

Two Miatas – One for the Highway, One for the City

by Sara J McBride

As you know, I really love my Miata, especially after the extensive modifications I made to it last year. The performance of my car on the road, track and county fair exhibitions makes it an absolute dream car. After a year of driving it, though, I realized that it wasn't the ideal car for cruising around town. City driving just never gave me the opportunity to use the full potential of its awesome performance. I spent most of last Fall researching what makes the ideal in-town car and made a list of what I wanted my "city" Miata to be able to do.

After I had a list of my performance requirements, I spent a lot of time at the Skunk Works at AIM Tuning brainstorming what we would have to do to realize my dreams of the perfect city car. As usual, Shane and the crew were very helpful during this phase and after many hours of planning and preparation, we decided that the best course of action was to try and find a 92 or 94 Miata and modify it to meet my needs. The curtains went up again around the Secret AIM Research Center (SARC) and we all started to work.

The first thing we realized was that although the car needed to handle properly, it wouldn't need to be quite as nimble as a road or track car. With this in mind, we decided on the Bridgesteel 7650/6200/36 UC tires. This tire offered the extra tread width that I needed for good city driving in all types of weather, as well as the toughness that the potholes, cracks and SUV's that city streets can throw at you without warning.

To go along with the extra-tough Bridgesteels, we decided on the USS XtraStiff suspension components. In case you aren't familiar with these beauties, they really glue to car to the road under all conditions, even when you hit the unexpected urban obstacle (like a building, for example). Although the ride leaves a little to be desired, the toughness more than makes up for it in the long run. I'm still

getting used to the in-cabin suspension adjustments, but they seem to open up a whole new world of suspension tuning.

Since our cars are pretty short, city driving puts vision at an absolute premium. On the highway, our low vantage point isn't that big of a deal, but, in the city, you really need a higher vantage point to help protect yourself. With this in mind, the people at AIM made a very small adjustment to the ride height and the seat height to provide maximum visibility in close quarters. This also necessitated a slight adjustment in the height of the steering wheel. What a difference just an inch or two makes! It's nice to be able to see something in front of me besides the back of a minivan or giant SUV.

Finally, we decided to enhance the output of the backup lights. Even in the best of circumstances, a Miata backup light is dim. Not any more! The new ones allow me to see down an entire city block! What an improvement over the OEM lights. We also added a rear-facing video camera for an even better view.

Of course, it's still a convertible, but a final modification will include a roll bar for those "just in case" situations.

Now that the car is finished, I want to thank the people at the Secret AIM Research Center for another outstanding job on an extensive modification. I'll post updates as I get more used to the car.

