

# Road Test Yearbook

1992

The 100 newest cars on test



Readly

Retros

AD CAR



# Road Test Yearbook

..... 1992 .....

**The 100 newest cars on test**

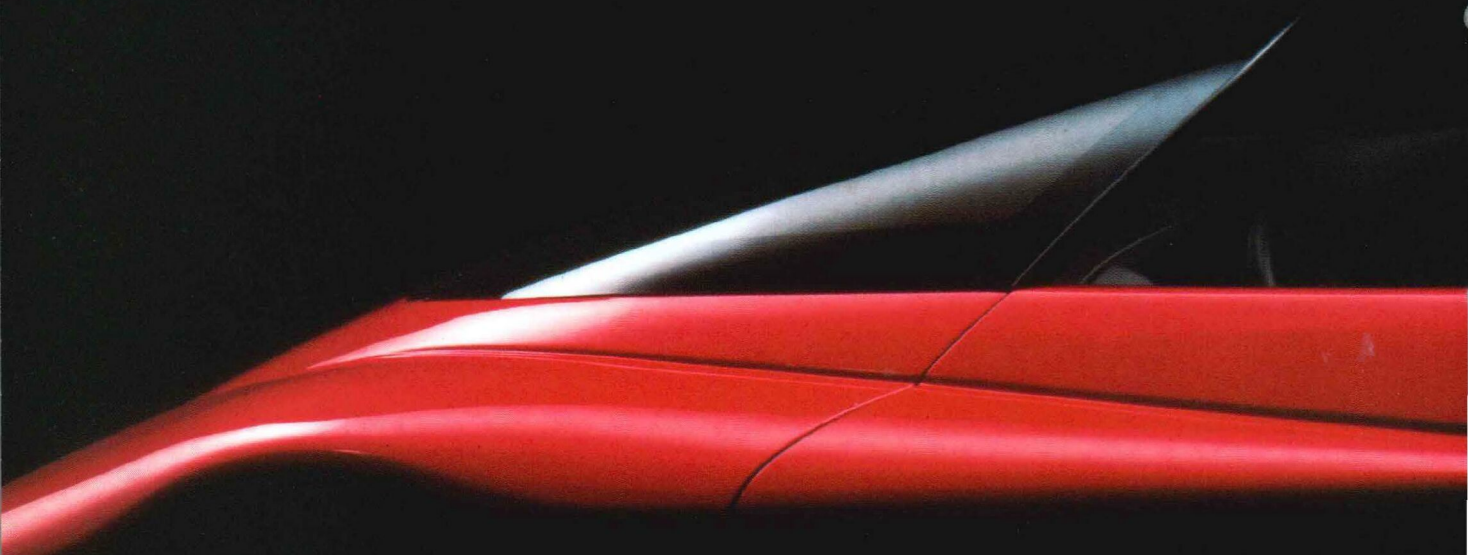


**AUTOCAR**  
..... & Motor .....



L I N E A P I N I N F A R I N A

foto G. Boffa  
O. K. M. A.



*pininfarina*

L A T R A D I Z I O N E D E L N U O V O



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*Autocar & Motor* sets the definitive standing for road tests — not surprising as we've been doing it longer than anyone else; since 1928. To make sure we stay ahead of the pack we've made further improvements and added more information. In



**The World's Best Road Test** on page 4 we take you through the new Road Test and spend a day in the life of a road tester.

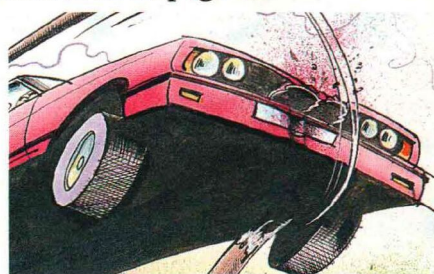
Over 100 new cars passed through our four road testers' hands in 1991. In **Opinion Poll** on page 8 they reveal their personal favourites and make a few confessions.



A group test contains all the essential ingredients of

catastrophe. Broken cars, failed brakes, poor navigation and irate PR chiefs all figure in what ought to be an enjoyable jaunt in the country but rarely works out that way. **Convoy Catastrophes** takes a look at some of the more disastrous on page 12.

With so many facts and figures on hand we're well placed to see how trends have changed over the last year. In **Trimming The Fat** on page 14 we reveal the changing priorities and identify 1991's average car.



### The Road Tests

Your essential guide to the 100 new cars of 1991 starts on page 17.



Invented by The Autocar in 1928, our Road Test has always been a world leader. Now it takes those standards even higher. Martin Vincent explains

# The world's best road test just got better

**A YEAR OF TESTING. A HUNDRED cars.** From the humble Fiat Panda Selecta to the mighty Porsche 911 Turbo, each has undergone the same test procedure carried out by *Autocar & Motor* road testers. Where a car has strengths, those strengths are highlighted; where it has weaknesses (and we've yet to find a car that has none), they are exposed.

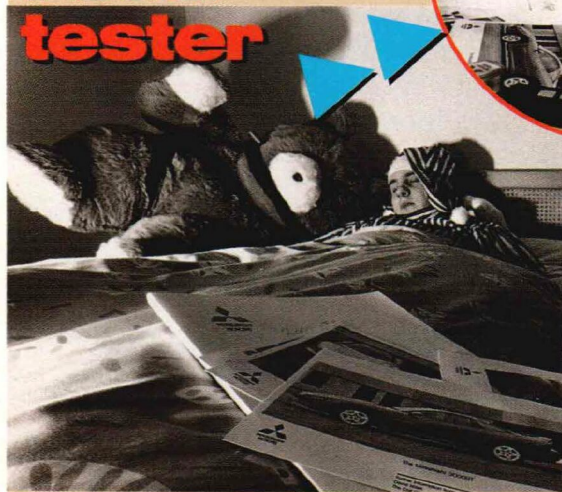
Measured values such as speed and

acceleration rub shoulders with more subjective seat-of-the-pants style assessments that can only be gained from experience in driving a wide range of cars. It's an assessment based on a consensus of opinion from the findings of a road test team with a combined professional testing experience spanning more than two decades. As for the measured data, all our figures are taken using test equipment more sophisticated

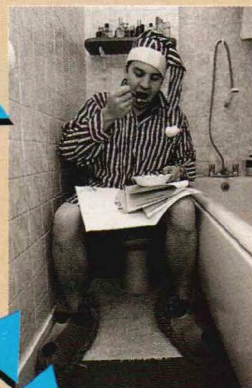
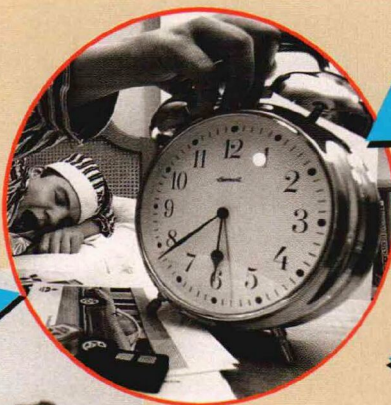
and more accurate than that of any other British quality motoring magazine.

But the process of improvement never stops. Regular readers will have noticed from this week's issue that parts of the Road Test have changed. The aim is to provide a more comprehensive data package and improve presentation to convey those facts better. In the text, sections have been added to cover safety, value, brakes

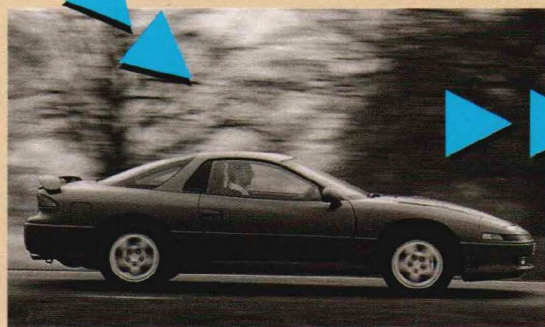
## A day in the life of a road tester



**My alarm goes off at 6.40. I turn it off and enjoy a last cuddle with my mischievous bear, Bumpa**



**I begin the day with a power breakfast. I eat on a slow in, fast out basis, just like my cornering technique**





and noise in greater detail, and all sections now have a quick-guide star-rating.

The specification page has been revised so that test information is more clearly illustrated and vital data easier to pick out. For the first time, a graph depicting engine revs in each gear against road speed is incorporated. One of the most significant changes is to our brake testing procedures. We've introduced new tests accurately to measure stopping distances at 30, 50, 70mph and also at the standing quarter-mile terminal speed. Also, we have moved to metric measurements for dimensions and weight, although clearly it would have been wrong to drop certain imperial standards — mph and mpg, for example.

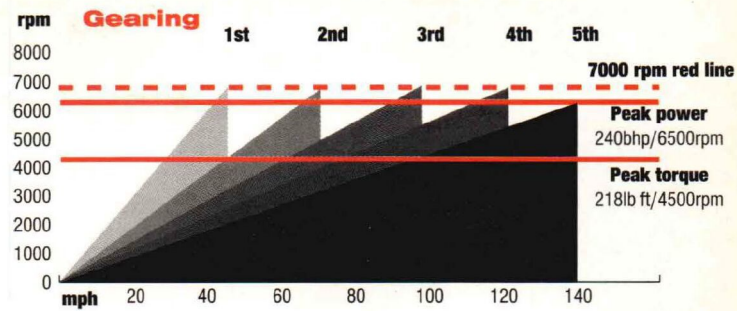
To test cars with consistency and safety requires not the right equipment, the right people, and the right testing facility. In England, the only place that meets our requirements is the Lotus Group Proving Ground at Millbrook in Bedfordshire. Here, cars can be tested on closed roads at speeds of up to around 170mph on a banked two-mile circuit. There's a mile-long stretch of level tarmac for two-way acceleration tests, a twisting circuit for handling assessment, and an more tortuous 'hill route' that provides further punishment in more undulating conditions.

