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20yrs of the Mazda3 | Mazda’s award-winning

hatchback and saloon marks two decades on sale

* The Mazda3 was revealed at the 2003 Frankfurt Motor Show and went on sale in the autumn of 2003.
* Across four generations, the Mazda3 has achieved cumulative global sales of over six million cars.
* In the UK the recently updated 2024 Mazda3 line-up features 15 hatchbacks and 3 saloon models.

The Mazda3 has reached the milestone of two decades on sale - revealed at the 2003 Frankfurt Motor Show, the first-generation Mazda3 arrived in European dealerships in the autumn of 2003. The Mazda3 built on the success of the Mazda 323, which across four generations had been Mazda’s flagship family hatchback in the European market, as well as proving to be a huge sales success both at home in Japan, (where it was called the Familia) and around the globe.

A strong clue to the future Mazda3 came at the Geneva Motor Show in the spring of 2003 when Mazda showed the MX Sportif concept car, which unapologetically showed off the style of Mazda’s next generation of family hatchback. The design was led by chief designer Hideki Suzuki and involved collaboration between Mazda’s design centres in California, Germany and Japan.

When the final production car, designed by Hasip Girgin, was revealed at September’s Frankfurt Motor Show it stayed true to the concept car’s look inside and out. The Mazda3 came with a choice of hatchback and saloon body styles - named the Axela in Japan - it went on sale in its home market in October. UK sales starting in late 2003 and it quickly won praise for being an affordable, fun-to-drive and well-built contender in a super competitive segment of the European market.

Available with 1.4, 1.6 and 2.0-litre MZR petrol engines, plus two outputs of MZ-CD diesel engine, the new Mazda3 shared its ‘C1’ platform with the popular Mazda5 MPV and by 2005 annual sales in the UK had passed 15,000 cars. At the 2006 Geneva Motor Show, the Mazda3 MPS hot hatch made its debut, and it joined the line-up in October. Powered by a 260ps 2.3-litre turbocharged MZR engine it was one of the most powerful front-wheel drive hot hatches in the world at the time of its launch and came with a limited-slip differential, 18-inch wheels and unique styling. Across all models in the range a total of 67,731 first-generation Mazda3s were sold in the UK.

The second-generation Mazda3 Saloon was revealed in November 2008 at the Los Angeles Auto Show with the Hatchback shown a few weeks later at the Bologna Motor Show. While it retained the same ‘C1’ architecture it featured a completely new body and a more modern look. Longer and wider, yet lighter, than the first-generation it came with an all-new 2.2-litre diesel engine, alongside familiar but updated petrol engines. European cars saw the introduction of stop-start for the first time to improve fuel economy and lower emissions.

After the success of the first-generation, the MPS model returned with upgrades to its suspension, brakes, engine and gearbox to ensure it stayed a competitive hot hatch choice. With a large bonnet air scoop, 18-inch wheels with a similar design to the RX-8 sportscar and a larger rear spoiler it had the looks to match its performance. Across the lifespan of the second-generation Mazda3 it received a series of updates and a total of 36,254 were sold in the UK.

Introduced in 2013, the third-generation Mazda3 saw a big step forward, it featured an all-new exclusively Mazda Skyactiv Technology platform and architecture. This generation Mazda3 was also the first to adopt Mazda’s Kodo design philosophy, the third model to do so after the Mazda CX-5 and Mazda6. It also saw the introduction of Skyactiv G petrol and Skyactiv D diesel engines, and despite being bigger than the outgoing model, it was once again lighter than its predecessor.

With a longer wheelbase but shorter front and rear overhangs than the previous model, and helped by its dynamic Kodo design, this generation was a sportiest looking Mazda3 to date, which went someway to offsetting the fact that the MPS model did not carry over to the third-generation. With the hot hatch market shrinking in Europe, the third-generation Mazda3 focused on a move upmarket with the four-door body style moving towards the small premium saloon market. Offered in nice exterior colours it was the first Mazda3 to feature Mazda’s signature Soul Red paint.

To highlight the reliability of the third-generation Mazda3 a group of cars were driven from the factory in Hiroshima to Frankfurt for the Motor Show, having crossed the Sea of Japan, they then drove 15,000km from Vladivostok to Germany traversing Russia, Belarus and Poland driven by motoring journalists, repeating a feat first completed with the original Mazda 323 in 1977. A big sales success in the UK, from 2013 to 2019 49,503 third-generation Mazda3s found homes in the UK.

In common with the first two generations of Mazda3, the third-generation Mazda3 was also a global success story for Mazda with production and assembly in Mexico, Thailand, China, Malaysia and Vietnam, in addition to production at Hofu plant in Japan. Well received by media and customers, the Mazda3 made it to the shortlist for European Car of the Year in 2014, however it was the fourth-generation car that claimed the coveted World Car Design of the Year accolade in the 2020 World Car of the Year Awards.

Based on the stunning Mazda Kai concept car, the fourth-generation Mazda3 was unveiled at 2018 Los Angeles Motor Show, and staying very close to the looks of the 2017 concept car, it took Kodo design to the next level, setting new standards of athletic and artistic aesthetics for a family hatchback, while thanks to completely unique body panels, the Mazda3 saloon moved ever further into the realm of rivaling compact premium saloon rivals.

The fourth and current generation Mazda3 saw the debut of Mazda’s groundbreaking Skyactiv-X Spark Controlled Compression Ignition (SPCCI) petrol engine technology, now updated to e-Skyactiv X it sits alongside the e-Skyactiv G engine in the line-up, both of which feature Mazda M Hybrid 24V mild-hybrid systems. Since the launch of the current generation of Mazda3, 17,847 have been sold in the UK, bringing the cumulative UK sales total for Mazda3 to 171,335 cars.

However, to bring even bigger perspective to the significant role the Mazda3 has played in shaping Mazda’s brand image and commercial success over the last 20 years, it has reached global sales of over six-million units and has been one of Mazda’s best-selling models over the last two decades.

Commenting on the Mazda3’s 20th anniversary, Mazda Motors UK, Managing Director, Jeremy Thomson, said: “the Mazda3 has been a mainstay of our sales success and customer retention for nearly all of my time at Mazda UK, it’s combination of quality, style and driver engagement has always made it stand out in a very competitive sector. While the growing popularity of SUVs has changed our sales mix over the years, the popularity of the Mazda3 with our customers and dealers remains strong, highlighting what an important car it is in our line-up”.

Adding, “the SPCCI technology found in the e-Skyactiv X engine is part of our multi-solution approach to powertrains and sustainability. With its connectivity and interior screen upgrades, the 2024 Mazda3 continues to be one of the best looking, highest quality and most generously equipped hatchbacks in the market, while the stylish Mazda3 Saloon is a competitor in the compact executive saloon market. With five new model grades, there remains a lot choice across the range for customers to get the Mazda3 they want.”

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**Notes for Editors**

For more information on the 2024 Mazda3 click here:

[**https://mazdamediapacks.com/en/mazda3/model-release.htm**](https://mazdamediapacks.com/en/mazda3/model-release.htm)

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