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Long Road Racing offers what it calls the "Ultimate MX-5" -- a race-bred package for today's ND MX-5.



Long Road Racing uncovers the Mazda MX-5 Miata's ultimate potential

ONE WITH ANY CORNER

FEBRUARY 8, 2017

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For as long as [Mazda's million-selling MX-5 Miata](#) has existed, enthusiasts have wanted to extract more magic from the classic little front-engine, rear-drive roadster.

Shortly after the first-generation NA model's appearance in 1989, tuners popped up in Japan, England and America. Turbos were offered to boost horsepower. Thicker sway bars and revised damping promised better handling, and braking packages claimed to bring the lightweight convertible to a halt—now! Less than a decade passed before small-block missionaries preaching the gospel according to Shelby stuffed a V8 into the Miata.

The delightful madness continues today, and a new player has arrived, with a performance pedigree no existing tuners can claim. [Long Road Racing](#) offers what it calls the "Ultimate MX-5" -- a race-bred package for today's ND MX-5.

If LRR sounds familiar to you, there's a good reason why. The Statesville, North Carolina-based shop is the official builder of Mazda's Global [MX-5 Cup race car](#), the ND racer that launched along with the new Global MX-5 series in 2016. Led by ex-Freedom Autosport team manager Glenn Long, LRR developed the Global MX-5 Cup car with Mazda and has built 128 examples so far. Bottom line: No one knows how to make the ND platform perform to any individual's taste better than LRR.

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Or, as Long says, "We're not about just taking parts that fit and putting them onto the car. We focus on a thoroughly engineered solution both for the car and for you."

Hence the term "Ultimate MX-5," meaning LRR builds your idea of what an MX-5 can be, working with individual owners to fulfill their performance desires. Underpinning that idea: This is a car built for the street that also works on-track.

The concept derives from LRR's Global MX-5 Cup customers—many own both the race car and the latest MX-5 for the street. Long says they wanted a bit more performance from their cars.

"They love the race car. They love the street car, but it wasn't quite where they wanted it to be. They asked if we could incorporate some of what we engineered for Global MX-5 Cup cars into a street car."



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LRR does just that, applying its lessons to chassis tuning, suspension damping, engine breathing, engine/brake cooling and putting power to the ground. Much of what Long's team can do was integrated into the gray MX-5 Grand Touring model seen here. We drove it back to back with the "soul red" stock MX-5 Club that Mazda provided.

A half-mile and two corners from launch in the Ultimate MX-5 is all it takes to feel the improvements. The ND is already among the most nimble, responsive cars on the road. The Ultimate MX-5 deepens its capabilities and brings the communication to a new level. This thing is alive.

Many have noted the roll the stock roadster exhibits in corners, which makes some drivers uncomfortable. That roll is gone. In its place is confidence-inspiring tuning that lets the chassis dig in, becoming one with any corner.

Modifications start with a front strut tower brace for added front-end solidity, eliminating any cowl shake. Specially tuned springs and dampers with settings (dropping ride height 0.75 inch) tailored to each car's weight and customer mission are added, along with proprietary LRR sway bars front and rear. Turn-in is sharper but not troubling, thanks to retuning the MX-5's electronic power steering via the ECU. Carefully chosen rear suspension bushings sew up the back end while a customized Cusco limited-slip differential helps the car rotate better.



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The engine comes to life with a pleasing snort, the kind heard from small-displacement race cars, not tuner whips. A specially developed long-tube header/cat/resonator/muffler combo also improves breathing, adding approximately 10 hp at the wheels—not a huge gain, but noticeable.

Weight is unaffected, so the car's custom Wilwood front calipers, two-piece rotors and stainless-steel brake lines provide trackworthy, fade-free stops time after time. They ride inside the same lightweight Rays wheels the Global MX-5 Cup car uses on grippy tires from series sponsor BFGoodrich.

Exterior cues can be customized with graphics and treatments from the Mazdaspeed catalog.

The Ultimate MX-5 is a ball, an integrated package besting the stock version without penalizing everyday usability. The combination we tested costs approximately \$14,500 installed.

"It's a great car already," Long says. "We just offer a sharper version with the racing and engineering expertise to make it your Ultimate MX-5."

This article first appeared in the February 6 issue of Autoweek magazine. [Get your subscription here.](#)

By Jan Tegler

AS TESTED PRICE: \$44,565

DRIVETRAIN: 2.0-liter I4; RWD, six-speed manual

OUTPUT: 165 hp, 148 lb-ft

CURB WEIGHT: 2,332

FUEL ECONOMY: 27/36/30 mpg
(EPA City/Hwy/Combined)

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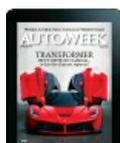
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