Of course, all this is backed up by around 1000 road miles racked up in each test car: performance testing is only a small part of the story. In our road tests, we fill in all the gaps that the figures alone won't tell you. Anyone who judges a car's performance by the isolated measures of a 0-60mph time and top speed could well be misled. Vastly improved aerodynamics in recent years means that some cars of modest perfor-

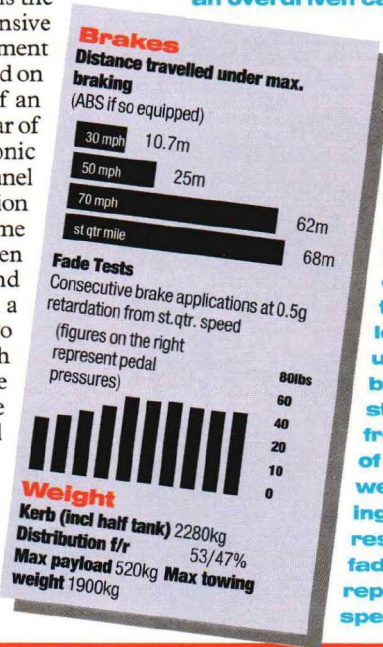
mance are able to reach respectable top speeds, and anyone who heeds only the 0-60mph dash without also checking the 30-70mph through the gears time could well end up disappointed.

Pay careful attention, then, to our figures: they are as accurate as it is possible to be. Of course, the track surface and weather can affect results, but the Datron Correvit test equipment we use is the most advanced available. Expensive and complex, this German equipment is capable of measuring road speed on almost any surface by means of an optical sensor mounted to the rear of the car together with an electronic processor and head-up display panel within the car. Once an acceleration run is completed, the measured time taken at 10mph increments is then printed on to metallised tape, and this result will be averaged with a run in the opposite direction to produce a mean figure for each increment. Standing quarter mile and standing kilometre times are also measured automatically, and the same equipment is used to measure stopping distances in the brake tests.

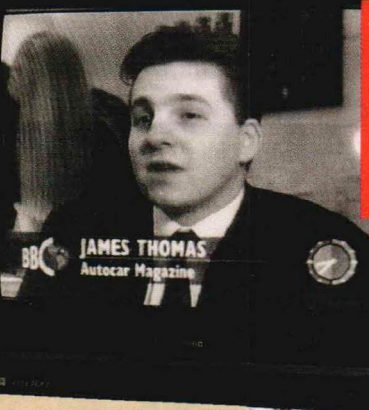
Despite all this technology, though, this year saw the Correvit equipment and road testers ingenuity stretched to ▶



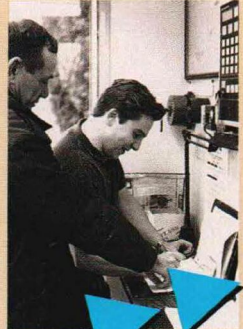
The gearing diagram (above) does more than indicate how fast a car will travel in each gear: you can tell an overdriven car from one with more sporting ratios and how close to the torque peak the revs fall with each change. The braking chart (left) tells you how long it takes under full braking to stop the car from a range of speeds as well as showing the brakes' resistance to fade during repeated high speed stops



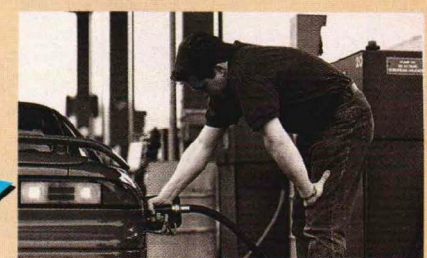
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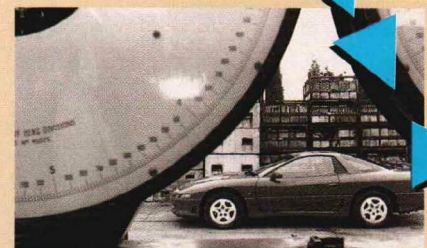
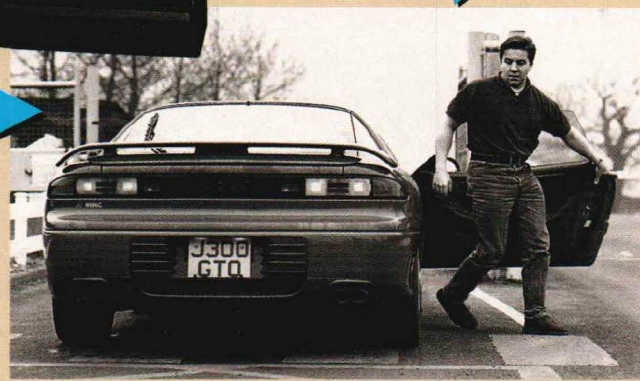
★ Appear on breakfast TV looking strangely smart and speaking in a voice not my own



Sign on with probation officer. Allowed to fill up car by myself

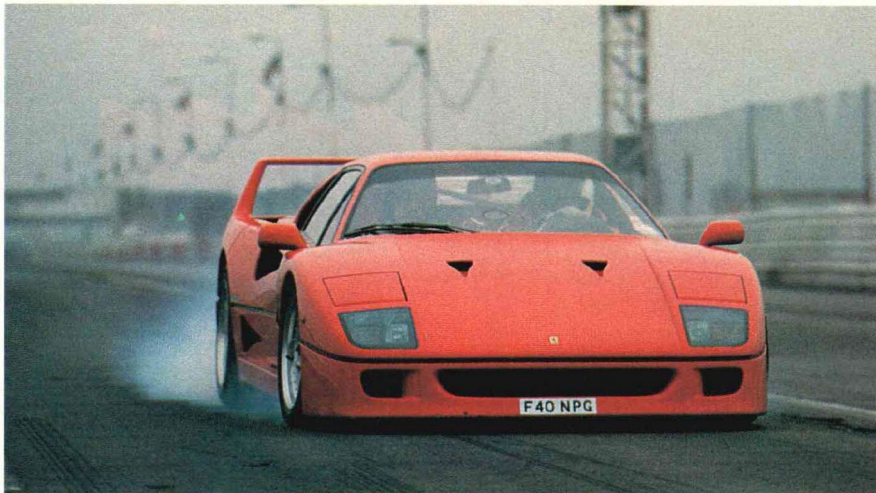


Change back into my grotts and drive to the Millbrook testing ground in the Mitsubishi 3000 GTO



Weigh car, then self. Readings are similar, easily confused





0-100-0 challengers have varied from the most sophisticated supercars...



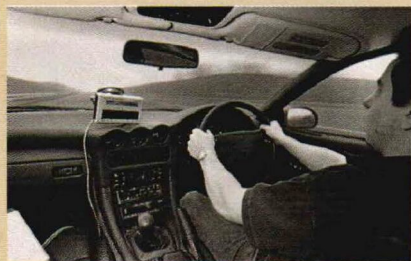
Drivers need total dedication



...to rather more belt-and-braces, but similarly effective, machinery

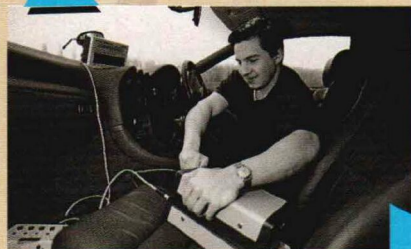
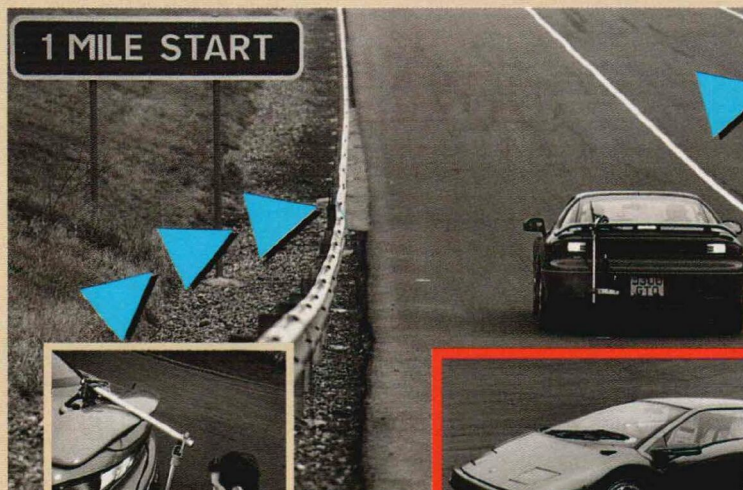
◀ the limit: the arrival of our 0-100-0 challenge. This series also allowed us to feature some wonderful cars and gave our readers a chance to show their competitive side, too. For reasons of location, convenience and atmosphere, we decided to hold the 0-100-0 challenge at Britain's premier dragstrip, Santa Pod raceway, and it proved ideally suited to the task.

With a suitable rubber-burning strip sorted, we faced the problem of exactly how to measure the necessary 0-100-0 time. Getting to 100mph was fine but how could the drivers — usually the owners of the car — know exactly when to hit the brakes? One method we considered was to set up the equipment to measure the 0-100mph time, then, separately, to measure the 100-0 braking time. The two figures added together would remove any element

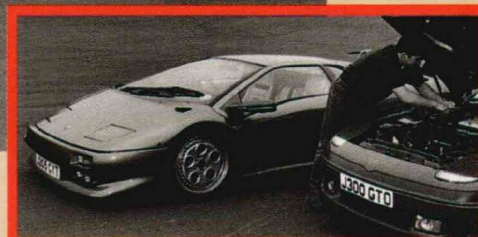


Ready for acceleration runs, times taken in both directions

Mile straight is perfectly flat and level. Reach 60mph in 5.6secs and pass quarter mile in 14.2secs. Change underwear



Fit Correvit test kit, ensuring everything secure



Stop passing Lamborghini for jump start having left lights on over lunch



of a reaction time as the driver changed from acceleration to braking. However, we felt that this went against the spirit of the challenge first made famous by Aston Martin in its claim that a DB4GT could get from rest to 100mph and back to rest again in under 20secs. So we elected to measure the elapsed time, and to indicate the ton up by having the road tester, crammed into the passenger seat with the Corveit, simply slap the dashboard.

One problem we faced here was that the faster cars such as the Ford RS200 and AC Cobra accelerated so rapidly that drivers needed warming at around 90 rather than at 100mph in order to prevent speed rising to around 110mph in the short period between getting off the gas and onto the stoppers.

There was also the difficulty of attaching the Corveit's measuring head on to some of the more outlandish beasts entered, and on one car, the measuring head needed manual support on the getaway because the thunderous vibration of its throbbing V8 created sufficient movement to trigger a false start.

The exercise proved fascinating and it's one that will be repeated later this year with a new crop of potent machinery. But, however low the times tumble — and it could well fall below 12secs for the 0-100-0 — you can be sure it will be measured with an accuracy and consistency unmatched by any other publication.

