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e-mail: shift.dailystar@gmail.com

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ROTOR MANIA

2003 Mazda RX8 Type S

Owner: Fahim

Mazda is undoubtedly one of the most misunderstood Japanese car-makers, as far as Bangalis are concerned (closely beaten by Subaru, in a solid first place since forever). Despite making some great cars infused with a zippy, happy go lucky nature (Zoom Zoom, as Mazda took to calling it), Bangladesh wholeheartedly rejected the brand when it came to conventional, run of the mill cars.

The Mazda presence in Dhaka is instead of a much more exciting nature. SA22C (first generation) RX7s are often found at random spots in the city, rusting away into oblivion. A few of the newer RX7 FC and FD's can be seen around too. However, the steady appearances of the Mazda RX8 in every nook and cranny in Dhaka has cemented its position as Dhaka's favourite rotary marvel.



Fahim is of an older generation of Bangladeshi gearheads. Being a part of the older crowd means he's seen the car scene grow, and his fascination for cars spans a whole decade. His V30 Toyota Camry was the first 3SGTE converted car in Dhaka, and as a daily driver, he uses a JZX91 Chaser. When it came to a weekend driver, he was looking for something that gave the maximum bang for buck, looked great and was a rarity on the streets by relative comparison.

What he found was a yellow Mazda RX8 Type S in immaculate condition, going for an amount that fit his budget perfectly. Even though the Mazda's relatively expensive maintenance cost was one of the foremost concerns for him, he took the leap of faith and took it.

When we ask him if it has given him trouble so far, he replies that the RX8 is easy to live with if the owner takes the regular maintenance routines seriously. Maintain well, and the RX8 makes for a brilliant second car, he says.

The Mazdaspeed bodykit has the high quality fit and finish you'd expect from a factory made bodykit. Low, wide and imposing, not to mention a distinct shade of yellow (try the minions from Despicable Me), the RX8 is a visual thrill for everyone on the road, everyone from rickshawallas to little kids craning their necks to get a second look at the yellow rocket as it goes past. The Autoeex exhaust sounds muted at low speeds, but when the throttle is floored on an empty stretch of road, the RX8's nose visibly lifts up into the air and the noise from the exhaust reaches an ear-deafening

crescendo.

It. Is. Fast. The six speed manual shifts into gears with a solid thunk at the expert hands of Fahim, the yellow blur moving to higher velocities effortlessly with just a momentary delay between shifts. Looking at the tachometer and the digital speedometer can be extremely deceiving, as it simply doesn't feel as fast as its actually moving (according to the speedo). I chuckle and say that this feels more timid and planted than a certain 4AGE swapped Ceres at similar speeds, even though the RX8 has a lot more power and professional engineering behind it to make it go fast. Its obvious that Mazda left as little room for improvement as possible when engineering this car, and it was developed to be a proper sports car in every way. Fahim says he would love to keep the RX8 forever if possible, because it's a great car and it is immensely fun to drive as a weekend car, despite the fuel bills and the possibility of a rotor seal being broken sometime in the future.

There's a certain crowd amongst automobile enthusiasts (worldwide, not just in Bangladesh) which thinks that cars like the Mazda RX8 and the Toyota Celica are girly. Truth be told, I personally think the last gen Celica is quite possibly the girliest sports car Toyota has made (maybe on par with the Toyota MRS), and I never really kept the RX8 in high regard because compared to the RX7, the RX8 always felt like a step down as Mazda's flagship sports car. After listening to Fahim, his experience of owning one, and getting a taste of what a mildly tuned RX8 at the hands of an expert driver can do, I have to admit, the RX8 is a pretty damn good car. I stand corrected.

WORDS: SHAER REAZ
PHOTO: EHSANUR RAZA RONNY

SURVIVAL TIPS

Brake oil dies Change it.

Some say the most important part of a car is that black metallic paint because men, women and children like it. We'll take a risk and say it's the braking system. You could have a fast car, a big one or even a piece of junk, but they are all the same death traps if your braking system is faulty.

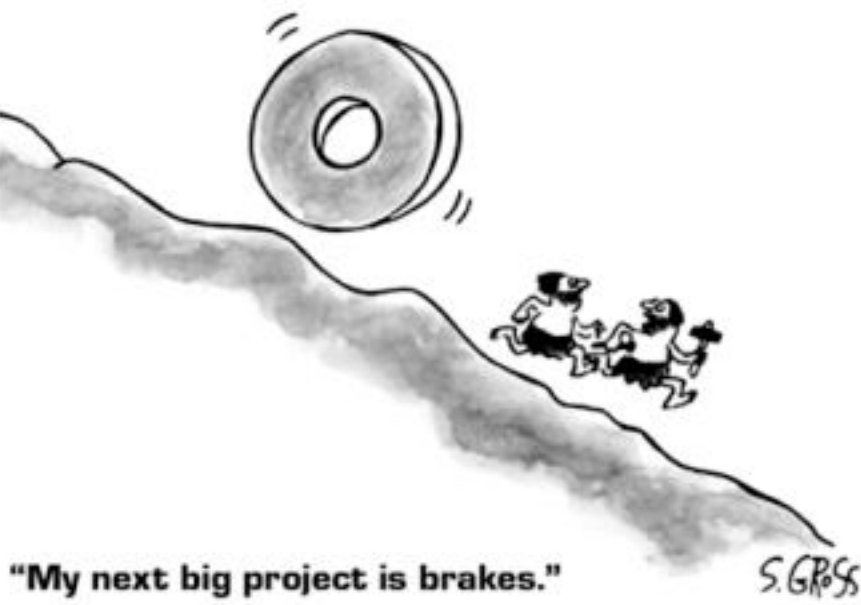
The main reason brakes go bad is because we ignore them. When brakes work we forget about them, like the toilet flush. When things go a little haywire, all hell breaks loose. Proverbial crap hits the fan.

