

**W**HEN 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

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.

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

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