Testing a car is as much an art as it is a science. At *Autocar & Motor* that combination of art and science has been honed and refined ever since *The Autocar* created the Road Test 64 years ago. It remains the standard by which others are judged. ■

Every week we receive correspondence calling test results in question. Usually, I'm happy to say, it's not our results which are being doubted, but the discrepancy between the performance claims a manufacturer has made for the XYZ GTi they've just bought and figures in *Autocar & Motor*, which can tell a very different story.

The reason is simple. All the cars we test undergo exactly the same test procedure: they are taken to Millbrook, filled with fuel, and tested two-up using the most advanced electronic timing equipment. Manufacturers, however, can be a law unto themselves. Their tests may take place with only the driver on board, with less fuel in the tank, using different equipment and at a different track. Many car makers even use computer generated figures.

Clearly the opportunity for differences is massive. The driver, for example, can be responsible for creating a gaping margin. I remember David Vivian and myself failing time and again to match Chevrolet's claim that its Corvette ZR1 would reach 60mph in under 5secs. We handed the car over to Chevy's chief tester who then rocketed the car to 60mph in the requisite time. The only difference was he didn't bother to take his foot off the throttle while changing gear — although that's definitely not a technique we would recommend.

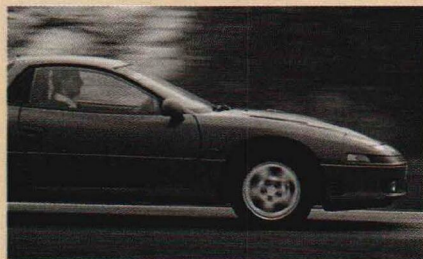
We would not be so arrogant to suggest the way we go testing is definitively right and everyone else is wrong. But if you do want to compare one car's performance with another, remember to check out *Autocar & Motor's* figures first. It's the only way to be sure.

**Andrew Frankel**



How fast is a Corvette ZR1 to 60mph? Answers differ

## The truth game

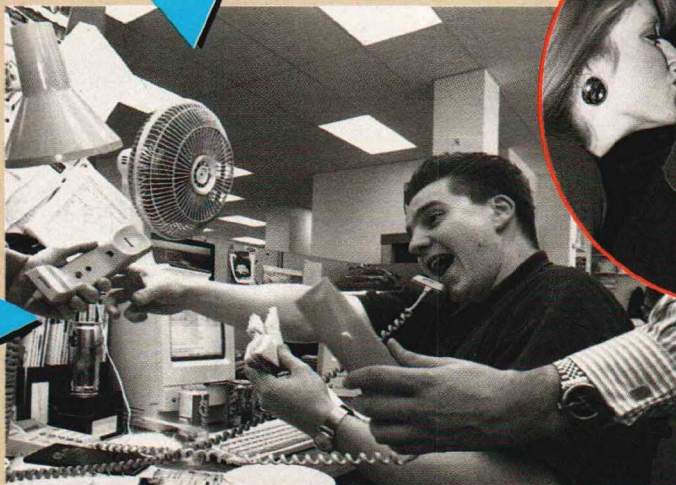
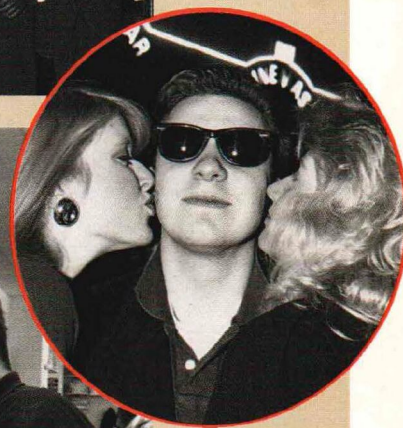


Head back to office with full set of figures to write road test



Road testers are a professional bunch, efficient and punctual

Who tests the testers?  
Performance is likely to be disappointing.  
Torque is one thing, doing it another



Next week:  
'How I found peace at last'



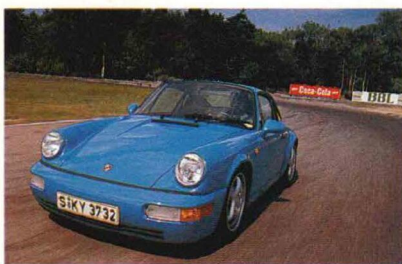
# Opinion

## OPEN TO QUESTION DAVID VIVIAN

**S**o what was the driving thrill of the past 12 months? That single, sublime, tumultuous moment it all came right?

There are a few contenders. Three hot laps of Lommel's serpentine handling circuit in

shade too big for a shot of pure, mainline, adrenalin-rich fun. Porsche's 911 RS Carrera, on the other hand, was almost too much of a good time at Belgium's Zolder circuit — a real whoopee cushion, ooh you are awful, steady on missus of a ride. On the road, though, the ride turned out to be unbearably unyielding.



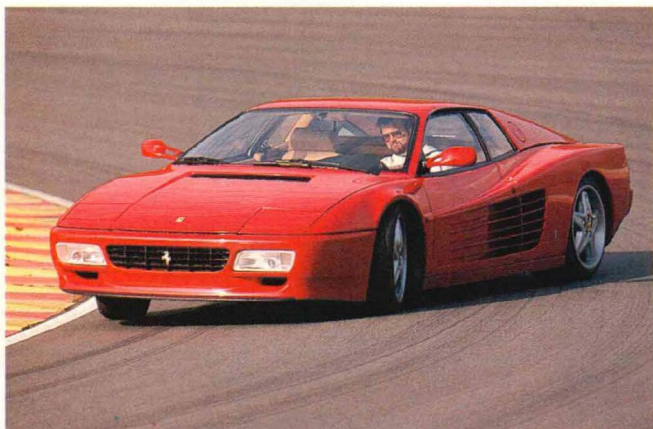
RS Carrera: ooh you are awful

the brand new Escort RS2000 came close to being a revelation — grip was expected, poise and finesse were not — but ultimately it failed to stimulate.

Mercedes' 600SEL, then? What a car. A limo, supercar and sportster all in one. Quite possibly the greatest saloon ever made. But, well, just a

most charismatic production engine, a beautiful body and a surprisingly crisp chassis.

But best of all was the little Peugeot 106 XSi at its launch in France. For 10 minutes on a very twisty road, it gave me the most intensely rewarding driving experience of my life. Great car meets great road. I look forward to the next time.



Ferrari 512 TR: crisp and charismatic



**What is the first car you remember drooling over?**  
E-type Jaguar.

**In which car did you learn to drive?**

A Mini Cooper with walnut facia and an Abarth twin exhaust. But that was when I was 11 on a scrap of waste land. The car in which I passed my test was my father's Opel Manta 1.9 SR. Then I wrote it off.

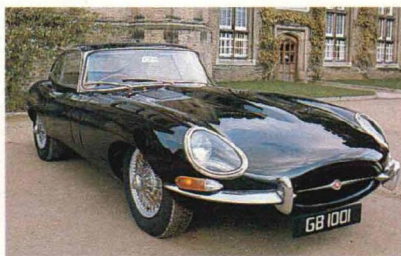
**Have you ever been convicted of a driving offence? Give details.**

Last time for doing 50mph in a 30mph zone, before that for stopping on the hard shoulder for a pee.

**Do you like oversteer or understeer in a car's handling?**



Ultimate buzz: Peugeot 106 XSi



Early favourite: E-type Jaguar

Don't care so long as I'm in control.

**What is your worst driving habit?**

A tendency to drive one-handed, usually as a result of boredom.

**When was the last time you got up early purely to enjoy driving a car?**

Getting up to earn some money is hard enough.

**If you could own only one car for the rest of your life, what would it be and why?**

A Range Rover. It's the closest thing I know to an all-purpose car and would grow old gracefully.

**If you could put all examples of cars on sale in a crusher, what would be first?**

Ford Escort 1.4 LX.

**What's the most frightening moment you've had in a car?**

Driving through a dry-stone wall in a Rover 216 Vitesse and not knowing what was on the other side (a 6ft drop into a field, as it turned out).

**What's the fastest you've ever driven?**

Just over 180mph down a deserted autobahn in a Lamborghini Diablo.

**Where, and in what, did you have your best ever drive?**

In a Peugeot 106 XSi on a twisty mountain road in France. I was going as fast as I could and nothing came the other way. The Peugeot was fantastic.

**What is the best piece of driving you've ever seen?**

From the passenger seat, Rauno Aaltonen failing to drive a four-wheel-drive BMW 325i in a straight line on an Austrian glacier.

**What's the best car you've ever driven?**

Honda NSX.

**Do you love cars?**

I love the freedom they give and the entertainment they provide. Otherwise no.



# poll

From the biggest thrill to the greenest, from the most surprising, to the cars still to come, our road testers remember the past year and confess their driving sins

## OPEN TO QUESTION ANDREW FRANKEL

**P**redicting is a mug's game. It doesn't matter if the information is the best in the world; the moment you use it to look into the future, you're asking to be shot down. Ask weatherman Michael Fish — he knows.

Apply this thinking to car testing and the problem magnifies massively. Even I would not be so stupid as to tell you which cars we will be testing for the rest of the year. Many we're not even meant to know about. We have been sworn to secrecy about others. Some will not turn up when they're meant to, one or two might break while on test. And I cannot guarantee none will be broken.

So please treat the following as no more than a peep through the keyhole at some of the cars we will strive to bring you this year.

Sporting Brits will hopefully include the Rocket, AC Ace, TVR Griffith, Lotus Esprit SE and Bentley

Continental. Among the foreign supercars on the horizon are the new BMW M5, Ferrari 512 TR, Mazda RX-7 and Porsche 968.

More accessible motors heading for the road test mill are Fiat's Cinquecento, the Volvo 850, the British-built Nissan Micra and Toyota Carina and Renault's Safrane.

Together these represent barely 10 per cent of the cars that will pass through our hands in the next 12 months. Many will be good, some may be dreadful. All, we hope, will be interesting.

There, I've said too much already. Get your guns out — I'm the one with the big 'M' on my shirt.



Looking forward to new Micra



Sporty Brits due this year include the Rocket

### What is the first car you can remember drooling over?

A Ferrari 275GTB/4. I remember thinking it was the most beautiful car I had ever seen. Twenty years later I can think of no reason to change my mind.

