



## TIM TESTS IT



Our motoring editor, Tim Barnes-Clay, has been working like a dog reviewing a bunch of cars for us since the last issue. We know he loves it really – after all he's a 'driven' guy! We hope you enjoy the mix of motors we bring you in this packed edition of Sorted.

**2017 Mazda MX-5 RF**

**R**F stands for is 'Retractable Fastback', but it's not just the name that distinguishes itself from the regular Mazda MX-5 – the new RF has its own look.

It's easy to get the MX-5 RF's top to drop. The time to press the switch to make the car's roof and rear window stow away is when you're immobile. But, if you're in a rush, you can complete this action up to 6mph.

After that, the RF cautions you that it's a 'no go'. The electronic folding feat is over in 13 seconds, and then you're left with the 'fastback' portion which gives some shelter against the biting wind.

The MX-5 RF is offered with a 131ps 1.5-litre engine, or you can up the enjoyment factor by going for the 160ps 2.0-litre unit. The latter is the version I squeezed behind the wheel of. If you don't like switching gears yourself, you can go for an RF with automatic transmission, but I'd advise staying with the six-speed manual 'box. The miniature gearstick feels good in the hand

and it finds the cogs with accuracy – making for a more pleasing drive.

The 2.0-litre powerplant is hurried, with zero to 62mph arriving in 7.3 seconds. But the car needs some work to get the best out of it, and that's where you come in – helping the RF with the revs by hanging onto the gears and really pushing the car. It all makes for a gratifying experience – especially when the Mazda's engine and sprightly exhaust notes make themselves known.

The MX-5 RF's static roof sections make the Mazda 45kg weightier than the normal MX-5, but the RF has

**"I could drive into twisting turns of tarmac eagerly; the steering is exact and the RF feels meticulously balanced in the bends."**



been engineered so that it handles as amiably as the lighter model. I found I could drive into twisting turns of tarmac eagerly; the steering is exact and the RF feels meticulously balanced in the bends. All this keeps you well within the margins of safety. It also rides well, coping with road surface inconsistencies far better than some bigger, less athletically orientated cars.

What the 2017 Mazda MX-5 RF can't do, though, is gag the whistling wind. It disperses road and tyre rumble better than the MX-5 Convertible, but even with the roof up, it still sounds

squally. That said, once the roof is dropped, you are shielded from a pummelling by the fastback segments – and at that point you accept the sound of the wind rather than battling against the hubbub.

Inside, the miniature cockpit is very much the same as the usual MX-5. The only tangible alteration is an up-to-date colour screen housed in the driver's instrument binnacle. As with all MX-5s, there's only room for two, and if, like me, you're tall and not particularly lean, it's a close-fitting place to be. The boot isn't colossal – obviously, but a couple of holdalls

and some shopping will fit in.

So, if you're in the market for a motor that has a removable roof section, but isn't a full drop-top, then this MX-5 RF could be for you. The new Mazda protects you from the worst of the elements, while giving you that wind in your beard (and ears) experience. At the end of the day, the RF delivers just as much joy as the MX-5 Convertible, but in a more relaxed way. It also looks, dare I say it, more virile with its fastback styling. But having an ingenious roof and an altered look comes at a price – an additional £2,000 over the conventional MX-5. I think it's worth it for the brasher, smoother shape alone, but then, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. →

#### Fast Facts

**Max speed:** 133mph  
**0-62mph:** 7.3 secs  
**Combined mpg:** 40.9  
**Engine layout:** 1998cc 4-cylinder petrol  
**Max. power (PS):** 160  
**CO2:** 61g/km  
**Price:** £23,095





## 2017 Subaru BRZ

I would argue that the Subaru BRZ is the enthusiasts' car of choice compared with the Toyota GT86. That might sound contentious, but maybe I like playing devil's advocate?

Hand on heart, I think the BRZ is a sports car in the traditional sense. It's a rear-wheel-drive machine with 200 horses pulling under the lid. Sure, the car is naturally aspirated, and some would like to see a turbo fitted, but this all makes the petrol-powered BRZ even purer.

OK, the same goes for the GT86, but Subaru is a niche car brand in Britain – Toyota is not. As part of the deal when Toyota and Subaru came up with the BRZ/GT86 plan, Subaru agreed to sell the BRZ in lower volumes. This further bolsters my certainty that it will be a collectors' car in a couple of decades' time.

