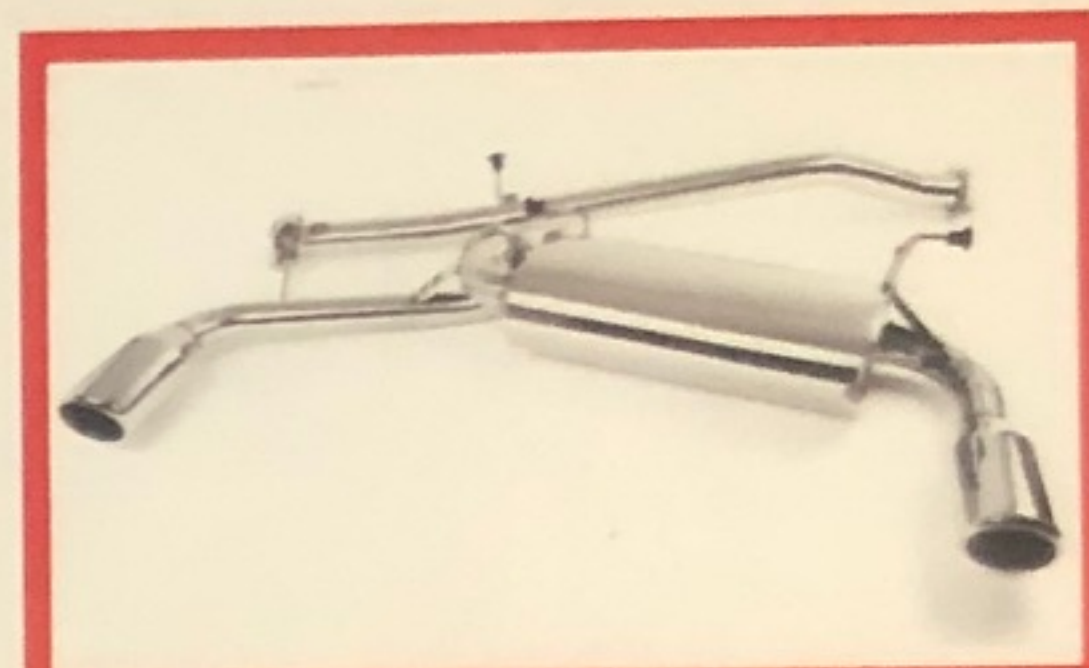


MX-5, MIATA, EUNOS – THREE NAMES, ONE BRILLIANT CAR

TOTAL MX-5



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Holiday heaven

The visual, architectural and culinary delights of central Italy, experienced from the driver's seat of cars from an epic MX-5 collection – welcome to the wonders of Miataland

Photographs: **Daniela Loof**

Crazy about your MX-5? Of course you are. We all are. But some folk are a little crazier than others. Andrea Mancini would happily confess to being a stalwart of that latter camp. The Jaguar Land Rover Italy Financial Services, Sales and Marketing Manager currently owns 39 MX-5s, including some very rare models. By any measure that demonstrates a level of enthusiasm for the Mazda roadster that the rest of us can only marvel at. But Andrea has taken his passion for the MX-5 a stage further; he's opened a resort dedicated to his dream car, and he's called it Miataland. And you can stay there and drive some of Andrea's extraordinary collection.

What MX-5 enthusiast wouldn't want to visit Miataland? Simply getting there can be an adventure in itself, even if you opt to fly into Italy and rent a car at the airport. Andrea's resort nestles in the Umbrian hills, near to the small town of Collazzone, a place as authentically rural Italian as you could wish for. It's south of Florence and northeast of Rome: Perugia is only 25km away. The landscape here – and you can see great swathes of it from Miataland's lofty position above the valley – is magnificent and the roads are