### In which car did you learn to drive?

My big brother had a Renault Dauphine which I steered around a field, but by the time my feet reached the pedals he'd traded it in for a £10 Austin A35.

### What is your worst driving habit?

Losing patience with other road users.

### Do you like oversteer or understeer in a car's handling?

A tiny bit of steady-state understeer that can be safely turned to oversteer on, and only on, my command.

### When was the last time you got up early purely to enjoy driving a car?

The day before yesterday to drive a Peugeot 205 GTi 1.6.

### If you could own only one car for the rest of your life, what would it be and why?

A BMW M5. It's the only car I've ever driven that satisfies my every motoring requirement.

### If you could put all examples of cars on sale in a crusher, what would be first?

A Mahindra Indian Chief.

### What's the most frightening moment you've had in a car?

Seeing the remains of a modified Sierra's off-side front tyre after it had started to disintegrate at 156mph on Millbrook's banking.

### What's the fastest you've ever driven?

171mph at Millbrook in the latest Porsche 911 Turbo.

### Where, and in what, did you have your best ever drive?

From Inverness to John O'Groats in a Lotus Esprit Turbo SE. It was 15 hours after we had left Land's End on an economy run and we hadn't exceeded 60mph. Frustration eventually got the better of me; the feeling of freedom from running flat on deserted Highland roads is unparalleled in my experience.



Senna going for it in an NSX

### What is the best piece of driving you've ever seen?

Watching from the passenger seat of a Honda NSX as Ayrton Senna went for it round the revised Silverstone in the wet.

### What's the best car you've ever driven?

I felt most honoured to be allowed to drive the Silver



Silver Ghost an honour to drive

Ghost, but the greatest car I've ever driven is a 1930 4.5-litre Bentley.

### Do you love cars?

Absolutely.



## OPEN TO QUESTION MARTIN VINCENT

Last time I wrote this column, a year ago, the talk was all about Lotus, the Honda NSX, Caterham Seven HPC and other similarly potent machines. We had a share of the exciting stuff again in 1991, notably the 911 RS, Ginetta G33 and the incomparably macho Westfield V8.

But almost everywhere else you look, the message is somewhat different. Times are changing. If 1990 was the year of the performance car, then 1991 spelt the turn of the biodegradable, recyclable, accident-proof, thiefproof and pollution-free car. Or rather, it did if you take in all the marketing hype that's being fed to us on an almost daily basis.

Just a year or so ago the car makers were crowing loudly about indecently fast top speeds and how much better their Fasthatch GTi could zip around the corners than your neighbour's Hothatch 16v. Today those same people appear embarrassed by the presence of high-performance models in the range. Now the talk and the marketing thrust centre around worthy ideals such as recyclable bumpers and exhaust emissions.

Of course, it's not just for the well-being of the planet. There's a hard financial motive, too. Those well-spoken women who accost you in the street with pen and clipboard have finally added up all the ticks and crosses and reported that what the public wants is environmentally friendly, safe cars.

Germany, in particular, has grasped the green nettle with

both hands and is desperately trying to get across the message that their cars are cleaner than alpen dew and purer than driven snow. In truth, worthy as these ideals are, they are token gestures at present — more ideology than practical implementation. The new VW Golf, for example, weighs more than its predecessor, and hence uses more energy and therefore more fuel, but we're told that because it's cat-equipped, CFC-free, uses solvent free paints and has a handful of recyclable components, it's ecologically sound. Mercedes Benz boasts about recyclable components for the S-class, but the great Stuttgart barge weighs well over two tonnes.

Catalytic converters are in, and car makers have clasped this as a marketing tool, often conveniently forgetting how much fuel their cars consume. Some loudly advertise that cats are standard throughout the range, but most still charge extra for such a fitment.

Lets face it, the car makers are not going to spend money unless it will translate directly into increased sales. If public opinion favours the green route and if people vote with hard cash for cars that genuinely offer a cleaner and greener deal, then we will see a lot more new cars coming on to the market that are lighter, safer and more fuel efficient. Audi is one car maker committed to this route and is well on the way to producing a lightweight aluminium car. Others must follow.

And perhaps, once this has been achieved with the next generation of new cars, we can shout about performance again. With a clean conscience.



### What is the first car you can remember drooling over?

As a small boy I would often see a Lotus Seven in British Racing Green with a yellow nosecone driving around the local lanes. It was so excitingly different and seemed so fast that some day I knew I would have to drive one. Little did I know that essentially the same car would still be on sale 25 years later.

### In which car did you learn to drive?

Anything I could lay my hands on. Usually, it was either a Taunus V6 estate or Triumph Herald convertible.

### What is your worst driving habit?

Fumbling around trying to decipher the radio/cassette while driving. User-friendly is a term unknown by the vast majority of car radio designers.

### Do you like oversteer or understeer in a car's handling?



Lotus Seven spirit lives on

Neither. A car should be set up so that it drifts neutrally in extremes. Oversteer as a handling trait (as opposed to power-induced) is dangerous. Too much understeer is simply frustrating.

### What is the best piece of driving you've ever seen?

Carlos Sainz driving in the 1988 RAC Rally in a rear-drive Sierra Cosworth. In his first attempt at this rally, he battled every inch of the way to put on a sensational showing against the works 4wd teams.

### If you could own only one car for the rest of your life, what would it be and why?

It would have to be my 'Vincent Special'. From the first chalk lines on the floor to welding the chassis, shaping the body moulds, or building the engine, it represents too much sweat, blood and toil to be parted with. And besides serving as a reminder that it's easier to write about cars than to make them, it would provide endless driving fun.

### When was the last time you got up early purely to enjoy driving a car?

Last November to track test my 'Vincent Special' at Goodwood.

### If you could put all examples of cars on sale in a crusher, what would be first?

The FSO Polonez. It's truly the most abominable car I've ever had the misfortune to drive.

### What's the most frightening moment you've had in a car?

Piling into the armco at Castle Combe in a motor race many years ago. I made a complete balls-up of the approach to Quarry bend and ended up with all wheels on the grass heading for the crash barrier. The car struck obliquely, then launched into a series of gyrations before embedding itself in the tyre wall. The frightening bit was explaining the misdemeanor to the car's owner, who had just watched it all happen.

### What's the fastest you've ever driven?

169mph at Millbrook in a Porsche 928 GT. I tried removing the wiper blades and aerial to coax it beyond 170, but the speed remained at 169.

### Where, and in what, did you have your best ever drive?

Driving through Wales from Harlech to Black Mountain in a group test with the Ferrari Mondial, Porsche 928 GT, BMW 850i and Jaguar XJR-S. The roads were traffic-free and provided endless challenges.

### What's the best car you've ever driven?

Honda NSX. The depth of its ability is simply astounding.

### Do you love cars?

I've owned more than 20 cars over the years, I've restored



Sensational: Sainz on RAC

them, designed them, built them, raced them, tuned them, photographed them, tested them and written about them. Would I do all this if I didn't love cars?



Mercedes S-class: is it really environmentally friendly?



## OPEN TO QUESTION JAMES THOMAS

If cars were people, Roald Dahl would have liked our 1991 road test year, which was a tale of the unexpected in itself. There were characters enough for more than a few sinuously twisted plots, closing with the obligatory sting in the tail.

Take the Ford Escort, for instance. A car seemingly devoid of personality donned the magic RS2000 badge and stood head and shoulders above the rest of the range. Come to think of it, the more you pay for an Escort, the better it becomes. There is nothing strange in that, but plump for a Vauxhall Astra and the opposite applies. We thought that the 1.4i GLS was a better buy than the range-topping GSi 16v.

The Renault 19 — an ugly duckling if ever there was one — showed that it could turn into a swan, courtesy German cabriolet specialist Karmann.

Jekyll and Hyde story of the year was the Nissan Sunny. How could such an unprepossessing range produce the GTi-R, a tearaway quasi rally car with 220bhp, four-wheel drive and the

appetite to consume the sprint from 0-60mph in five seconds flat?

It was fascinating to see how disparate the Porsche 911 range could be as well. Reintroduced after a two-year absence, the 911 Turbo had obviously been to finishing school — it returned just as fearfully fast as ever but with much better manners. Not so its lightweight relative, the Carrera RS, which proved to be a thoroughly unruly child with its bone-jarring ride. A 911 for the masochist, not the enthusiast.

Last but not least came the Fiat Tipo 16v — much rumoured, oft delayed and arriving an amazing four years behind the core of the Tipo range. Worth waiting for? Absolutely — it won our big hot hatch group test.

Let's hope 1992 proves to be just as confusing!



**What is the first car you can remember drooling over?**

The mid-engined Renault 5 Turbo — it completely redefined my theories on how a car should look and go.

**In which car did you learn to drive?**

A Suzuki SJ410 jeep, and yes, I got it to fall over, on a forestry road.

**What is your worst driving habit?**

Not having the discipline to brake progressively.

**Do you like oversteer or understeer in a car's handling?**

I like a car that understeers late but is very throttle-responsive and will oversteer when the throttle is lifted.

**When was the last time you got up early purely to enjoy driving a car?**

About three weeks ago to get in a Mitsubishi 3000 GTO.

**If you could own only one car for the rest of your life, what would it be and why?**

A BMW M5 — understated enough to avoid the Feds, as much performance as you'll ever need and room for your lady and children, too, should you acquire them.

**If you could put all examples of cars on sale in**

**a crusher, what would be first?**

Seat Marbella 840. Not a memorable machine.

**What's the most frightening moment you've had in a car?**

Hitting a patch of black ice and knowing there was absolutely nothing I could do to avoid going off.

**What's the fastest you've ever driven?**

151mph on the high-speed circuit at Millbrook.

**Where, and in what, did you have your best ever drive?**

In a Westfield SEIGHT near Beverley, Humberside, and over the Yorkshire Moors towards Kirkbymoorside. It's a fearsome monster which scared the observing sheep as much as it did me. It also had a penchant for catching fire — highly amusing!

**What is the best piece of driving you've ever seen?**

Henri Toivonen opposite-locking a Peugeot 205 T16.

**What's the best car you've ever driven?**

The Honda NSX — the five-speed manual one, to be precise. Total sensory satisfaction. It stops and goes rather well, too.

**Do you love cars?**

Ask a silly question...



