

Mazda MX-5 MK3 Buyers guide.

This guide is aimed at previous owners of MX-5's although much of the detail would be very useful to anyone buying one for the first time.

Where to find one.

MK3's are everywhere and it'll be easy to find a good car near you that suits your needs, the prices are coming down all the time, the winter is an especially good time to find a good car for your money.

Learn how to read a classified ad and check a seller out. Drive several cars. When calling in response to a small ad or one you aren't sure is Private always say: "I'm calling about the car you have for sale"

I'm often astounded by what professional car salesmen call an advert. Autotrader is full of nonsense in many of its descriptions, you have to call and ask some good questions.

You need to keep a clear head and focus on what you want with a dealer. Know the price you want to pay and don't let small, easily correctable things spoil a good car for you.

Don't let him keep to the sticker price and give you some £50 mats either.

Personally I love to buy privately, a great opportunity to really see how the car has been treated and they're cheaper too. If you're brave or know what you're doing you could even try an auction.

The very cheapest 'Good base point' MK3 is obtained in this way (in the winter). Many MK3's were leased as company cars, most are around four years old or so and have been well serviced/treated, worth a good look, especially buying a car for less than the Trade will pay. (Check out BCA online for cars near you)

Know what the car is worth: Use 'Wisebuyer's Guides' for some free and quite accurate pricing/spec HERE: <http://www.wisebuyers.co.uk/motoring/used-car-prices/Mazda/MX-5+%282005-09%29/>

The MK3

A well fettled MK3 is a great all-rounder, still as cheap to run as the earlier cars and a lot faster than a stock 1.8 MK2.5, forget the S2000 and Boxster etc, they really aren't competition anyway. All MK3's are more 'refined', so make better distance/everyday cars than the earlier models. There's nothing else as fun, reliable or as affordable, so I'll save you looking.

The MK3 really doesn't 'feel' much like the earlier cars, it feels wider, taller, more stiff and more 'strong'. You also feel like you're 'in it' instead of 'on top of it' as the seats/blocker/hoops behind you are so much higher. This makes it a fab winter top down car though, the heater's still a furnace! The MK3 is a thoroughly modern 21st century design, it's a strong car and a safe place to be.

The doors have a very un-MX5 like 'Thunk' when you shut them. At about 1120KG's it's not exactly heavy, it still feels taut and 'lithe'. For its refinement, stiffness and strength, this car at only 1120KG's is quite some achievement. The car has kept the design brief's essential ingredients: An affordable, fun, chuckable car. With straightforward mods it will do what you want, Fast road/Track whatever.

The legendary Mazda reliability hasn't gone out of the window either so it's fine to cane it, the 'MZR' chaincam engine is plenty tough enough, efficient too. Early one's with some miles on aren't to be afraid of. As long as everything in this guide checks out OK, you'll be fine.

Importantly the body is Galvanised with clever details like plastic sill covers, they have a 12 year rust warranty (if stamped).

Get a drive in several cars as the way they feel varies car to car, almost certainly down to the set-up, more of which later.

Spec:

The Sport models got 17" alloys, fogs, bilstein shocks, front upper strut brace, 6spd box over the standard 2.0, then some cars had 6cd bose, heated leather and a/c fitted, others didnt. The leather is worth having, it's 'rougner' and thicker than the earlier MK's and is very hard wearing, 70K = perfect drivers seat.

If you're going to mod definitely go for the non-sport 2.0, The front tower brace you can fit yourself (the shell is miles stiffer than a MK2.5 even without one) and it's the only difference body-wise.

All manual 2.0's have a limited slip diff. The 'Sport' has 6 speeds and most of the rest have 5, there's not much between them and really it's a personal preference thing. The cold change 1st to 2nd on the 6 needs care until warm, or better oil. Both have a really nice light clutch and a good gearchange. The brakes are powerful, the DSC is useful too (2.0 only) although the electronics 'nanny' a bit too much, the system kicks in early and stays on a little too long, MK3.5's supposedly have this problem fixed.

