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Again, Mazda drew on the talent spread throughout its various design studios around the world in a bid to find the desired shape for the second generation MX-5 (J07E). The Frankfurt office submitted some stunning sketches, although they weren't developed further.



It was actually a far braver decision to support the M2 than the first generation ever was - there were far more competitors vying for the business of less customers. However, compared to the situation in Korea at that time, the Japanese company had little to worry about ...

A fresh face

Unlike the competition held as part of the OGG project (which ultimately led to the first generation MX-5), there were to be no winners or losers with the second generation; Mazda simply wanted ideas from its various design centres. The whole project was overseen by Martin Leach. Each design centre was given the same brief: keep the car's character intact. Tom Matano gave an interesting example of how the new car should be designed: "Looking from 100 metres away, a person should recognise the vehicle is a Miata. From 50 metres, it will still appear to be a Miata, but as it gets closer still, they will realize it is the new model."

The amazing thing is that all of the designs were very similar, although, as everyone started from the same point, it's perhaps not so surprising. From sketches, each centre (except the Frankfurt studio) produced full-sized clays which were presented for inspection at a meeting in Hiroshima. The proposal from the Yokohama office fell by the wayside quite quickly, leaving just the Irvine and Hiroshima offerings to choose from. After much



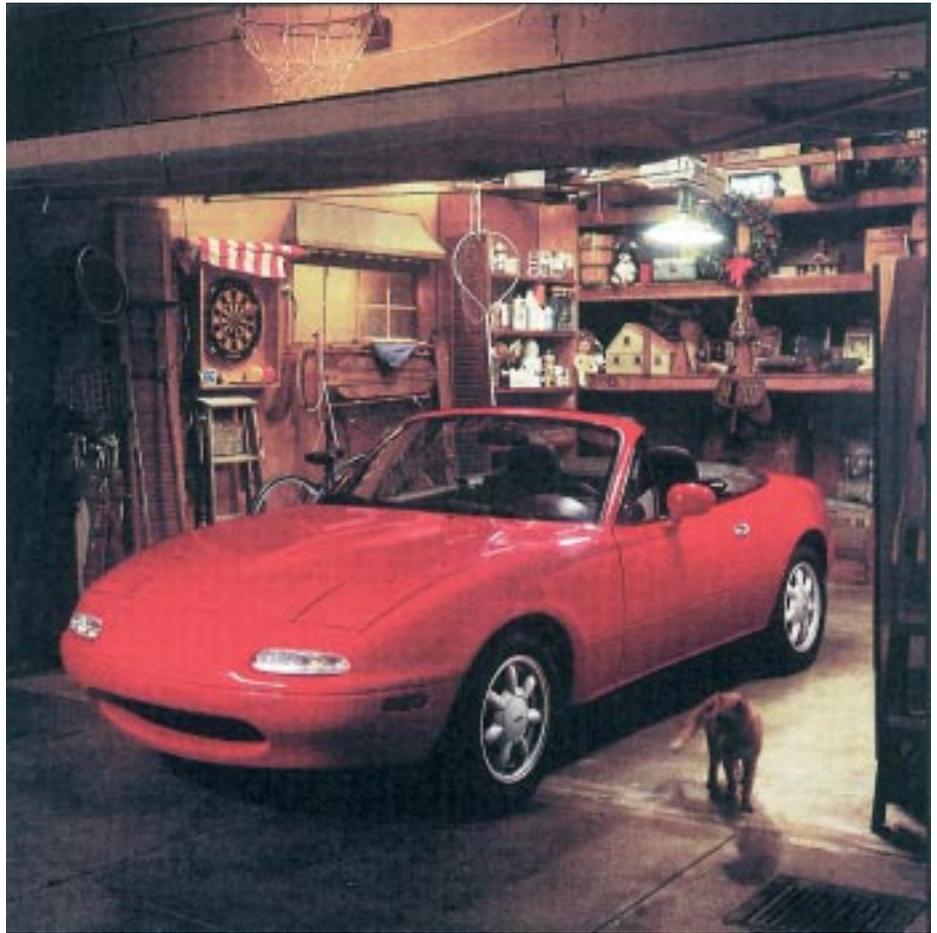
deliberation, the MRA design (credited to Ken Saward - an ex-Chrysler man) was the one chosen for further development.

The attractive cover of the 1991 model year Miata brochure. The same picture was also used in magazine advertising in the States; indeed, through the years, many Mazda catalogues have used retouched rather than new photographs to illustrate updates.

their attention to the suspension, and in conjunction with Koni developed some dampers specifically for the MX-5. They tried some four or five combinations before settling on the correct type. These are combined with BBR springs that have a progressive action like rising rate suspension in motorcycles. The first portion of the suspension travel is soft, but the resistance of the springs increases as the deflection increases, so that in quick cornering there is far less roll than on the standard car, but the ride comfort is not unduly sacrificed. There are also anti-roll bars in the BBR kit." The BBR suspension kit was priced at £495 plus fitting, incidentally.

An American update
During 1990, the Miata was named 'Automobile of the Year' by *Automobile* magazine. The car deposited with *Road & Track* had everyone in raptures, although it was noted that, whilst cold, the engine had a tendency to hesitate and the brakes were a little sharp on the first few applications. Also, after just 9000 miles (14,400km), the hood was starting to show signs of wear. However, there had been

The 1991 model year Miata in Mariner Blue. Standard colours at this time included this shade, Classic Red, Crystal White and Silver Stone Metallic. There was also a limited run Special Edition in British Racing Green.



IT ONLY SEEMS LIKE YESTERDAY.