Here's some fundamental things people generally ignore. The brake fluid needs to be changed because it can go bad. It's not holy water. It is a hygroscopic oil meaning it can attract moisture and hold it. Over time your brake fluid will get saturated with water vapor. This will rust internal parts and the water under heavy braking will boil. Water contains oxygen molecules so your brake lines will now have air. In terms we can all understand, your brakes will feel like you are stepping on a rotten tomato at a Bangladeshi Boys concert.

Also, rubber bits from the inside of brake lines and the internal washers gradually break off. This makes your brake oil become like sludge. Change it once a year if you can. Let's put matters into context. Bangladesh is unbearably humid and dusty. Also, people act like dumb animals by walking/driving blindly onto the street, meaning everybody has to brake to avoid death and mayhem. Regular stop-go braking, humidity and dust mean your brake oil will degrade quickly.

How do you know if it's ready for a change? One way is by visual inspection. Brake oil needs to be clean. It should look clear or blue or whatever color it came as. It shouldn't look muddy like the contents of Dhanmondi lake. The other way is determining how long it has been in the car. Couple of years? Change it. It's worth it. It's something we generally overlook but it can be a life threatening oversight. While you're at it, check that the brake hoses connecting to each wheel are solid and rubbery. Have someone pump the brakes hard. There should be no bubble/blister forming on the surface of the hoses. There should be no crack either.

There's more about brakes and how they can go bad but this is the most basic maintenance check that you can do, instantly.



EHSANUR RAZA RONNY

NEW RELEASES Koreans on the rise KIAs everywhere

Korean rising star KIA has launched brand new models to take on the world, and they look pretty good on paper.

The Cadenza is aimed at the sport luxury market and is equipped with the most powerful V6 engine in KIA's production history, a 3.3 litre putting out almost 295 hp. Designed for Europe and the US, the sportiest, fastest KIA sedan yet might not make it to our shores in the Premium trim, but a downgraded version might come by, although chances of that happening are little.

On the SUV front, the brand new KIA Sorento is an alternative to the Hyundai Santa Fe. The Sportage is a big hit in Dhaka mainly because it's a well-equipped but cheap entry level SUV. Will its bigger brother fare better when the brand new Sorento reaches Bangladesh? We'll have to wait and see.



MYTH OR WHAT? Engine Ionizer

The Electronic Engine Ionizer is just of a couple of pieces of wire molded to rubber blocks, or "capacitor blocks", as the manufacturer claims.

There aren't any capacitors in them, however. The rubber blocks clip onto the spark plug wires near the plugs, and supposedly carry the "corona charge" from one cylinder's plug wire to the electrodes of the other plugs. This charge is supposed to "cause a partial breakdown in the larger hydrocarbon molecules in all the non-firing cylinders, resulting in increased combustion efficiency". Yeah. Normally, engineers would work to prevent cross-coupling between spark plug wires to prevent cross firing between cylinders. The Engine Ionizer seems engineered to promote crossfire.



Verdict: In a test where the magazine Popular Mechanics did to test whether it actually works or not, their test truck showed a 15 horsepower loss. On top of that, the Ionizer melted and dripped onto the exhaust manifold, which then resulted in 2-foot tall flames. They had nothing to say about it's fuel saving properties, naturally.

So you want to own an RX8

You can get a decent one for 12-15 lakhs. Some are available for much, much less with Toyota engines. Although the engine should be a more reliable option, it's way less powerful. Steer clear unless you like projects. Look for the 5 speed manual that has a lower powered 190bhp engine. It's the most user friendly. The Type S has a lot more juice about 250bhp. We suggest you get a compression test done to find out if your dream car has a solid engine. A compression test will cost you 2-3k.

Low torque at low revs, so a little annoying to drive regularly around the traffic filled city. Drop a gear, keep calm and press on. Yes, you will smile if you shift right. If it's a manual, you need to work the 6 speed (or 5 speed) to stay in the rev ranges. Translation: Open or winding roads and this car will be glorious. Suggestion: Sylhet, Khulna and Chittagong-Coxs Bazaar highways.

It's a four-door car. Yes, average sized people can easily jump in and out. And occasionally fall face first. So you can theoretically fit in your family. But... you need to open the front door first.

Huge trunk, tiny opening. Your groceries will fit just fine but don't expect couple of large suitcases on a trip to Coxs Bazaar. Also, poor rear visibility.



Watch the oil. This is not a regular piston engine. In Wankel engines, fuel and oil go into the same place. The fuel pushes the car, the oil lubricates the Apex seals. What this means is the oil will burn continuously. So you need to watch the oil level religiously on this 9000rpm engine. Don't rely on the oil gauge, which is the main crappy thing device on this car. It's more like an on/off switch, you've either got full pressure or almost nothing at all. Pull out the dipstick every couple of weeks or couple every 1500-2000km, check the oil level. Top up and don't use synthetic. This way, your car should last a long, long time.

Pros: Looks amazing even after so many years, comfortable interior, good power, low tax bracket for Bangladesh because it is equivalent to a 1300cc car. Tons of power (either side of 200bhp).

Cons: Thirsty around town. Needs regular oil top-up. Sounds like an electric motor at idle.

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