First love: mid-engined R5 Turbo



Jekyll and Hyde: meek Sunny hatch turned into tearaway 220bhp GTi-R



'd become mesmerised by the BMW's neurotic behaviour. Trailing the twitchy Teuton at what seemed like a safe distance in a Honda Legend Coupe, the gaffes were eye-catching but, by a strange distortion of the truth I don't understand to this day, didn't look too awful. They were, of course. Terrifying. Sometimes the bright red 525i would swoop towards the apex of a bend with all the laser-guided precision of a shot-up Scud. Sometimes it would go in tighter than Mark Knopfler's head band. When it did, the rear tyres kicked up tell-tale plumes of dirt and dust. For a while, the balletic Bee Emm looked like the victim of an inexperienced driver trying

slightly too hard. But only until the first moves in an ultimately disastrous sequence of events started to unfold.

It happened on a Welsh hillside, on a road with a treacherous left-hand kink. A spray of earth from the rear tyres flagged another error of judgement. This time it looked terminal. Instinctively I backed off, then braked, then braked very hard indeed.

Through the swirling dust cloud I could just make out a storm of fast-moving metal; the grey-pink blur of a thrashing beached shark, its slashing tail excursions now using up all the road. The point of no return had elapsed several seconds ago. Now everything was grinding away in agonising slow motion, interspersed with significant freeze-frame moments: the moment when the offside rear tyre climbed up the dirt

bank on the wrong side of the road; the bit when the car seemed to accelerate off the dirt and back across the road at 45deg; the stunning, unbelievable instant when its nose snapped a telegraph pole at the knee, punched a hole in the nearside hedge and disappeared from view, leaving the top portion of the telegraph pole to perform improbable acrobatics on the supporting cables of the adjacent poles.

By this time the Honda was stationary and the road was eerily quiet. I sat numbly in the silence, swearing sharply under my breath and listening to the distant thumping of an accelerating heartbeat. BANG! An overhead explosion convulsed

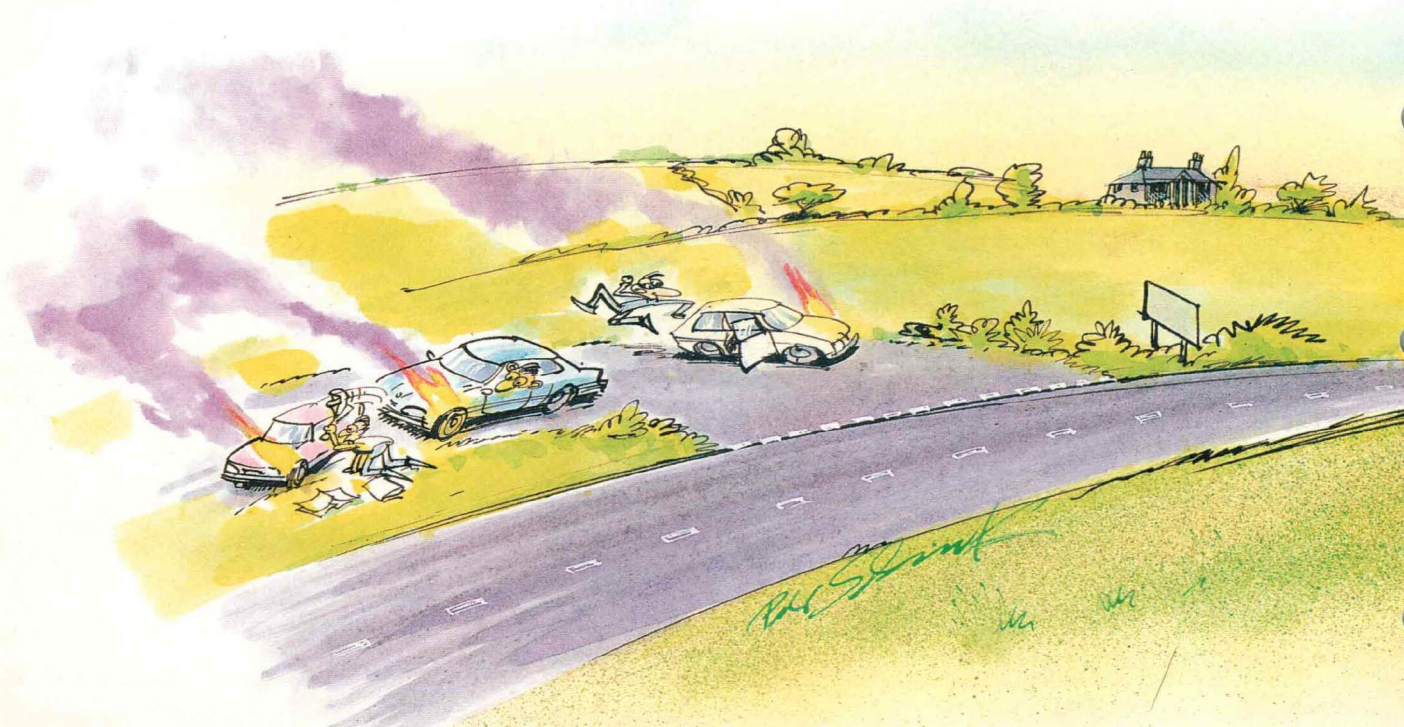
my buttocks to such an extent that I suddenly found the top of my head in contact with the perimeter of the open sunroof aperture. Three inches away, a six-inch rod of metal normally used by telephone engineers to climb up telegraph poles had gouged a small valley in the roof of the Legend just behind the trailing edge of the sunroof as the bouncing bisected log concluded its macabre dance. I should have felt lucky, but I nearly threw up.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the hedge, what remained of the BMW was steaming gently in a field some five metres below the level of the road. It had clearly landed on the corner of its nose because it looked remarkably like the aftermath of a 30mph offset frontal collision with a block of concrete so beloved of safety-conscious car makers. Standing outside the wreck, apparently neither shaken nor stirred, was its fortunate driver, looking every bit as repentant as a small dog that had just savaged your favourite pair of slippers.

But then this wasn't your average road tester. This was a gauche and clueless photographer's assistant who had found himself behind the wheel of Bavaria's finest in a fast *Motor* group test convoy with a Honda and an Alfa in the heart of north Wales. Because, on this fateful day, there weren't enough road testers to go around. As things turned out,

# Convoy catastrophes

The only predictable thing about a group test is that it's going to be unpredictable. David Vivian recalls days when nothing went right





it was a grave mistake — one the magazine, both on its own and when it merged with *Autocar*, vowed never to repeat.

We were more than capable of messing things up ourselves. One of the more regular group test follies was getting lost. The golden rule that you wait at junctions or any significant road deviation until you can see the bloke behind you worked when it worked. It didn't work when the hot shoe (every group test had at least one) became so infatuated with his overtaking prowess that he disappeared beyond the far horizon, next to be seen as a fast-moving blob on a local RAF radar screen. When that happened, you phoned the office to schedule a new meeting place.

On one particularly memorable occasion, Mark Hales (racing driver and one-time *Motor* road tester) decided that he'd had enough of following Daniel Ward (Nissan PR chief and one-time *Motor* technical editor) and decided to follow me instead. Seeing the whole extraordinary

my rear-view mirror, I took it as a cue to get a move on. Being in a particularly phlegmatic mood that day, Ward decided to continue at a brisk but unhurried pace.

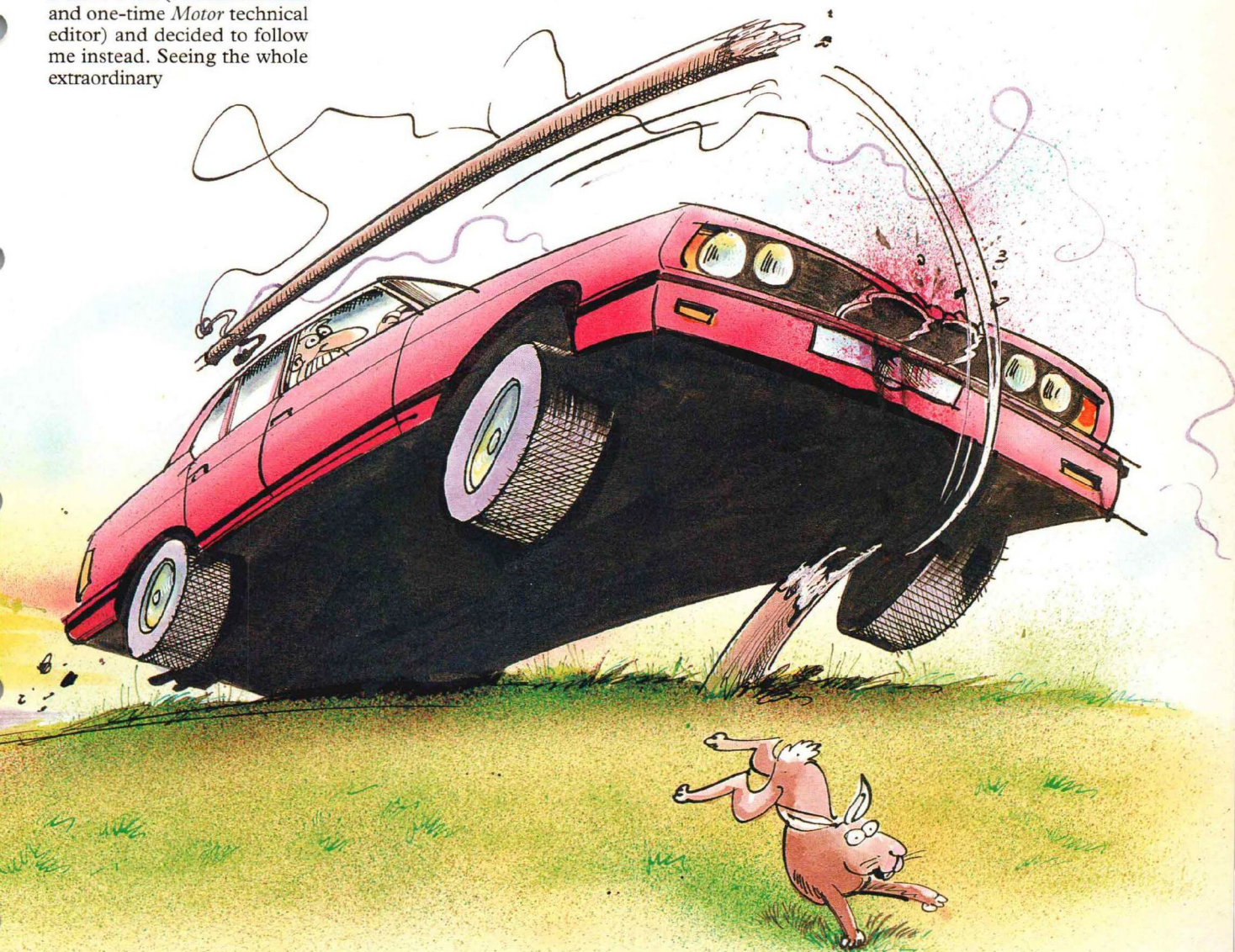
Ward also knew where he was going. In the heat of the chase I momentarily forgot and, having made Ward recede to a minute speck in my mirror, made a wrong exit at a roundabout, Hales doggedly in tow. By the time I realised my mistake it was too late. We were hopelessly and irrevocably separated. The emergency call to the office established that we should meet at Membury services on the M4, which we did,

having wasted the best part of two hours. Not only was Ward not pleased to see us, he was extremely cross. So cross, in fact, that he didn't want to stop for tea and a toasted bun, leapt into the car he was meant to be taking home for the night and screeched off into the sunset. With Hales's briefcase on the back seat. He had travelled all of 40 miles down the M4 before he noticed the error and had to drive all the way back. He must have been the angriest man ever to walk out of a Happy Eater without having eaten anything.