I recently took a drive in Subaru's 2017 BRZ Sports Coupe. It's had a few changes that further strengthen the BRZ as the driver's fun motor of choice. The car's profile shows off the Subaru's low centre of gravity, while beefy wheel arches give the 2+2 a strong posture. The wheels are now a 10-spoke aluminium design and the rear of the BRZ shows off reshaped tail lights. There's also a new pedestal spoiler to enhance aerodynamics. Inside, the BRZ's steering wheel feels nicer in the hand than ever, wrapped with soft cross-stitched hide. That may not seem like a change worth mentioning, but after hooning around tight turns in the Cotswolds, my hands

expressed some serious gratitude.

Available in just SE LUX trim in Britain, and costing only £26,050, the 2017 Subaru BRZ is now even more likely to be a car lusted after by enthusiasts. Most BRZs will get driven hard – they need to be to get the best out of them – but the few that are pampered will end up as museum pieces in 20 years' time. Trust me, Subaru has long basked in its legendary motorsports status, and there will be more basking in glory to come.

Even the BRZ's moniker – standing for 'Boxer', 'Rear-wheel drive', 'Zenith', validates the Japanese company's devotion to driving enthusiasts. The aspiration behind the Subaru BRZ was to produce a stripped-back sports car, offering the most clean-cut handling possible – and Subaru pulled it off. Yes, the identical GT86 does a similar job, but it's all about emotion, folks. The word 'Toyota' just doesn't get the juices flowing like the word 'Subaru' does. After all, it was Subaru that invented the Boxer engine – the fundamental element under each car's bonnet. The 2.0-litre Subaru Boxer lump can be fixed low and shoved back in the chassis which creates that low centre of gravity and helps dish out the weight 53% front and 47% rear.

The Subaru BRZ is best driven with the six-speed manual 'box. You must work it hard to get from 0-62mph in 7.6 seconds, but that's all part of the entertainment. With the BRZ and

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the GT86, it's not so much about out-and-out power, it's about the way you feel when you dart from bend to bend with utter poise and precision. Few driver's cars come close, particularly at this price point.

So, the Subaru BRZ and Toyota GT86 are among the most pleasurable and inexpensive rear-wheel-drive motors to be launched in modern times. The mechanical parts are indistinguishable, but each make has adjusted the steering and suspension of their 2+2 for a distinctive feel. Their cost is one and the same, but picking which one to have is easy. It's the BRZ every time.

It goes back to the fact that Subaru is a niche marque in the UK. And it looks the dog's dangles in blue – all it needs are those fabled gold wheels and you'll have a car you'll always cherish. And when, one day, you're told a care home awaits, you'll be able to flog your BRZ to the drooling collectors who've been pestering you to sell for years. At least if you part with it, the money will mean you can afford the care home. Now, there's something to look forward to!

### Fast Facts

Max speed:  
140mph  
0-62mph:  
7.6 secs  
Combined mpg:  
36.2  
Engine: 1998cc  
4 cylinder 16  
valve petrol  
Max. power (PS):  
200  
CO<sub>2</sub>: 180g/km  
Price: £26,050







### Fast Facts

Max speed:  
155mph  
 0-62mph:  
5.4 secs  
 Combined mpg:  
53.2  
 Engine layout:  
2,993 cc  
 6-cylinder turbo  
diesel  
 Max. power (PS):  
265  
 CO<sub>2</sub>: 138g/km  
 Price: £49,130

## 2017 BMW 5 Series

For over four decades, BMW's 5 Series saloon has been drooled over by executives around the globe.

It's a car that still wields more status points than many – and the seventh incarnation of this Bavarian tour de force has shown the likes of Mercedes-Benz and Audi that the 5 Series will always be a tough cookie to beat.

The new 2017 BMW 5 Series is lighter and quicker than the outgoing version – it's also more efficient. Naturally, the car is stuffed with better tech than before and it's also been given a boost in the comfort department. It's a looker, too – with a conservatively handsome exterior not drastically different from the exiting model.

