

WHEN putting Mazda's 190kW MPS-badged 3 into context, there's a couple of numbers you first need to get your head around. Like the 3.5 seconds it takes to accelerate from 80-120km/h in third gear. That's barely one-tenth adrift of Audi's bulk-performance, \$120,000-dearer RS4. To perform the same discipline, the MPS's fastest genuine rival, the Renaultsport

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Megane 225, needs 4.0 seconds, while Volkswagen's benchmark Golf GTI takes 4.4, and Ford's impressive Focus XR5 Turbo an even tardier 4.5.

Indeed, the number of big-name scalps the Mazda 3 MPS can claim once it's on the move is staggering. From 80-120km/h in third, it can sprint faster than a Porsche 911 Carrera (3.6sec), an HSV GTO (3.8sec), Aston Martin V8 Vantage (4.0sec), Falcon XR6 Turbo (4.0sec), and an Impreza WRX (4.2sec). Thing is, though, the 3 MPS only needs 4.1 seconds to perform

the same feat in *fourth* ... and that's 0.1sec less time than required by a seven-speed BMW M5 in the same gear!

As Mazda's first real hot-hatch since 1989's 100kW/184Nm 323 SS Turbo, the 3 MPS needed to make a grand entrance into its hectic market segment, and startling performance alone will ensure it does. The 3 MPS is currently the fastest front-driver in the country, with only HSV's forthcoming Astra VXR (0-100 in 6.4, 244km/h flat-out) looming as a challenger for the title.

Mazda claims the MPS will see 250km/h and hit 100km/h in 6.1sec - a number we failed to match (see panel, page 85), though a low six, and a lowish 14 for the standing 400m, are certainly achievable. However, it's the accessibility of the MPS's performance that hints at potential 'legend' status.

The MPS 3's direct-injection, turbocharged and intercooled 2261cc four is identical to that used in the all-wheel-drive 6 MPS sedan, producing a class-leading 190kW at 5500rpm and a hefty 380Nm at 3000rpm. But it displays a little more polish in the