Personally, I feel more sorry for the bloke who decided he wanted to join in a recent blast through Wales in a group of high-performance coupes. So instead of letting himself be overtaken on a long, straight stretch of road, he roused his Rover 827 fastback to the sort of peak that enabled him to

blend in perfectly with the storming coupes. It must have been a stirring sight; certainly stirring enough to persuade a policeman coming the other way to turn around, stop us as we pootled through the next village and administer a lecture to all concerned, including the unfortunate Rover driver, who took his medicine like a man, climbed back into his car and drove away. Very slowly.

It was a group of much more elderly coupes that attacked the famous downhill, hairpinned section of Clun on the Wales-Shropshire border and lost... their brakes. All three coasted into the lay-by at the bottom of the hill with their pads on fire, testers in a flap — a record that stands to this day. ■





# Trimming the fat

Howard Lees sifts through all the interesting statistics on the cars we have road tested and discovers that the average car is slower, cheaper and more economical than it was last year

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A YEAR makes. In the midst of the deepest recession for decades, *Autocar & Motor's* 'average' car — the distillation of the 100 or so cars road tested each year — reflects a similar downward trend. This year's car is smaller, less powerful and slower but more economical than the year before and, not surprisingly given the widespread price-cutting and discounting, cheaper. On the other hand, it might reflect on a test schedule that didn't include outstanding machinery such as the Honda NSX, Lotus

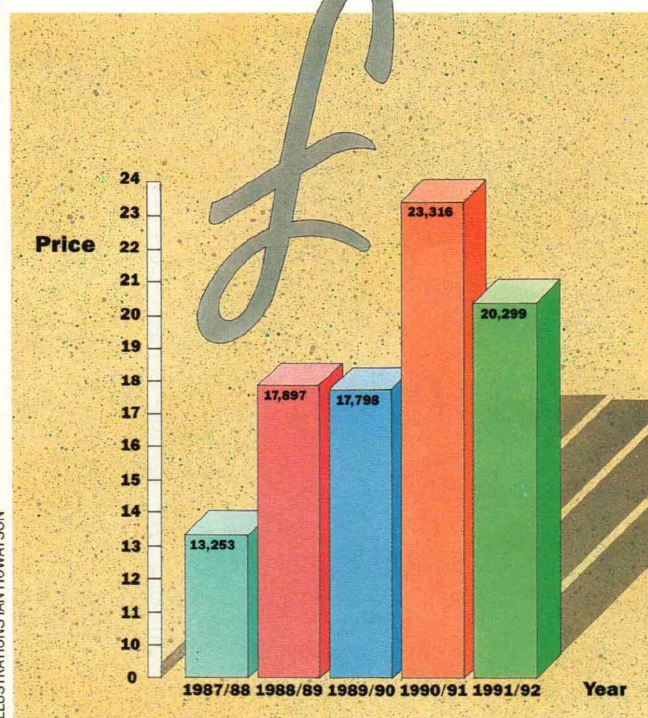
Virage and Ferrari 348. But last year did have its moments — no one could accuse the Porsche 911 Turbo, Mercedes 600SEL or Westfield SEiGHT of being run-of-the-mill.

At the outer edges of our performance parameters, the Westfield could not be ignored with class wins for kerb weight, power-to-weight ratio and every single acceleration category. With 270bhp of tuned Rover V8 in a featherweight 690kg car, its power-to-weight ratio of 402bhp per ton is 68 per cent better than its nearest

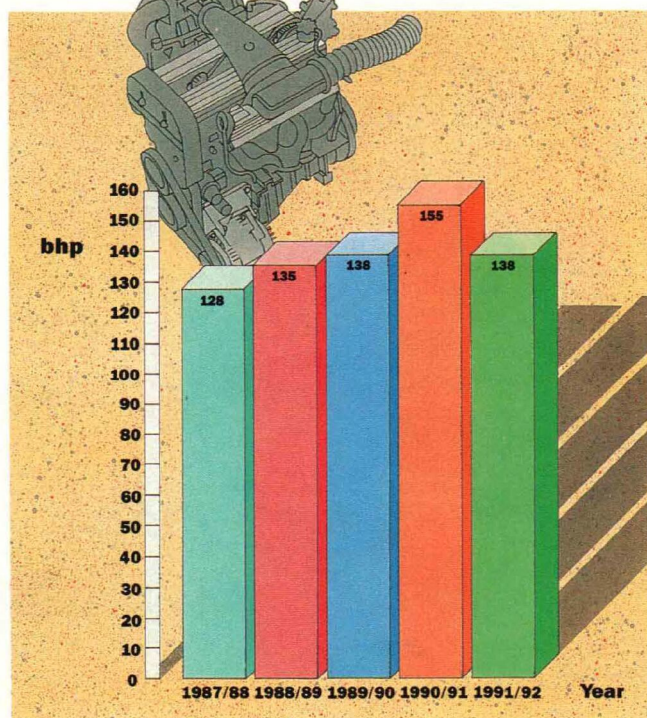
competitor, the TVR V8S, and 42 per cent up on last year's champion, the Caterham Seven HPC. Not exactly a true production car, the Westfield accelerates faster than any car listed in the back of this magazine. At 12mpg, though, it is the thirstiest car we have tested this time around.

An open two-seater with no pretence at aerodynamics, the Westfield stands no chance in the top speed stakes. That honour falls to the new 911 Turbo, which reached 167mph — 2mph faster than the previous champion, Porsche's 928 GT.

Price of average car is down £3017



Bhp fall reflects switch to smaller cars



ILLUSTRATIONS IAN HOWATSON



Mercedes made it to the top again this year, the 2300kg 600SEL taking over the heavyweight crown by a mere 6.8kg from last year's 300GD. Unlike that painfully slow off-roader, the S-class at least has the biggest, most powerful engine of the year — 5987cc of 48-valve V12 pumping out 408bhp and powering the 600 to an effortless, speed-limited 159mph. Only two cars cracked 160mph, the second also a Porsche in the form of the stripped-out, 161mph 911 Carrera RS.

At the other end of the performance spectrum, we tested nothing last year that came close to the lethargic 300GD. The least powerful cars we tested were a bunch of basic four-speed superminis, the Citroen AX 10E, Ford Fiesta 1.0 Popular, Vauxhall Nova 1.0 Trip and VW Polo Fox all having just 45bhp on tap. All but the Polo have engines of less than one litre, the VW having an extra 50cc to compensate for its catalytic converter. None was the slowest car we tested, though — that honour fell to the 46bhp Panda Selecta, its CVT gearbox and flat-screen aerodynamics delivering a top speed of 77mph and a unimpressive fuel consumption of just 31.2mpg. Stepless ratios did give the Panda a slight edge over the 30-70mph dash, though, its 27.9secs time just beating the Fiesta 1.0's.

Unsurprisingly, the most economical car was a diesel (although last year the petrol-engined Toyota Starlet beat the oil-burners). The Nova 1.5 diesel returned 46.7mpg — still way down on the amazing 54.7mpg returned by Citroen's AX diesel a couple of years ago. Twenty-eight per cent of the test cars bettered 30mpg, though — significantly better than the 14 per cent proportion the year before.

Just as importantly, only 18 per cent of the cars could not top 20mpg, whereas the figure was 27 per cent 12 months ago.

Combining all this data into our overall efficiency benchmark — simply maximum speed multiplied by fuel consumption (mpg) divided by 0-60mph time — showed that the average index had fallen from 328 a year ago to 318. This is despite the fact that this year's duffer, the Frontera turbo diesel estate, did significantly better than the G-Wagen with a figure of 104 rather than a mere 57. The Frontera was the only off-roader tested, one third as many as the year before, and 4wd cars in general showed a decline from a dozen down to just seven.



**Merc 600SEL is heaviest and most powerful**

It was left to yet another two-seat sports car to take over where the Toyota MR2 left off at the head of the efficiency league — nothing came close to the Carrera RS, its combination of 19.3mpg, 161mph top speed and 0-60mph time of 4.9secs yielding a figure of 634 overall.