You can switch the DSC off 😊

Don't forget the 1.8, they're a very much maligned little brother of the 2.0ltr, they're as cheap as chips and respond nicely to modifications. Most make up to around 140HP and they don't weigh much, still a fun car. As of October 2012 a good 1.8 privately is just £4,400.. an amazing car for that sort of money. This winter, 1.8's will be going through the auctions at less than £4K.

How to check the car over:

*Check absolutely everything works.

*Check every panel for signs of being painted, panel fit, mismatched components.

*As with other 5's the suspension underneath starts to look brown and a bit rusty.

*A good MK3 won't leak any fluid, use oil, smoke or make noises.

*Hood should be air tight with no leaks.

*Check fluid levels, colour of oil (and level!), brake and clutch fluid, water, all the usual 'water in oil/oil in water' etc. G40Steve, Rodders et al always say the same thing: Keep the oil on MAX. It doesn't help that the dipstick is hard to read.

*Look for cars with four matching tyres, this says a lot about it's life and it's owners, these cars will drive better too. Check the puncture kit (there's no spare wheel) as often it's past it's 'use by' date, haggle for this (expensive!) but replace it with a can of Holts Tyreweld for £7.

*The alloys may have kerbing or slight corrosion as the paint isn't brilliant, nothing that can't be negotiated/sorted.

*Water leaks i.e. wet carpets, under seats, front passenger foot well (possible new front screen?) boot under carpet, all easy to remedy. Your nose, steamed up windows and the backs of your fingers pressed hard into the carpet will pick up any damp easily.

*Once warm it should love revs, pull hard and easily catch the limiter.

*Brakes should be powerful (if car pulls to one side it may have corroded inner discs, quite common) have a look underneath on full lock.

*There should be no lights on, at all, on the dash. DSC,ABS, Airbag etc.

Tip: Disconnecting the battery (as some dealers do) makes the DSC light stay on, to sort this turn the wheels lock to lock. The light stays on because the computer needs to confirm where the 'Centre point' is.

One more thing.. make sure your car has TWO KEYS, they are silly money to get replaced and if your only key is lost, then you're truly buggered.

Buying a straight car.

Step 1

Get yourself a code reader.

These can be had from Ebay/China for £20-£30 and they're literally worth their weight in Gold. I've used an Autel Maxiscan MS309 which is a great reader/re-setter for bugger-all money, I now have the MS509 which is more of a 'real time' tool as well as a code reader.

Here's where to plug your scanner in..

The OBDII (On board Diagnostics) connector is an elongated 'D' shape so impossible to put it in wrong, runs longitudinally in line with the car, It's just behind and to the right of the remote boot release and bonnet release.



See if the car you're looking at has had any 'pending' codes. (These are codes which eventually show the 'MIL' light after something has happened a few times). Makes the dealers a little uneasy too, they aren't used to it.

There's loads on the web about using your reader and what the codes actually mean, also how to use the better readers as a 'real time' tool.

Bear in mind many codes are 'manufacturer specific' (i.e. unique to Mazda), some readers won't read

these or the ABS/DSC stuff. Also bear in mind some codes come up because of the effect of 'something else' happening, if you know what I mean. You still need an engineers mind..

Common Specific Mazda codes: http://www.obd-codes.com/trouble_codes/mazda/
Generic codes start 'P0...' Mazda specific ones start 'P1...'

Step 2

Check the security VIN stickers

All modern Mazda's have a revolutionary new security marking system which is very much to your benefit, every panel has it's own unique and identical sticker with the car's VIN number.

On the pic above, The white/silver rectangular sticker you can see to the right is one of the 'VIN number' security stickers, there are 11 in total and you have to look at every one of them. When the bonnet is open you can see four, one is on the front slam panel (near the bonnet catch), one on the top of each front wing and one on the bonnet itself.





The white stickers have a grey/silver strip which is metal and security etched with the full VIN (look a bit like a scratch card), **they cannot be removed unless sanded off**, so don't take any 'oh it must have fell off mate' nonsense.

This one is vertical inside the door jamb when you open it, it's on the main body of the car, where the doors are hinged.



