

# Plant Fire Fuels '05-'06 MX-5 Rumors

A fire halted production at two of Mazda Motor Corp.'s four Japanese plants on December 15, 2004. The fire broke out near a painting line at the company's Ujina No. 1 plant in western Japan. Television footage showed flames leaping high into the night sky above the Ujina No. 1 plant in Hiroshima, where the auto maker is headquartered. The fire department dispatched 21 trucks and two ambulances to the scene. The fire burned for about seven hours before being extinguished the following morning around 6:00am local time.

Mazda models made at Ujina No. 1 plant include the MPV family van, the RX-8, the Roadster (Miata MX-5) sports car, the Demio, and the Verisa hatchback. The daily output at this plant was about 1,000 vehicles, which accounted for more than one-third of Mazda's total production volume in Japan.

Mazda resumed production operations of the Demio at the plant starting on January 6, 2005 by utilizing the Ujina No. 2 plant Paint Shop and is restarting operations sequentially for other models such as Verisa and MPV. In addition, Mazda will secure its total production volume through increasing the production speed at Ujina No. 2 plant and Hofu plants.

There was a rumor that Mazda announced that there would be no more Miata production for the 2005 model year, as the production line was going to be retooled for the 2006 model. However, on January 27, Mazda issued a press statement that production of the MX-5, RX-8, MPV, Demio, and Verisa would resume in mid-February at Ujina No. 1 by utilizing the paint shop of the Ujina No. 2 Plant and at other company's facilities for integrated production. Manufacture of the Demio and Verisa has already begun and MPV production is scheduled to begin at the end of January.

"Production restoration of the Demio was easier than other models as the Demio has been manufactured at both the No. 1 and No. 2 plants, which was not the case for other models," a Mazda spokesman said.

Mazda also revised their vehicle production loss from 70,000 to approximately 30,000 production units due to the fire's interruption.

Mazda has been doing the clean-up and overhaul activities of the soot filled building and equipment. The restoration of the Ujina No. 1 Paint Shop began on December 25, with the dismantling of the damaged equipment using large-scale cranes.

If a silver lining exists, it's that Mazda must now replace the aging paint shop at Ujina No. 1 and will do so with state-of-the-art, three-layer coating equipment that will not only cut costs and but also boost quality. This system dispenses with the high-temperature "bake" normally necessary between the primer and the topcoat and shortens the painting process. It also features a control system that reduces the number of robots, resulting in a truncated installation time on the Ujina No. 1 line. The paint robot foundations are to be installed prior to the production facility being refurbished. The Three Layer Wet Paint system has already been implemented at Mazda's other plants in Japan.

Additionally, the Ujina No. 1 restoration project is requiring less time than forecast due to the use of a 'module system' that consists of prefabricated steel frame units that can be erected sequentially at the site. These measures drastically shorten the restoration time required, allowing Mazda to target resumption of production in April.

The total amount of the damage is estimated to be about 2.7 billion yen (approx. \$2,635,174 USD). This figure includes direct losses from the fire in buildings, equipment, and semi-finished products but excludes the cost of dismantlement and restoration of the plant.

The shutdown was the latest setback for Japan's car industry.



Smoke rises from the Ujina factory.

Nissan Motor Co., Japan's second-biggest auto maker, and Suzuki Motor Corp., the country's top mini vehicle maker, have cut back production because of a steel shortage.

Toyota Motor Corp., Japan's biggest car maker, plans to buy more steel from China and South Korea in the expectation that steel supplies in Japan will remain tight for a long time.

Suzuki has said it would cut domestic output in the second half to about 500,000 units from the previously expected 530,000 due to the shortage.

## Thinking About A Road Trip?

When the snow is on the ground and the roadster is under wraps, some of us are crazy enough to grab an atlas and start thinking about top down trips to scenic places. For those who might be inclined, here's a short list of events that you might want to investigate. One can dream, can't they?

**More Miatas in Moab**-May 13/15. Explore this scenic area with the Utah Miata club. Website is <http://teamzoom.net/miatasinmoab/index.htm>.

**Miatas at Deal's Gap**-July 30/31. The "unofficial" Miata event every year. It's organized by no one, attended by many. Info can be found here: <http://miatasatthegap.com>.

**Flyin Miata's Open House**-weekend of August 20th. Held in conjunction with Grand Junctions' Peach Festival. Look for info at their website: <http://www.flyinmiata.com/>

**Midwest Miata Gathering** -Sept. 9/11. The Greater Cincinnati Miata Club hosts this event and it draws folks from all over the midwest, east and south. <http://www.miatagathering.com/>

**Ozark Miata Playtime** - Sept. 9/11. A loosely organized event near Branson, MO. Look for more information at <http://forum.miata.net> in the Events Calendar in the Regional section .