Apart from getting more modest, our cars have changed little mechanically ▶

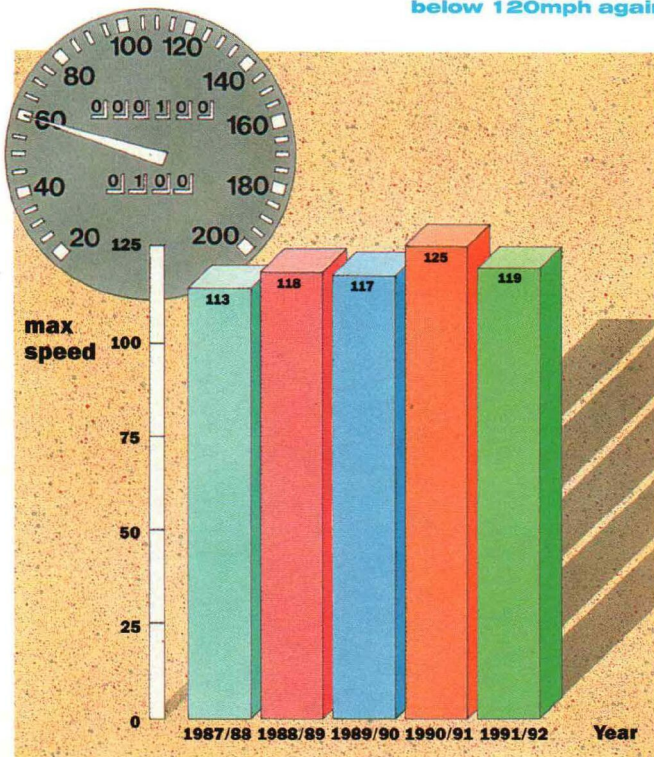


**Carrera RS tops efficiency table**

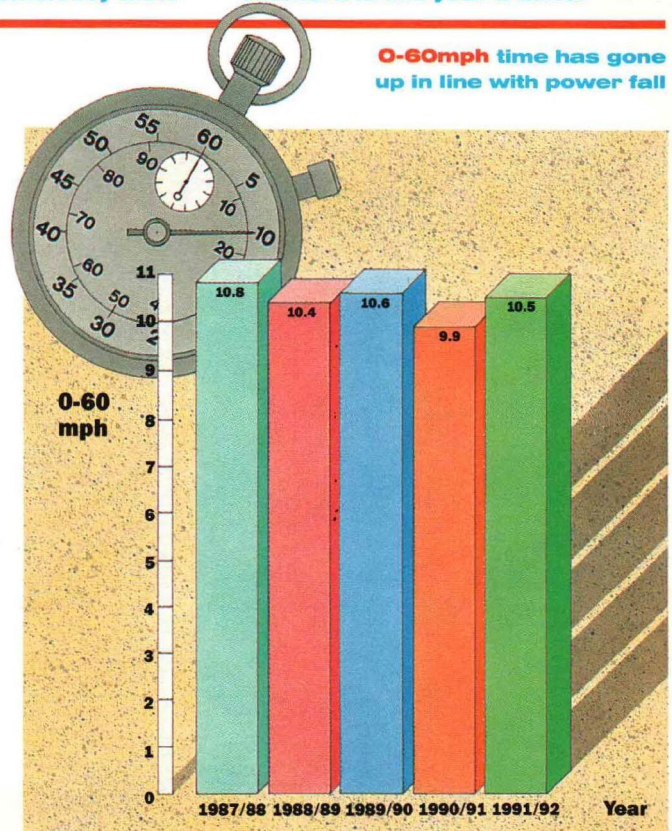


**Frontera is this year's duffer**

**Max speed has dropped below 120mph again**



**0-60mph time has gone up in line with power fall**





## Best and worst

The average car	Cars tested
Capacity 2150cc	10 diesels
Weight 1194kg	11 turbos, 1 G-lader
Bhp/ton 114.86	7 four-wheel drives
30-70mph 10.32secs	67 catalyts
1/4 mile 17.63secs	13 autos, 1 CVT
Efficiency 318.02	15 manuals
	73 four-cylinders
	19 six-cylinders
	5 eight-cylinders
	3 12-cylinders
<b>Most expensive:</b>	Mercedes-Benz 600SEL, £89,600
<b>Cheapest:</b>	Fiat Panda CVT, £6000
<b>Biggest cc:</b>	Mercedes-Benz 600SEL, 5987
<b>Smallest cc:</b>	Citroen AX 10E, 954
<b>Most bhp:</b>	Mercedes-Benz 600SEL, 408
<b>Least bhp:</b>	Citroen AX 1.0E, Fiesta 1.0, Nova 1.0 Trip, VW Polo Fox, 45
<b>Heaviest:</b>	Mercedes-Benz 600SEL, 2300kg
<b>Lightest:</b>	Westfield V8, 691kg
<b>Fastest:</b>	Porsche 911 Turbo, 167mph
<b>Slowest:</b>	Fiat Panda CVT, 77mph
<b>Quickest 0-60mph:</b>	Westfield V8, 4.3secs
<b>Slowest 0-60mph:</b>	VW Polo Fox, 21.4secs
<b>Best bhp/ton:</b>	Westfield V8, 402.32
<b>Worst bhp/ton:</b>	Vauxhall Astra 1.7D, 53.92
<b>Best 30-70mph:</b>	Westfield V8, 3.6secs
<b>Worst 30-70mph:</b>	Ford Fiesta 1.0, 28.8secs
<b>Best 1/4 mile:</b>	Westfield V8, 13.2secs
<b>Worst 1/4 mile:</b>	VW Polo Fox, 22.4secs
<b>Best mpg:</b>	Vauxhall Nova 1.5D, 46.7
<b>Worst mpg:</b>	Westfield V8, 12
<b>Most efficient:</b>	Porsche 911 Carrera RS, 634.14
<b>Least efficient:</b>	Vauxhall Frontera 2.3 TD, 104.55

over the last 12 months. Most of them still have four-cylinder engines (73 per cent), with just under a fifth having six pots, five in V8 configuration and three boasting 12 cylinders — the Mercedes 600SEL, BMW 850i and Jaguar V12. Forty-three per cent of the cars had more than two valves per cylinder, while it looks like forced induction is on the decline — *Autocar & Motor* tested just a dozen blown cars this year (one of them the supercharged VW Polo), down from a figure of 20.

There were more diesels, though (10 compared with seven), and a hefty increase in the number of cars fitted with catalyts — 74 per cent of petrol-engined cars were so equipped, compared with 51 per cent



Westfield SEIGHT cleaned up in acceleration runs

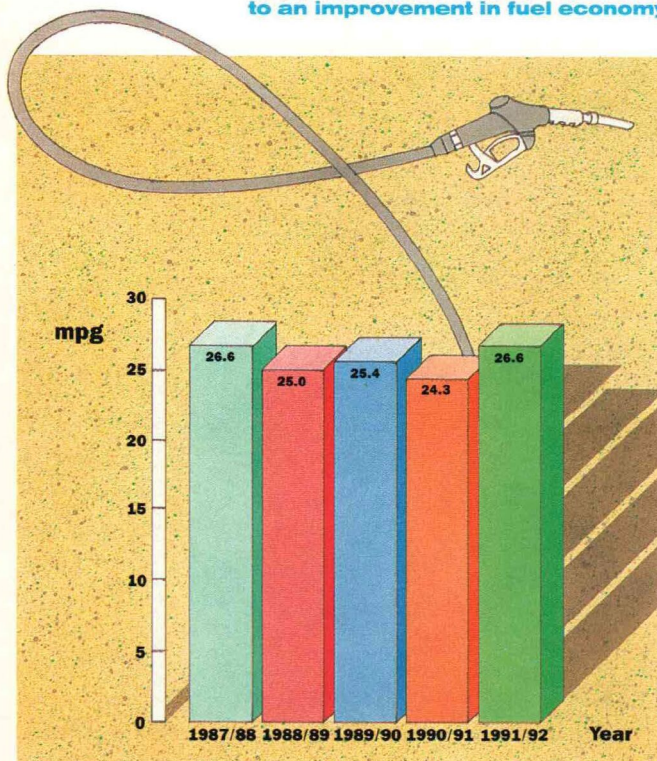
the year before. We still seem to prefer manual five-speed gearboxes, with a dozen four-speed autos passing through our hands, plus Jaguar's throwback three-speeder, but no representative of either Mercedes or BMW's five-ratio auto.

For the record, the transport of 1991 was a four-door saloon powered by a 2.1-litre, 138bhp engine that was more likely to have two valves per cylinder than four but was almost certainly fitted with a catalyst. It would reach 119mph and cover the 0-60mph sprint in 10.5secs, whereas 12 months ago it could have comfortably cracked 120mph and 10secs to 60mph. However, it was rather more economical — 26.6mpg vs 24.3mpg, despite that fuel-sapping catalyst. It would also set you back just £20,300, a saving of £3017. Although slightly cheaper and a shade faster than our median, only one car comes close to fitting the bill — if you bought a Camry 2.2 GL in 1991, you are Mr Average. ■

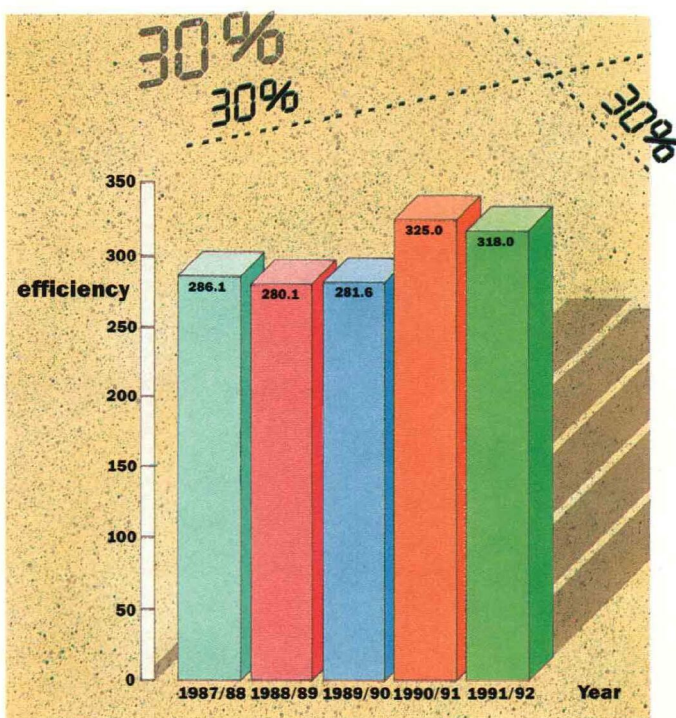


Polo Fox slowest over quarter mile

**Mpg: more efficient cars have led to an improvement in fuel economy**



**Efficiency index has suffered a 20-point fall this year**





# Alfa Romeo 33S 16v Permanent 4



**For** Charismatic engine, quite roomy, well equipped  
**Against** Surprisingly little grip, awful driving position, noisy

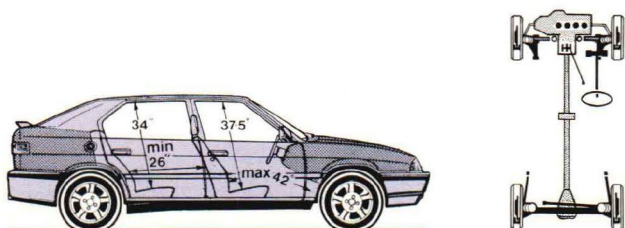
**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ For Alfa die-hards only

**T**his 33 marks the end of the line for Alfa's unloved 'Sud successor. Developed to an extraordinary degree over the years, a bigger engine, four valves per cylinder, four camshafts, fuel injection and even four-wheel drive have not been able to paper over the cracks in this ageing design.