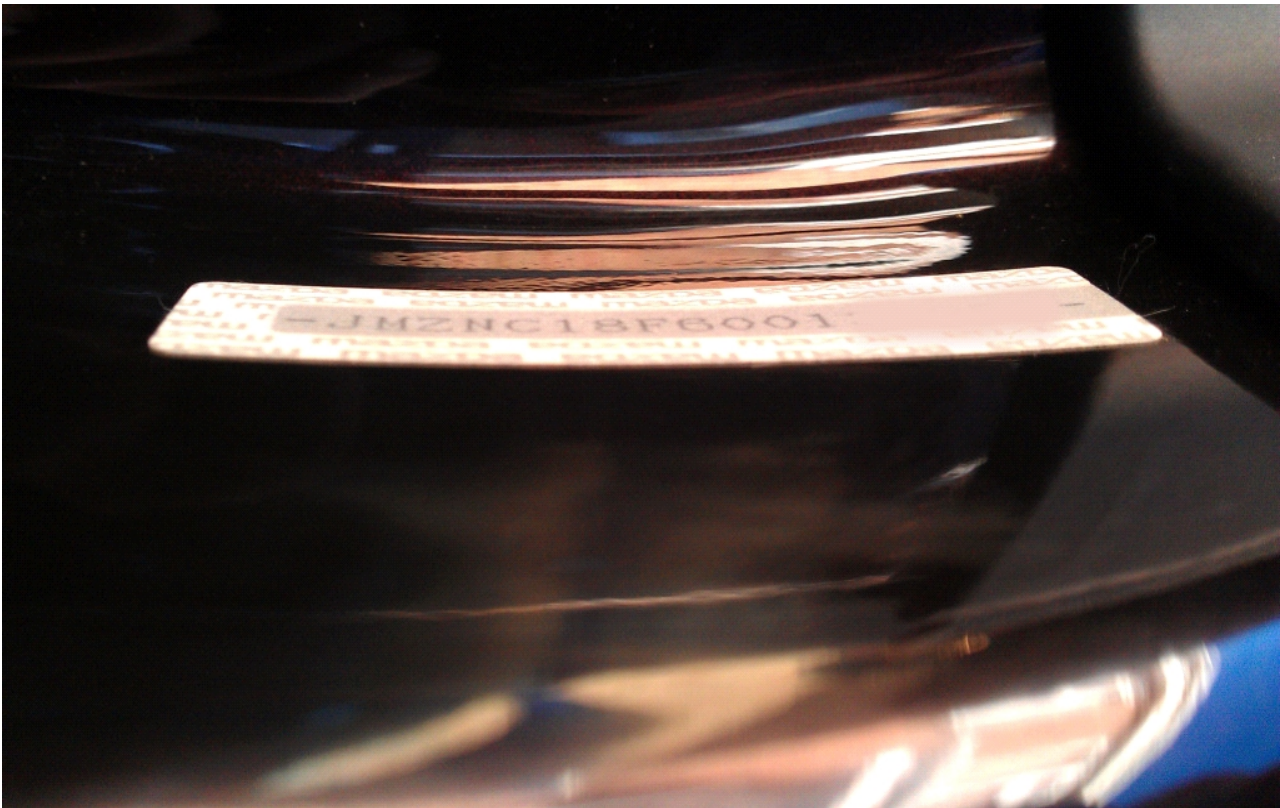
You can clearly see the metal strip and the Laser Security etching, they aren't 'printed'.

Whilst the door is open you can see the rear wing's sticker which is very obvious above the catch. Don't forget to look on the back or underneath the doors themselves, each door has one too.



The boot lid makes **11**.

It's only a matter of time before some bright sparks cotton on.. eventually they'll be putting fakes **OVER** the originals I'd say.. look from the side to be sure there's only one sticker



Pic trying to show the thickness.. hard to take, you're looking for just one thickness visible.

ANY problem with the stickers is a big problem with the car. Replaced panels, repairs, overspray, even stolen??

One lift of the bonnet/boot/doors shows you all you need to see. Two minutes checking the numbers match the VIN on every sticker = peace of mind 😊

Once you're happy about the stickers, we need to go further into the history to be sure.

Step 3.

Text check... Do this:

Text 'CAR' a space and then the reg number to 83600

Costs £3, another no-brainer. Don't take the dealers word, do it yourself.