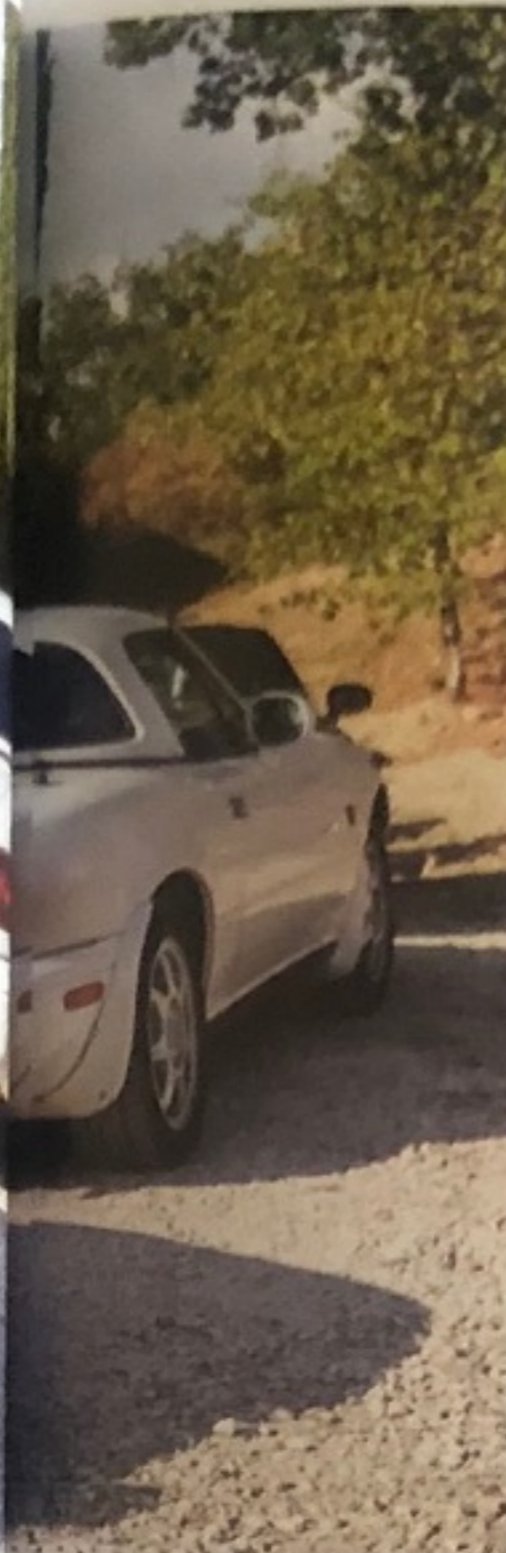
wonderful, as Andrea will explain as he sends you forth in one of his MX-5s to explore the region. You could have a fantastic time here even without an MX-5 to convey you around the countryside, but with one, roof down and a warm Italian breeze tousling your hair, the experience is magical.

Andrea's fascination with the MX-5 stretches back to the car's 1989 launch – from the moment he first saw one as a teenager visiting the 1990 Rome motor show he became a little bit obsessed, and used to stop off almost daily at his local Mazda dealer as he walked home from university. Not that he could afford one as his first car... 'I shared an Autobianchi A112 Abarth with my mother initially,' recalls Andrea, 'but my real first car was a stunning VW Golf GTI mk2, a three-door in grey with a sunroof. I still have a fondness for some of the hot hatches from the 1990s, but the MX-5, the Miata, is my real passion.'

'I didn't buy my first one until 1998. It was a used mk1, a grey import from Germany, and it was black with a tan roof and the 90bhp 1.6-litre engine. It was nothing special, really, but to me it was absolutely beautiful. I remember my first ever drive in it, top down, from my workplace in Rome out west to the coast, and that wonderful feeling of the wind and the sun... And your hand on the steering wheel is like having your hand on the front tyres!'

His burning enthusiasm for the roadster thus ignited, Andrea was inspired to set about building a collection of MX-5s, with a focus on the limited edition models, although he has plenty of standard cars, too, in both left- and right-hand drive. Decidedly non-standard, though, are the Ferrari 250 GTO 'replica' mk1, and the 5.0-litre 400bhp supercharged V8-engined mk1 Mega Monster imported from the US. The latter is available to be driven by guests at Miataland, as are a pair of super-rare factory hand-built lightweight M2 Eunos Roadster mk1s, but only by those Andrea knows particularly well. Yet even if you're not on that list, there are others models – a turbocharged Mazdaspeed mk2 – that will broaden your perceptions of what an MX-5 is capable of. Andrea reports that to date the most popularly requested cars are his regular mk1s, and the latest mk4s, both roadster and RF.