On the road, the new 2017 BMW 5 Series is everything you'd hope for – and more. It's agile, even though it's longer by 36mm and 6mm broader – and the six-cylinder 265ps 530d M Sport Saloon we drove pulls like a freight train. Zero to 62mph arrives in 5.4 seconds – and when fitted with BMW's all-wheel-drive system – xDrive, the car grips to corners like a koala bear to a eucalyptus tree.

Turn into a twisty section of tarmac and the new BMW 5 Series replies rapidly to the precise steering, while the car's Comfort, Sport and ECO PRO modes – each altering the throttle and steering response – will fit your mood, as well as road and weather conditions, perfectly.

But, let's face it; the new 2017 BMW 5 Series is more likely to be

used as a motorway mile muncher than a sports car strung through switchbacks. We certainly had no worries cruising at 70mph up and down the Spanish test routes we were allocated. The 5 Series irons out lumps and bumps, making any road surface – even the less than mirror-smooth ones – feel brand new.

Behind the wheel, you sit low down, and the wraparound dash



**“Zero to 62mph arrives in 5.4 seconds – and when fitted with BMW's all-wheel-drive system – xDrive, the car grips to corners like a koala bear to a eucalyptus tree.”**

and clear clocks make you feel as though you're in a jet fighter plane. All the switchgear falls easily to hand and it operates with an effortless action.

Expect to pay £49,130 for the 265ps BMW 2017 530d xDrive M Sport Saloon we tested, but if you're a business user choosing this as your company car, the new 2017 BMW 5 Series will give you those lower emissions you'll need for reduced benefit in kind tax bills. This fresh, powerful model gives off only 138g/km of CO<sub>2</sub> – and you'll be pleased hear it will return up to 53.2mpg. →





**“The cabin is excellently refined and just so utterly comfortable to spend a long time in.”**



## Volvo V90

Volvo's V90 is the successor to the well-liked Volvo V70, which has been the Scandinavian firm's flagship estate for years. Then Audi, BMW and Mercedes-Benz really improved their estate cars and the competition got hotter.

Now the V90 has come along with its saloon sibling, the S90, to shake the game up some more. The car has similar chassis parts and engines to the big XC90, but the Swedish automaker is taking a different angle on things when it comes to estates, now. The V90 houses a fairly small four-pot diesel turbo power unit under its bonnet, rather than a rumble V6 lump found in German marques. There is also a petrol hybrid if you're feeling 'green'.

Alas, the V90's boot area isn't as gigantic as the V70's, but it is still a decent, square load area and it's

certainly big enough for a family of, say, five's needs. The boot floor turns into an even larger level surface when the seats are folded, making it the perfect vehicle to transport stuff to the tip, or outsized items back from DIY furniture stores.

But the V90 will win over hearts with its ride rather than its load capacity. The cabin is excellently refined and just so utterly comfortable to spend a long time in. To be fair, Volvo's seats on all its models are top-notch – and the V90 simply builds on that. The car will take four adults, or two adults and three kids, for a cruise all day long without anyone feeling fatigued.

The steering is weighted nicely and there's very little body roll in corners. It's all very stress-free, even at a good lick on a challenging road. It's good news for the Volvo V90 on motorways,

too. It drives with composure and tracks attentively to its lane. At city speed, the ride stays graceful.

The range is divided into two turbo-charged diesel units, named D4 and D5 – and the factory-fitted gearbox across the line-up is an eight-speed auto. If you want manual, you'll be left wanting as there aren't any plans to supply a 'stick shift' version. Then there's the top of the tree T8, which is a plug-in hybrid. This will be available later this year.

There are four levels of trim: Momentum, Inscription, R-Design and Cross-Country. All come with good levels of kit and Volvo's safety system. This is able to detect pedestrians and even large animals in the road before you do. The V90/S90 models also come with Pilot Assist, which offers up a semi-autonomous driving function. Volvo could well be offering us a glimpse of what things will be like in the automotive future here.

The front-wheel-drive D4 will take the V90 from zero to 62mph in 8.5 seconds, returning 62.8mpg, with CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of 119g/km. The faster D5 Inscription that I drove comes with four-wheel drive, and will manage the 0-62mph sprint in 7.2 seconds. It does an official combined average of 57.6mpg and emits 129g/km of CO<sub>2</sub>.

