

Making Sure Your Car Is As Good As Mazda Designed It

Basic Maintenance Tips For Your Miata

by Chuck Wills

Most any Miata owner, sooner or later, will start to think about how to make their car better. Like Harleys and Jeeps, the Miata has a fanatical following along with the ability to be personalized with an array of aftermarket parts, ranging from interior and exterior bits to serious performance enhancements. When you attend a Miata gathering of any size, you are apt to see sharks teeth, carbon fiber or wood interior kits, chrome, wings and spoilers, wide tires, stripes and maybe even turbos as big as your head. The down side is, how do you choose? What's the right upgrade to make? In this series of articles, I hope to give you a little information to help you navigate the sea of advertisements and possibilities.

First things first. Your roadster, as delivered from the factory, was a very good little car. It spent over half of a decade on Car and Driver's 10 Best list, and that was on stock tires, stock shocks, stock everything! Your car also dominated the SCCA Showroom Stock racing series for 10 years with no upgrades beyond tires and a roll cage. Let's face it, though; many of us are driving around with cars that haven't had the proper maintenance since it left the factory. Coolant and brake fluid that were good in 1992 are now well past their "born on" date. Take a slow walk around your roadster and think about what needs to be done before buying a carbon fiber dash kit or a Racing Beat exhaust.

Brake fluid needs to be flushed every few years for several reasons – it absorbs water, which lowers its boiling point, causing spongy and fading brakes as well as corrosion of the brake components. If your fluid hasn't been changed in the past 3 years, consider new fluid before spring time. Any DOT 3 rated brake fluid is better than old waterlogged fluid.

Coolant wears out too. It will lose its ability to withstand sub zero temperatures, as well as lose its corrosion protection. The engine block is made of iron and the head is aluminum, and these two metals don't like each other much. In fact, when placed near each other with fluid running between them, they will corrode. One of the main jobs of antifreeze is to stop that corrosive action, but it does this sacrificially by wearing itself out. If your coolant is more than two years old, it's time for a flush and refill.

We're going to talk a lot more about **tires** later on, but I will say that they are an extremely important safety item and need to be inspected. Chances are good that the tire pressure sticker inside the door jamb on your car says 26psi. I consider that a bare minimum and feel that 28 to 30psi is very reasonable for normal street driving, with 26psi being reserved for those that demand the cushiest ride possible. After checking the pressure, inspect the sidewalls. Since many of our cars don't see year-round duty or high mileage, the tires may crack and dry-rot before the tread wears out. If your tires have significant cracks or the tread is thin, it is time for replacements. This is also the perfect time to inflate your spare to 60psi.

Does your car track straight down the road? Does it go straight under hard braking, or does it pull to one side? If the latter is happening, it may be time for an **alignment**. We could talk for hours on the details of Miata alignment specifications, but if your car won't go in a straight line, get yourself to a good shop and have it straightened out to factory specifications.

Everyone changes their oil **filter** with their 3000~5000 mile oil change, right? Good! Now what about your air filter and fuel filter? The air filter should be inspected at every oil change and replaced when it looks dirty. Fuel filters

should be replaced at 30k mile intervals. Differential and transmission fluids should be changed every 30k miles too. Switching to synthetic fluids is not necessary, but will offer smoother shifting and lower operating temperatures of those components. This will keep your roadster happily purring for many miles.

The last few items are related to **body maintenance**. I don't care what kind of wax you use, just keep it waxed! The interior and rubber trim also needs to be treated occasionally with Lexol or trim protectant from Mothers or Meguiar's. The only product I don't like is ArmorAll – I feel that it is bad stuff for your car. It is also good practice to hose out the wheel wells and underside of the car to removed dirt and debris, along with making sure that the door and top drains are open and free of debris. Clogged drains are the Number 1 cause of rust in the rear rocker panels. The drains empty out from the bottom of the rocker panel near the jack point. You can also find them **INSIDE** the car – they are about a 1/2" diameter, located behind the seat belt tower. Team Miata has a handy tool to help clean these drains out: <http://www.teammiata.com/TM400.htm>.

With good maintenance, your roadster should last for a long, long time. In most Miatas, 120K miles is just getting broken in territory! In coming months, we'll cover topics such as suspension, brakes and power (stopping and going!), so until then, keep the shiny side up and the top down!



Proper maintenance can prevent engine removal!