The idea for Miataland grew out of a day when Andrea invited a gang of his car enthusiast friends to drive some of his collection. To several of them the dynamics of the little Mazda were a revelation, a lesson in why driving



Left: cars ready for guests to take out on a little tour of the Umbrian region.

Below: lest you forget where you've woken up today... We don't think there's much chance of that, however.

plenty to see and do.'

As for the estate he discovered in Collazone, it couldn't have been better for Andrea. 'There are two main parts. The 200-year-old villa in which I live, and another, newer building for guests, renovation of which started about 40 years ago and is now finished! What sealed the deal, though, was the barn. While in more recent times it had been used for stabling, it had originally been constructed about 30 years ago to house a car collection... A story straight from



the Land Of Meant To Be.

Buying the property was one thing; transforming it into Miataland has been a two and a half year journey that reached its completion this April. 'We have six rooms, four suites and two double rooms,' details Andrea.

'And their décor is inspired by Miata colours: M2 Blue, Soul Red, Mariner Blue, British Racing Green, Sunburst Yellow, and Chaste White.'

'All of the rooms have some very special details, including luxury showers, handmade beds, top-class stereo systems, and mood lighting controls. We're very proud of the materials we've used, too – oak flooring, for instance, marble and handmade tiles in the bathrooms, satin sheets. In the communal lounge there's an impressive library stocked with Miata, Mazda and other automotive books, and guests can relax at our infinity pool with glorious views over the surrounding countryside.'

For the moment Miataland operates as a bed and breakfast, although Andrea says that for large groups dinner can be arranged. But there are several excellent restaurants nearby and your passionate host will encourage you to explore the local traditional Umbrian cuisine: he's

pleasure is born out of so much more than ferocious straight line performance and colossal horsepower figures. Having seen the fun they'd had, Andrea decided that sharing his cars with others wasn't just the 'right' thing to do, but also represented a business opportunity.

'Of course, there are other motoring resorts and museums with car collections at their core,' explains Andrea, 'but the very special feature of Miataland is that you can drive the cars. My pleasure is to share my Miatas with real enthusiasts from around the world; it's incredible to listen to their feedback after they've been out in a mk1 Miata.'

But to achieve his vision – a five-star resort where you can immerse yourself in all things MX-5 – Andrea needed to hunt down a property with sufficient space to accommodate his collection, an attendant workshop, guest rooms and a separate house for himself. And it needed to be in a region with great roads, historic cities and towns, breathtaking landscapes, and terrific food. 'I discovered Umbria while I was searching for the perfect location for Miataland,' reveals Andrea. 'I think it's one of the most beautiful regions in Italy, perfectly in the middle between Rome and Florence. Not far from the sea, and with lots of touring opportunities and



Above: Miataland's infinity pool is a great place to chill and admire the surrounding countryside

Right: Andrea's collection makes for an awesome spectacle and we could spend days in his car house





Stunning roads, beautiful countryside, wonderful architecture, superb food: what are you waiting for?

almost as much an advocate for the region as he is for MX-5s.

But it is the cars you'll be coming to Miataland for, and to our minds it would be worth the journey to Italy even if you only got to walk around and admire Andrea's collection. Instead, a drive is included in the price of your room. Yet before jumping behind the wheel of any of the cars, there are few things you should know. Firstly, if there's something in particular that you fancy driving, you should let the Miataland staff know in advance: apart from anything else, the cars need to go through a session in the workshop before going out with guests.

Then there's the insurance issue – Andrea may be a sharing kinda guy, but he's nevertheless very protective of his cars. The insurance covers third party claims, but as for the cars you're in, you bend 'em you mend 'em. 'Damage to the cars is a guest's responsibility,' explains Andrea. 'I chose this option because it encourages a careful and respectful approach to driving my cars: for me, it's the best insurance for my collection.'

'Additionally, each car is fitted with a 'black box' that records relevant data such as speed and location. Up to now I've only had great experiences with real enthusiast drivers and guests – no one has tried to race the cars or drive them to the absolute limit, they've simply enjoyed driving them with the roof down, revelling in the beauty of the countryside.'

