

The Inside Scoop About The Color of Your Miata

by Bob Hall

The fact the Miata's official launch date was 4 July, 1989 had nothing to do with the selection of red, white and blue as the sole colors offered at launch. Although Mazda's advertising agency of the day (Foote, Cone and Belding) put together an ad with the three cars arranged vertically with the caption "Three Cheers for the Red, White and Blue". The three kick off colors were in the system from real early, as they were traditional sports car colors. We also had BRG in the first go as well, but manufacturing said there would only be three colors available. BRG was dropped since it was felt it didn't work as well with a black interior as the other three.

Our 'second tier' of colors was Yellow, Black and Silver. We wanted these at launch, but the paint booth restriction to three shades meant they were put on the back burner.

The only controversy which arose over blue (and the other launch shades) was about naming. It was originally proposed that the colors be named Italian Racing Red, American Racing White (In Japan it was going to be 'Japanese Racing White' since both Japan and the US have white as their official national racing color) and French Racing Blue. Somebody, somewhere, didn't like that, so the colors were given more 'traditional' names. Rod Bymaster, the fellow at MMA who was responsible for marketing and sales of the Miata (as well as coming up with the name), though the shift to the more normal color names was a mistake, but the die was cast.

Laguna blue basically died in Japan and Europe. Germany was Mazda's most important market in Europe back then and Mariner Blue was the most popular color by a hefty margin (it peaked at just under 80 percent of all deliveries, but subsequently slipped to just about half) there, so when the decision was made to drop it the German importer went ballistic. As it shook out, Laguna took it in the shorts in Germany, where it was expected to carry global volume for the color. When it flopped in Japan as well (it's worth noting that sales of the Miata in Japan were running at a rate which was only about ten percent below the US volume) and North American volume wasn't enough to keep it in the system, it was dropped.

Yellow was always expected to be a small volume color, but the pick-up rate on it was actually quite good. The problem was that to get the yellow we wanted, the paint the Japanese supplier provided meeting Mazda's fade resistance requirements had lousy coverage properties. As a result, all Sunburst Yellow NAs (NA = original body style) had to be painted twice. At the end of a shift, a batch of body shells were run through the booth, given a white exterior coat then taken off the line and put back at the start of the booth. They were run through at the start of the next shift, getting no prime coat but having the yellow final coat applied. This disrupted production too much to be done on an ongoing basis and is why yellow stuck around for a short time, not because of demand issues.

Colors for the M-editions were basically piggybacked with what the Japanese market was going to do for local production models or the V-Limiteds, although the US pushed to get Merlot in the system. It didn't do as well in Japan as expected and was sold alongside an Elegant Green Mica V-Limited with black leather which shot out of dealers in Japan while the Merlot V Limited was glued to the showroom floor.

Japan had a second go at Sunburst Yellow with a J-Limited (as the Sunburst cars were called) run of 1.8s which can be easily spotted as the only Miatas done with the windscreen header painted satin black at the factory

instead of body color.

There was an R-Limited in 1995 which had a Satellite Blue Mica exterior with a bright red interior (an acquired taste) and the final 'sayonara' model, the SR-Limited, painted a Mazda Demio/121 color, Sparkle Green Metallic. A pretty sad way to say 'goodbye'.

The British importer was an out-of-control outfit (unrelated to Mazda other than as an independent business which imported Mazdas - it was not a wholly-owned subsidiary of Mazda as the US, German and Australian importer/distributors were) which did all sorts of weird specials often not relating to what was being done elsewhere. They had a run of Sunburst Yellow 1999 NBs (NB = 99+ body style) which never showed up anywhere else and even took the sad Sparkle Green car and sold it as a 'Berkley' edition. With apologies to Busby or the caravan maker, one hopes.

The last color program I was involved with was for a major shift of the entire color and trim palette to take place with the 1993 model year. As originally proposed, the standard cloth interior would be beige, with the dash and door trim vinyl parts coming from the previous leather-upholstered cars. The leather package was going to move to black, using the vinyl interior and gas parts from the regular Miata. The color palette was going to change as well, although the core palette was still going to be red, white, blue and silver.

The red was going to shift to a darker red, not dissimilar to the color Jaguar used for XK-120s. White would be very much warmer, not an Ivory but like the Old English White MG and Jaguar used. Mariner Blue was to be replaced by a dark shade of Navy blue and the silver was going to darken to charcoal grey.

If anybody's still awake after that, maybe now's a good time to take a breather. I've got to have lunch.

Bob Hall, is considered the "Father of the Miata" and hangs around the forum area of Miata.net. Someone posed the question about Miata colors and "bwob" (as he's know on the net) responded with this article. We contacted bwob and asked permission to run his response in the Open Road. His response?

Sure, no problem. Say 'hi' to all the people smart enough to drive a Miata in Indiana for me, okeh?
No problem, bwob, and thanks again!