If you loved the V70, you'll adore the new Volvo V90 estate. It's everything the V70 was and is – but more. That is except for the boot – but it's only ever so slightly smaller, and we don't think that should be a deal-breaker.

## Fast Facts

### D5 Inscription

Max speed: 145mph  
0-62mph: 7.2 secs  
Combined mpg: 57.6  
Engine layout: 1969cc  
4-cylinder, 16 valve turbo diesel  
Max. power (PS): 235  
CO<sub>2</sub>: 129g/km  
Price: £44,455







## Infiniti Q30

Infiniti, the loftier arm of Nissan, is steadily raising its profile in the United Kingdom – and its Q30 model should not be disregarded if the luxury hatchback class trips your trigger.

First impressions of the Q30 are familiar, and that's because it's based on the pre-facelift Mercedes A-Class. But the Infiniti looks the part, with an aggressive deportment and low roofline. Inside, plush seats evoke a feeling of quality and sophistication.

I got behind the wheel of the Q30 1.6T 7DCT Business Edition. Even though it's substantial for a smallish car, the Infiniti copes with corners and bites into the bitumen as if it were appreciably lighter.

A sharp-shooting seven-speed automatic gearbox helps by storming up and down through the cogs smoothly. Performance-wise, the model's 115ps and 250Nm of torque get into a frantic froth, pulling the car from 0-62mph in 8.9 seconds. The car isn't wearing to drive either, due to the Q30 requiring negligible steering input.

The cabin's very comfortable seats have been intended to relieve pressure on the top and bottom of the back by supporting these areas more than in a traditional chair. Elsewhere, you can identify



### Fast Facts

Max speed:  
134mph  
0-62mph:  
8.9 secs  
Combined mpg:  
48.7  
Engine: 1595cc  
4 cylinder 16  
valve turbo petrol  
Max. power (PS):  
115  
CO<sub>2</sub>: 136g/km  
Price: £23,600

**“The critical aspect with the Infiniti Q30 is that it is manufactured to be a premium alternative to more commonplace cars.”**

components shared with Mercedes-Benz; for example, the switchgear and the dashboard.

Infiniti has carried on the sweeping wave across the dash, which is seen on the exterior of the Q30, and a mock suede roof lining adds to that well-heeled feel. The factory-installed infotainment system looks costly as well, with well-defined screen graphics. Bluetooth and voice control

are standard, too. Plentiful room in the front is offset by a limited rear, but boot space is up with the best in class.

The critical aspect with the Infiniti Q30 is that it is manufactured to be a premium alternative to more commonplace cars – and the outcome is a more well-to-do and easy-going experience than you would anticipate from your average hatchback. →





## Mitsubishi Shogun

Thirty-five years ago, Mitsubishi launched a 4x4 which was robust enough to go where others dreaded to tread, yet enjoyed the sort of stylish specification more normally associated with high-end saloon cars.

1982 is a long time ago – that was the era of *Fame* and neon leg warmers – but, unlike the TV series and early 1980s fashion, the Shogun is still very much a relevant vehicle today.

The latest Mitsubishi Shogun has a confident fresh front end, distinguished by a more integrated grille and smart LED daytime running lights. The design changes show a subtle, yet natural evolution for the commanding Japanese off-roader.

Unsurprisingly, the Mitsubishi keeps its go-everywhere, confident and mightily built presence. This is characterised by its upright windscreen, short front overhang, solid high flanks, flared wheel arches and rear-mounted spare wheel. These are all fundamental Shogun styling cues that underscore its mud-plugging ability.

Standing next to the Mitsubishi Shogun makes you feel tiny. The vehicle is colossal and looks rather daunting to drive. But once you heave yourself into the cabin, turn the key, select 'Drive' from the automatic transmission and get moving, any unease dissolves.

By no means is the beast always a pleasure to drive on the road, though. Sure, it's easy to aim

the Mitsubishi Shogun down a motorway and stay there, but any crosswinds do blow you about a bit. That's no surprise as it's a lofty vehicle – and because of that, you can also forget hooning around bends on rural roads, unless you enjoy hardcore body roll.

Instead, the Shogun is about strength. The top-of-the-range Long Wheel Base (LWB) SG4 model, on test here, pulls like a freight train with its 3.2-litre, 190ps, four-cylinder turbo diesel engine. Zero to 62mph arrives in 11.1 seconds and the SUV's maximum speed is 112mph. More significantly it has low-ratio gearing and a differential lock to ensure you've got the best chance of getting out of the trickiest of non-tarmac situations.