You'll get two texts back, all the HPI, stolen/damaged/colour change/plate change stuff etc. too. If it's totally clear you're on your way. <http://www.cartextcheck.co.uk/>
These guys are the cheapest in the UK.

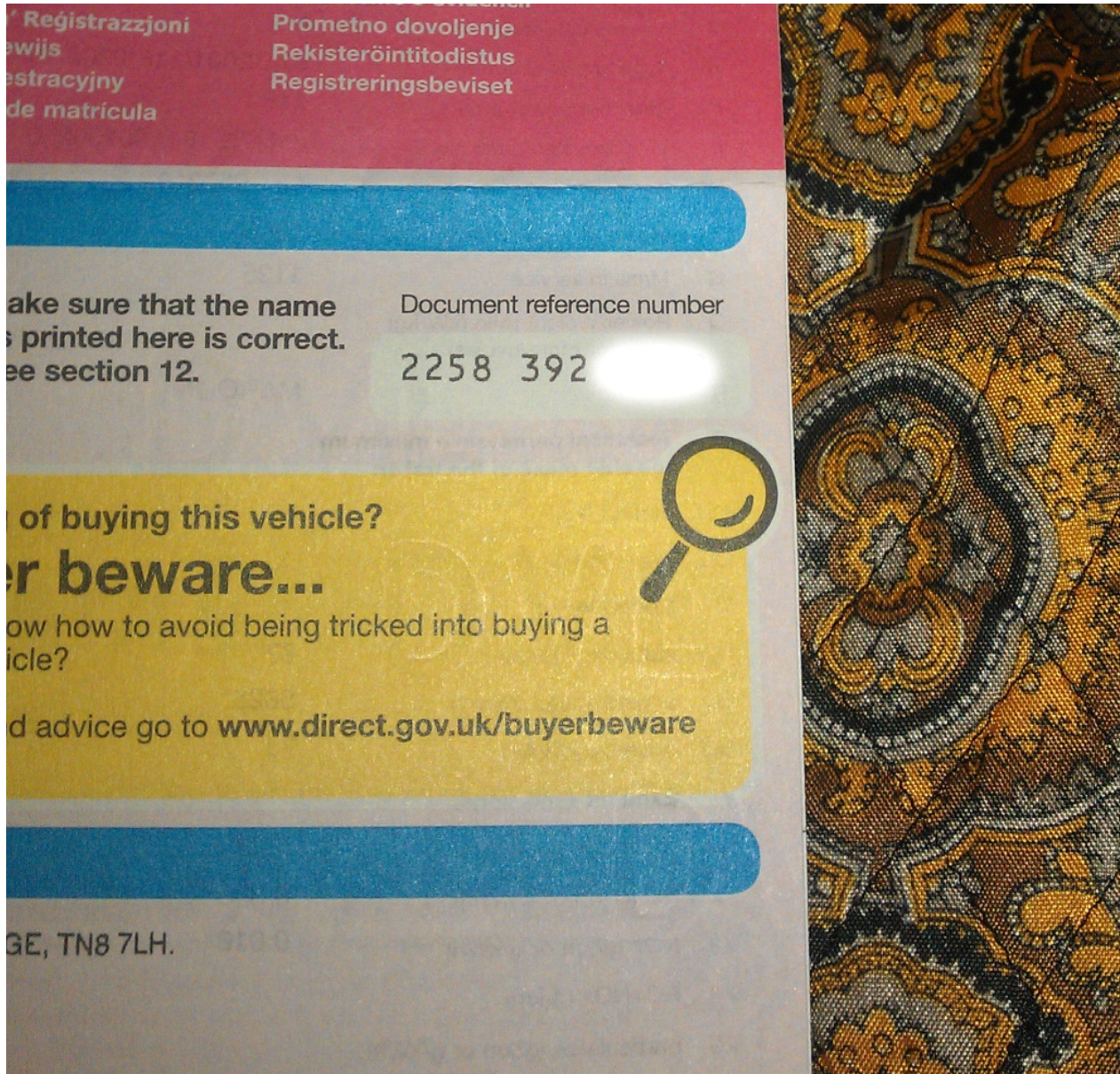
Step 4.