Miata Special Edition. They had names like Healey, MG, Triumph and Jag. They smelled of engine oil and leather. And a chosen few were the deep green of the English countryside. If these memories are familiar, this Miata is for you. Its coat of British Racing Green and tan interior evoke the best of the classic roadsters.

Settle into the cockpit and revel in the scent of leather. Other than the standard CD player and power accessories, you'd think little has changed since 1960. But as you bring the eager twin-cam engine to life and grab the wood shift knob, you find that everything's changed. Everything except the fun.

Take the inside line through a curve, and the rigid unibody works in concert with four-wheel double wishbone suspension. Handling has come a long way in the last

30 years. So has reliability. The Miata may well be the most trouble-free sports car you'll ever own. Small wonder that with such virtues, *Road & Track* recently named it "One of the Ten Best Cars in the World."

So come experience the old magic in a new way. See your Mazda Dealer and take the Miata Special Edition for a spin. There will only be a few. And a car like this only comes along every now and then.

36-MONTH/50,000-MILE WARRANTY. No deductible, "bumper-to-bumper" protection. See your dealer for limited warranty details. For information on any new Mazda car or truck, call toll-free, 1-800-345-3799.

mazda
IT JUST FEELS RIGHT.

November 1990. © 1990 Mazda Motor of America, Inc.

Tasteful advertising for the Miata Special Edition. Based on the Package B model, each car came with a personalized interior badge.

- it's fun, light, quick, agile and it's the cheapest. What more could you ask?"

The same magazine named the Miata 'One of the Ten Best Cars in the World', and *the* 'Best Sports/GT' in the \$13,000 to \$21,000 bracket.

Interestingly, *Motor Trend* had found it hard to choose a winner when it compared the Miata to the second generation MR2 GT, declaring it an honourable draw, but in a similar test in the UK, *What Car?* thought the Toyota was best - just! However, while only 25,000 MR2s were exported worldwide in 1990, American Miata sales for the year added up to 35,944 units; people were definitely voting with their wallets in favour of the Mazda. By this time, the changes for the 1991 model year had been announced.

For the 1991 season, the Miata started at \$14,300, and was now available with ABS braking as a \$900 option. One magazine stated: "With that single addition, the Miata is just about perfect." Maybe Mazda thought so, too, for other than the new ABS system, mechanical specifications and options stayed pretty much the same as for the previous year.

However, March 1991 saw the launch of the high spec Special Edition. Basically - apart from a few subtle differences (such as the steering wheel) - it was the American equivalent of the home market's V Special. Ironically, the dark green

no unexpected bills, and only \$70 worth of maintenance. Obviously, the title of 'most trouble-free' sports car in the 1990 JD Power Survey was well-deserved.

Despite a poor year for Mazda as a whole in the States, Miata sales were still very strong in 1990, and it seems that *Road & Track* went a long way to explaining why in a comparison test involving the RX-7, Nissan 300ZX, Porsche 944

and Toyota MR2. The journal stated: "For most of us, the job of a sports car is to take pavement - particularly winding pavement - and alchemize it into that elusive thing called fun. This the Miata does better than all the others ... A majority of the group said the Miata would be their first choice if they had to pick one car for the entire trip. A Feature Editor said, 'It has everything I want from a sports car



The Miata M-Speedster made its debut at the 1995 Chicago Auto Show. Designed by Wu-Huang Chin of MRA, it featured a 1.8 litre supercharged engine that developed a healthy 200bhp.

Stunning interior of the M-Speedster.

faltering business situation within Mazda itself”), the team managed to get a third and final Eunos Roadster-based car into production - the M2-1028. Announced in February 1994 at a price of 2,800,000 yen (delivery began in March), the 1028 was based on the five-speed, 1.8 litre model, but had a stronger - yet lighter - body (helped by a front strut brace and an aluminium roll-over bar) and a highly tuned engine.

Tipping the scales at 960kg (2112lb), it had 30 per cent better torsional rigidity; in fact, it was easily as strong as most closed cars. This, in addition to newly developed Bridgestone tyres and a harder suspension set-up, allowed an impressive improvement in handling (0.93g has been measured on the skidpan).

The 1028 was available in either Dark Blue or Chaste White, although a hood was not supplied - at the end of the day, the car was intended to be more at home on the track than commuting to work on a daily basis! However, a lightweight custom hard-top was part of the package. Of the 300 built, 185 were sold in white (the most popular colour for cars in Japan), leaving 115 finished in the blue shade. At least the M2 project went out on a high note, as the M2-1028 sold out within a couple of months.

The M-Speedster
The Miata M-Speedster made its debut at the 1995 Chicago Auto



Show. It was designed by Wu-Huang Chin of MRA, and featured a supercharged 1.8 litre engine. To keep the 200 horses in check, 215/50 ZR15 tyres were employed, mounted on five-spoke alloy wheels. The suspension and braking system was also uprated, with 250mm (9.8in.) ventilated discs at the front and 225mm (8.8in.) solid discs at the rear.

Complete Car was quite confident that this vehicle gave an insight into the future, despite Tom Matano saying: “We have no intention of building it.” Perhaps the magazine thought it was being used as a tool to gauge reaction, as at the end of the article, it said: “If US buyers give the thumbs up, it will form the blueprint for a revamp in Europe.” Sadly, although there was almost universal praise for the



The aggressive lines of the M-Speedster, built on the so-called ‘Mi-ari’ - a one-off car produced by the Irvine team to honour Ferrari at Monterey in 1994. Twin round lamps were hidden under each headlight cover, and a pair of matching helmets nestled under the fairings behind the seats. Many thought that the M-Speedster would form the basis for the second generation MX-5.