

# Mazda MX-5 PRHT

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Of all the convertibles that might be converted to the new "power retractable hardtop" standard, I would have thought the venerable Mazda MX-5 Miata would be last on the list. It's just too strongly identified as a ragtop two-seater classic sports car. But as so often happens, the Automakers have a few surprises up their sleeves, and the PRHT MX-5 is about the best surprise to hit the showrooms in the last couple of years.

Now, if you're only now considering an MX-5, what took you so long? You're as bad as I am!

You see, I recently bought my first Miata &ndash; a very well-used 1990 model year Miata with almost 400,000 miles on the clock. And even in its very tired, very faded, and rickety state, it&rsquo;s one of the funnest cars I&rsquo;ve ever owned. I let a friend drive it for a weekend and he went straight out and bought himself a 1996 Miata the next week. What I can&rsquo;t believe is that it took me seventeen years to buy one of these cars!

But that&rsquo;s water under the bridge, and now I&rsquo;ve joined the Miata cult. You can tell by the bugs in my teeth when I grin like an idiot every time I drive it.

I suppose one of the standard reasons people don&rsquo;t buy Miatas in Portland is because they think that a two-seat convertible will be impractical in our climate. And perhaps that was the case when the Miata was strictly a ragtop car. But now Mazda has come out with the MX-5 Power Retractable Hard Top (PRHT) version, and there are sure to be a few 2007 models left on dealer lots, so a bargain may be possible.

Did I mention that Mazda finally ran out of their leased trademark on the Miata name? Turns out the copyright was held by an Italian bicycle manufacturer, and so the Miata is now and forever the MX-5 &ndash; its original product designation. The rest of the world simply calls the car a &ldquo;Mazda Roadster&rdquo;

Now, I was skeptical about the PRHT until I drove it. I thought this might be the beginning of the end for the Miata Magic. Maybe it would add too much weight, maybe it would just change the feel. As a member of the generation that watched the lithe and powerful Datsun 240Z turn into the bloated and sluggish Nissan 300ZX, I&rsquo;ve been burned before. That must be how Elvis fans felt in the 1960s.

But I digress.

The PRHT is perfect for Portland and the Northwest in general. The top&rsquo;s power action takes only 12 seconds &ndash; short and easy enough to take advantage of an April sun break &ndash; and when the top is up, this car is as dry and cozy as any coupe on the market. As it turns out, you can have your latte and drink it, too.

The PRHT weighs only 75 pounds more than the soft top version, and it doesn&rsquo;t seem to take up any more space than the old convertible top. The MX-5 still has more trunk space than any other car in its class. (Check out the boot in a Honda S2000, or the tiny little cubby in a Pontiac Solstice if you don&rsquo;t believe me.) The MX-5&rsquo;s trunk provides 5.3 cubic feet of capacity that is unrelated to the top style or position.

The interior of the PRHT is nice &ndash; Mazda has had the ergonomics of the Miata down for decades now, and that&rsquo;s part of the reason why it&rsquo;s so much fun to drive. The MX-5 is a bit bigger than previous version of the car, but they used the space wisely.

From the outside, the MX-5 looks a little less like a jellybean than the original Miata, and a little tougher than the second-generation car. There&rsquo;s no doubt that this is a sports car &ndash; just all grown up and comfortable without having lost its edge.

The engine provides 166 Horsepower and 140 lb-ft of torque &ndash; which may not sounds like much in today&rsquo;s

uber-sports car world, but mated to the tough 6-speed manual transmission, the MX-5 has plenty of get up and go. And you'll like the 24/30 fuel economy more than you will in a big V-8, V-6, or turbocharged car.

The most killer thing about the MX-5 PRHT is the price &ndash; in the Grand Touring trim with the 6-speed manual transmission, the car costs \$26,520. If you really had to have the automatic trans (Don't Do It!) it bumps the price to \$27,620. Which is really nice for the level of car you're getting.

So the bottom line really is that this is the perfect time to go shopping for a 2007 MX-5 PRHT. You'll get a good deal on a car that's already easy on your bank account and you'll have a year-round car that your friends will envy no matter what the weather's like outside.