The Mitsubishi Shogun is not only a hulk of a 4x4, its cabin feels soundly screwed together and comes jam-packed with luxury features. As well as decent sound deadening, the SG4 trim brings Bluetooth, a tyre pressure monitoring system, leather seats, and an automatic with manual mode transmission.

Continuing inside the cabin of the Shogun, its multifunction display has reams of data available. This includes an altitude gauge and barometer – demonstrating that this is a vehicle with motoring talents extending far beyond a farmer's field.

The Shogun's seats are comfy and supportive, and the big glass area provides first class views of the road



### Fast Facts

Max speed: 112mph  
 0-62mph: 11.1 secs  
 Combined mpg: 30.4  
 Engine: 3,200cc 4 cylinder 16 valve turbo diesel  
 Max. power (PS): 190  
 Max. torque (Nm): 441  
 CO<sub>2</sub>: 245g/km  
 Price: £41,225

or rugged ground around you. Rear seat room is vast, and load capacity seems incalculably immense.

A third row of seats can be popped up, too – transforming the Mitsubishi Shogun into a seven-seater SUV. This is handy if you've got a mob of children you need to drop off at school or you're taking a bunch of mates into the rough.

Heavyweight workhorses such as the Shogun have cut out a distinctive niche in the motoring market where dependability and ability matter first and foremost. With its modern design and avant-garde specification, the Mitsubishi Shogun now offers even more bang for your buck.



**"I'm seriously considering buying the Ford Grand C-Max now that I've lived with it for a while."**

## Ford Grand C-Max – Update

Last issue, I wrote about my long-term test car, the Ford's Grand C-Max. In this issue, I figured it was worth looking at it again, as many of you reading this might well be dads with young kids.

OK, with three children of my own, I'm happy to say the Ford Grand C-Max has been a useful car to have in the family since mid-December. But what have I learned about living with the car in terms of its practicality? Well, the boot is minuscule with all seven seats in place, but it swells to offer truck-like boot space when required. The seven-seater car has more general room than the standard five-seat C-Max – just don't look forward to making use of it all when the rear two seats are in place. Stow them away into the load floor, though, and you have a substantial boot.

Overall, at 1,684mm high, 1,828mm wide and 4,520mm long, the Grand C-Max offers good storage and interior space. There is lots of room in the second tier of seats for adults, but the third seating row is only large enough when the central row of seats has been pushed forward, affecting legroom.

The Ford Grand C-Max's visibility is marvellous, though, and the driving position is first-rate, with the steering wheel and seat wholly adjustable to make sure you can get comfy.

The sliding rear doors prove valuable in car parks and are extremely convenient for hauling small kids and their school bags in and out. Additionally, there are ISOFIX mounts on two of the second-tier of seats to fix child seats into. Nonetheless, down to earth though it is, the Ford Grand C-Max's interior is slimmer than it first appears, so if you require more room – or you carry lots of wide passengers – you may be more contented with the bigger Ford S-Max.

There is no denying it is hugely pragmatic inside the Ford Grand C-Max, but with all the seats in place



there's only a paltry 65 litres of boot space remaining, which is just about enough for a bunch of supermarket shopping bags. But collapse the third tier of seats and boot room inflates to 448 litres, which is a fair bit more than you get in many family-sized hatchback-style cars.

When you do need that additional room for moving big and awkward items, the second tier of seats also stows away flat to give a colossal 1,715 litres of volume. Oh, and there's no annoying boot lip to snag things on, so heaving unwieldy objects into the Grand C-Max's boot is stress-free.

So, I've got to say, as a dad-of-three, I'm generally impressed. In fact, I'm seriously considering buying the Ford Grand C-Max now that I've lived with it for a while. I just might not be able to dig deep enough for the £29,265 flagship version I've been testing. ■

### Fast Facts

Max speed:  
124mph  
0-62mph:  
10.7 secs  
Combined mpg:  
56.5  
Engine: 1997cc  
4-cylinder turbo  
diesel  
Max. power (PS):  
150  
CO<sub>2</sub>: 129g/km  
Price: £29,265



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