didn't admit that a little more 'oomph' wouldn't go amiss, but there is something so honest about the car. I enjoy its manual window winders, misty zip-out plastic rear window, boundless underbonnet access space and the constant self-reminder to avoid leaving the keys in the boot when unloading (the internal boot release was axed to save a few quid on sticker price).



McNaughton-Gisby with the inherited Mazda – still his summer daily driver



Dropping its undercarriage in the workshop



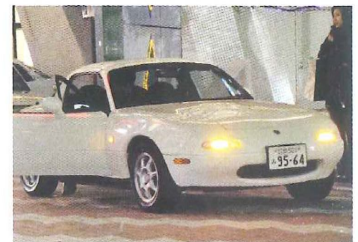
Rear subframe and suspension was tatty...



Girlfriend Eleonora collects MX-5 in '03...



...and the same car today, on Italian plates



Hiroshima Mk1 inspired refurbishment

'Recently, jobs such as rusty and crusty suspension and sills have moved from the back-burner to "Go!" status'



...but now it gleams after a full restoration

Ignore the friendly derision about it being a 'hairstresser's car' (everyone's a comedian) and it is hard to deny that this is a well-balanced shape. It also incorporates such simple ideas as the PPF (Power Plant Frame) joining the engine/box and back axle, which refines power delivery, and the use of aluminium panels where possible, which also ensures ease of supermarket car-park damage.

While in Hiroshima a couple of years ago – ironically, on the only days of the year that the Mazda production facility was closed to shop-floor tours – I saw a mint Mk1 roadster that reinvigorated me to spend a little more time and care on my car as it passes into middle age. This home-based car was also Chaste White, and had a hard-top. There is evidence that my car once had one of these, but I'm reluctant

to replace it because you lose that instant appeal of dropping the top.

The car has never required any major work, passing through regular servicing and MoT tests without a hiccup. It is only more recently that jobs have moved from back-burner to 'Go!' status, as rusty and crusty suspension and rear sills get listed as to-do tasks, along with the never-ending toil of retaining a shine in the soft white paint.

During the past few months the car has ungracefully had its undercarriage dropped out. No holding back – engine, gearbox, drivetrain, PPF and all suspension. This has been a good opportunity to attack and treat any early nibblings of rust in the underside that would otherwise be inaccessible, although fixing an engine mount that ripped out from inside the body during removal was an anxious time.

With new dampers, springs, stabiliser bars and – what the hell – a new clutch and front discs, it has now regained the firm ride and taut handling of the car that first emanated from the drawing board nearly 30 years ago.

I get my titillation from balance in corners rather than straight-line speed so, even though my Mazda will not be victorious at Santa Pod, it wins my adoration for excelling at basic motoring thrills.

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