MOT History

Before you part with any of your money **always check the MOT history online.** It's very easy, here's how to do it.

Always ask the dealer/seller for the docs, tells you loads about the car, how much history actually is there? Even the way they are presented tells you everything about the previous owner/s and the dealer (I love seeing a 'wodge' of receipts). Every Mazda dealer has the history of every car available on their computer system too if you don't have all of it.. they might charge a small fee for a print-out though (worth it).

From the V5 you must **write down or photograph this number:**



My favourite quilted smoking jacket has made a splendid background 😊

When you get back home or on your smartphone go to the brilliant 'MOT history online' website and type this number and the reg number in.

<http://motinfo.direct.gov.uk/internet/jsp/ECHID-Internet-History-Request.jsp>

Every MOT the car has had since it was three years old will be on there, with mileages and dates, (Clocked??).. Brilliant! also **advisory information**, i.e. a 'nearly fail', this can be a HUGE bargaining point. The reason my trusty MK2 was finally sold was the advisory: 'rusting suspension', the car passed, but for all time, the MOTinfo website will show the real detail. Looking at my current car's history online shows even the private plate change and the previous reg number/date too.

Very very useful info to have, this should be enough to either cement your notion that the car's a good'un, or not. What did it get an 'advise' on last year???

Interestingly the flash in the pic has highlighted the DVLA 'watermarking' every V5C has, no harm in holding it up to the light and having a look, shiesters printing their own V5's has been known..

That's it! If your car checks out on all of the four points, you've done all you can to make sure it's a good 'un.

Now get your car aligned and really enjoy it, an alignment at a proper shop is a must.

Known Problems:

There have been reports of some cars over 60K having rumbling crankshafts, the engines are tough so this always points to lack of maintenance, if you don't change the oil or keep it on the max line, it'll harm the engine, same with any car. The only real failures to speak of (from Forums in the states) come from Forced Induction and tuning/mapping issues, i.e. mucked about with.

The plastic panel underneath the wiper arms has two very cheap clips instead of proper grommets, if these slip water enters the front footwells, hence damp carpets etc. More seriously, the ECU and fuse boards sit underneath this and getting them wet isn't a good thing. There's quite a few articles online about this and preventing it is easy.

The seat Belts are awful, non-adjustable for position and they often don't reel in properly without assistance.

Err.. I think that's it.

Popular Mods

Suspension, of course. Find a specialist near you or go to Rodders/AK/WIM from MX5Nutz. There's quite a bit on the Forum.

Getting an alignment is an absolute must, It'll inspire you with confidence in the car and you'll be chucking it around in no time, not to mention your tyres will wear evenly, over a year or two an alignment can actually pay for itself. It's just the cost one ONE TYRE if you think about it. Any MX5 with all four wheels pointing in different directions will handle like a wheelbarrow.

'Variable intermittent' RX8 wiper Mod, a very easy mod to do, swapping over the wiper stalk from an RX8, these have the variable intermittent function, mine was £25. A godsend when it isn't raining hard.. Which seems most days this year! I wouldn't be without it.

De-Tango, takes the prominent orange 'forward lens' out of the headlights, using just your oven and some nerve..

Exhausts, of course. Although the standard car sounds great, it's a clever system as it sounds 'sporty' inside the car but it's not loud outside the car. A popular (free) mod is to take off the back box and knock out the insides of the second Catalytic converter.

Ephemera..

Have a look in these:



Great for security and keeping your Satnav in when parked, there's two, one behind each seat. Some models don't have the door. I found a fluorescent bib, a white baseball cap and a pack of spare bulbs in one of mine.. from a previous, previous owner probably! Whenever you read reviews and they talk about the glovebox and storage space inside, they never mention these. The 'PRHT' (folding electric hardtop) cars don't have them.

Also: Fill up with Super unleaded and give it a try, the ECU and the engine respond well to this as they 'learn' the octane rating, makes a difference.

One more useful link: The Factory workshop manual for 2005 to 2008 NC1's. <http://www.mellens.net/mazda/Mazda-Miata-2006-2007/index.html>

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