Another thing to bear in mind is that each car has a 60km (37-mile) range limit each day. 'Within this range,' smiles Andrea, 'you can visit Assisi, or Montefalco – very famous for the red

wine – or Todi and Monte Castello di Vibio, or Orvieto and Lake Corbara, or Perugia, Solomeo and Lake Trasimeno. Spend two or three days here at Miataland and you can have the full central Italy experience: some guests have done just that as part of a larger Italian tour. And the feedback we've had from international guests so far is that they've had a wonderful time.'

So, is it just MX-5 enthusiasts who visit Miataland? 'Well, by its very nature Miataland does tend to attract the MX-5 aficionado,' chuckles Andrea, 'but really this place is for everyone. At least, everyone who likes cars. And for sure, if you're not an MX-5 owner when you visit Miataland, chances are that you'll be thinking of buying one by the time you get home – this has already happened more than once. And I've helped several guests source interesting MX-5s from around the world.'

It's hardly an original question, but we can't help but ask Andrea what is his favourite MX-5 from his vast collection? His answer is straightforward and passionate: 'Honestly, I don't have a favourite car! All of them are so special to me, and I remember all the stories linked to each and every one.'

If you don't already have your holiday booked this year, might we humbly suggest that you take a long, hard look at Miataland's website. 📄

Miataland is open year-round, apart from a 15-day break in mid-February. You can check availability of rooms and make reservations directly by visiting either www.miataland.it or www.miataland.com.

THE COLLECTION

- 1989 mk1 Mariner Blue 1.6 (LHD)
- 1990 mk1 red 1.6 (LHD)
- 1991 mk1 BBR Turbo 1.6 (RHD)
- 1991 mk1 V Special 1.6 (RHD)
- 1991 mk1 red 1.6 turbocharged (LHD)
- 1991 mk1 M2 1001 1.6 (RHD)
- 1992 mk1 M2 1002 1.6 (RHD)
- 1992 mk1 Frog-eye 1.6 (RHD)
- 1992 mk1 M2 1002 1.6 (RHD)
- 1992 mk1 Eunos 1.6 Pit Crew Racing (RHD)
- 1993 mk1 B-Spec Supercharger 1.8 (RHD)
- 1993 mk1 S-Limited 1.6 (RHD)
- 1993 mk1 Mega Monster 5.0 V8 (LHD)
- 1993 mk1 FM2 turbo USA 1.8 (LHD)
- 1994 mk1 M2 1028 1.8 (RHD)
- 1994 mk1 Tokyo Limited 1.8 (RHD)
- 1994 mk1 S-special 1.8 (RHD)
- 1994 mk1 S-Special 1.8 (RHD)
- 1994 mk1 V-Spec II 1.8 (RHD)
- 1994 mk1 V-Spec II 1.8 (RHD)
- 1994 mk1 white 1.8 (LHD)
- 1995 mk1 yellow 1.6 (LHD)
- 1995 mk1 RS limited 1.8 (RHD)
- 1995 R Limited GTO tribute 1.8 (RHD)
- 1996 mk VR Limited 1.8 (RHD)
- 1996 mk1 VR Limited A 1.8 (RHD)
- 1996 mk1 G-Limited 1.8 auto (RHD)
- 1996 mk1 Montego Blue 1.6 (LHD)
- 1997 mk1 silver 1.6 (LHD)
- 1997 mk1 SR limited 1.8 (RHD)
- 1999 mk2 10th Anniversary 1.8 (LHD)
- 2000 mk2 Miracle 2000 1.8 (LHD)
- 2002 mk2 Phoenix 1.8 (RHD)
- 2004 mk2 Mazdaspeed Turbo 1.8 (LHD)
- 2005 mk3 grey 2.0 (LHD)
- 2009 mk3 Open Race 2.0 (LHD)
- 2016 mk4 Sport 2.0 (LHD)
- 2017 mk4 RF Miataland special edition 2.0 (LHD)
- 2018 Yamamoto Signature 01/04 special edition 1.5 (LHD)