Simply put, there is now a wealth of hatches available that can not only match this 33's straight-line performance with ease but also pulls away convincingly on a twisting road thanks to vastly superior handling. For the truth is that, even with viscous-coupling four-wheel drive, the 33 still loses grip at modest speeds, wet or dry.

Enthusiasts will point to the engine's invigorating nature and fizzy exhaust note, which still makes it one of the most distinctive powerplants you can buy, and the roomy five-door body and generous equipment levels to suggest the 33 is a fine sports hatch with an eye on family considerations. But buyers also have to tolerate a short-legged, offset driving position sending their toes to sleep, a rubbery gearchange and noisy motorway progress. In the end, the list of demerits is too long to justify the car to any but the most fervent Alfa supporter.

cc	1721
max bhp	137
max lb ft	119
max mph	124
0-60 (secs)	8.6
30-70	8.7
1/4 mile	16.9
30-50	8.3
50-70	12.4
Overall mpg	25.0
Touring mpg	34.7
mph/1000 rpm	19.9
Weight (kg)	1089
Tested	22.5.91
Price now	£14,997



# Audi 100 2.8E Auto



**For** Build integrity, sweet engine, secure handling  
**Against** Thirsty, lacking in equipment

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Performs as solidly as it's built

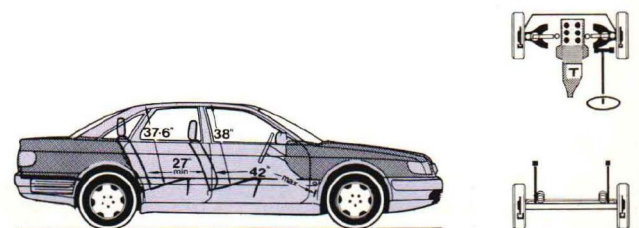
**T**raditionally, Audi's big saloons tend to get overlooked alongside certain German rivals with stronger identities and more cylinders. The latest 100 sets out to address that problem with a new, leaner look and a more instantly recognisable grille and frontal treatment. And in 2.8E form, it's overcome any shortfall in engine power by the introduction of a new 174bhp V6. So equipped, this all-new Audi 100 comes across as an altogether more self-assured luxury saloon than its predecessor.

The new engine delivers solid performance with decent refinement, but economy is indifferent and the gearchange cumbersome in manual form. Automatic transmission, as tested, is the better choice.

Some significant gains are to be found in the chassis. A stiffer shell and revised suspension mean a polished performance with an underlying firmness to the ride. First-class damping, good balance, nimble steering and fine grip add up to a truly first-rate performance.

Inside, there's the usual Audi sober dress, reeking quality and restrained elegance, and safety is well to the fore with the Procon-Ten restraint system as standard.

cc	2771
max bhp	174
max lb ft	184
max mph	134
0-60 (secs)	9.3
30-70	9.0
1/4 mile	17.2
30-50	3.6
50-70	5.4
Overall mpg	19.0
Touring mpg	24.8
mph/1000 rpm	24.8
Weight (kg)	1504
Tested	15.5.91
Price now	£23,524





# Audi 100 2.8E quattro



**For** Traction, build quality, ergonomics  
**Against** Price, notchy gearchange

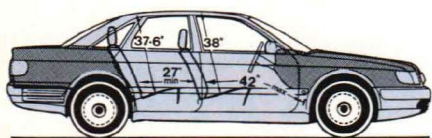
**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Competent but bland

**Y**ou can't knock the ethics behind Audi's new 100. Employing deformable side cells and the Procon-Ten system, this is the range that aims to oust Volvo from the top of the safety-first image ratings. And if crash tests conducted on the Continent are to be believed, the Audi 100 is the safest car you can buy. It's also one of the best finished, rivalling BMW for build integrity and ergonomic excellence.

The 100 2.8E quattro should, then, be a great car. Consider its specification: an excellent four-wheel drive system with Torsen differential and the new compact and lightweight 174bhp V6. As expected, traction is extremely good, giving neutral handling characteristics in the wet or dry which inspire an air of unimpeachable stability. The 2771cc V6 is always lusty and eager but is quiet and refined at motorway speeds, too.

But the driving experience left us a little frustrated, mainly because of a notchy gearchange and long-winded clutch action which conspired to spoil smooth driving. Neither did the Audi's high price impress us too much. A car costing this much needs more flair; right now it's too anaesthetic.

cc	2771
max bhp	174
max lb ft	184
max mph	135
0-60 (secs)	9.0
30-70	9.2
1/4 mile	16.9
30-50	8.3
50-70	10.0
Overall mpg	23.9
Touring mpg	24.5
mph/1000 rpm	22.2
Weight (kg)	1549
Tested	17.7.91
Price now	£26,161



# Audi 80 2.0E



**For** Proper boot at last, build, handling, interior space  
**Against** Slow, thirsty, lacks equipment

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Now a truly practical family saloon

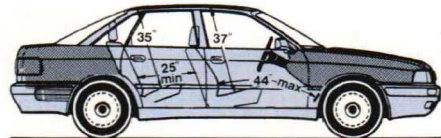
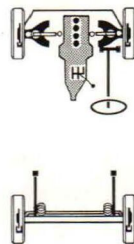
**R**evised rear suspension has not only endowed the new 80 with a boot of proper size and shape — getting rid of the old car's single biggest fault in one go — but has also improved the ride and handling. Grip is better than ever and, for the first time, you can adjust your line with the throttle alone.

Shame, then, that the improvement at the rear is not matched at the front. While the two-litre engine is smooth and offers an even torque spread, it lacks any sparkle. This is partly due to the 1265kg kerb weight, which takes its toll on economy, too.

Inside, you enjoy a well-designed cabin, clear instruments, excellent seats and room for four. However, short ratios and a notchy gearchange restrict its touring potential and you have to pay for goodies such as electric windows, although anti-lock brakes, power steering and the Procon-Ten safety system are standard. Buyers will enjoy first-rate fit and finish on a par with the best German marques.

While visually it's hard to spot the changes, the latest 80 is now a practical, spacious and safe family car, although in base two-litre form you will have to suffer poor performance and economy.

cc	1984
max bhp	115
max lb ft	124
max mph	118
0-60 (secs)	11.9
30-70	11.7
1/4 mile	18.7
30-50	8.6
50-70	12.7
Overall mpg	24.8
Touring mpg	31.4
mph/1000 rpm	20.9
Weight (kg)	1265
Tested	1.1.92
Price now	£15,699





# Audi 80 2.8E V6 quattro



**For** Build, security, overall competence  
**Against** Over-firm ride, ponderous gearchange, poor economy

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Swift and safe sports saloon

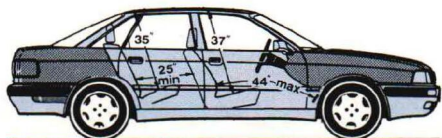
**A**udi's revised 80 range has brought with it a new-found maturity and appeal. The new, stiffer shell with restyled nose treatment, together with a longer wheelbase and a proper-shaped boot (at last), is handsome and practical, and in V6 quattro form the car is fast and secure, too.

This is the first time a V6 engine has appeared in the 80. It uses the smooth and sweet 2.8-litre unit from the 100, and in this application its 174bhp is good for 133mph with sufficiently lusty mid-range acceleration to make it interesting. Yet odd gear ratios and the fairly excessive all-up weight dull its edge slightly. A ponderous gearchange doesn't help matters.

Safety and security are the watchwords with the 80 quattro. Four-wheel drive and a fine chassis provide a level of grip the boundaries of which few will approach, while the excellent anti-lock brakes and Procon-Ten add further to safety.

As ever, this Audi is solidly built, quiet and refined. Rear room in the sombre but tastefully trimmed cabin is now adequate, but the equipment specification smacks of meanness and the ride is over-firm for some tastes.

cc	2771
max bhp	174
max lb ft	184
max mph	133
0-60 (secs)	8.3
30-70	8.7
1/4 mile	16.5
30-50	8.3
50-70	9.9
Overall mpg	20.0
Touring mpg	25.3
mph/1000 rpm	22.7
Weight (kg)	1455
Tested	22.1.92
Price now	£21,799



# BMW 316i



**For** Capable chassis, strong image  
**Against** Mediocre performance, gearchange, economy

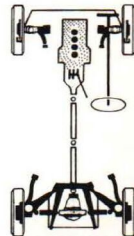
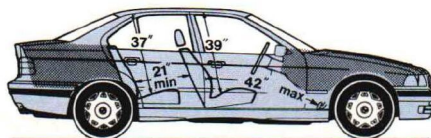
**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ A BMW for the price of a Sierra

**F**or repmobile money it's quite possible to step on to the first rung of BMW ownership with the 316i. It might boast just 1.6 litres but it's still good for 120mph and comes with the healthy dose of prestige that's part of any 3-series deal.

The 316i benefits from a chassis that successfully blends the best aspects of ride and handling without any obvious compromises. However, the four-cylinder engine carried over from the old 3-series can't maintain the same accelerative qualities it possessed in the lighter shell used before. The 0-60mph time is up by about a second, but the newer car's cleaner aerodynamics spell fine economy and effortless motorway progress. There's a fair level of refinement, too, and the ride is first rate, but in certain areas the new car seems less solidly assembled than before.

Like all BMWs, this one feels thoughtfully designed and well engineered, and the control positioning and general ergonomics are hard to fault. If outright performance isn't a priority but image, chassis dynamics and build integrity are, the 316i makes a fine choice. That said, the beefier response of the 1.8-engined equivalent makes it a better, more balance package.

cc	1596
max bhp	100
max lb ft	104
max mph	120
0-60 (secs)	11.2
30-70	11.2
1/4 mile	18.2
30-50	10.1
50-70	14.2
Overall mpg	27.8
Touring mpg	33.4
mph/1000 rpm	20.5
Weight (kg)	1255
Tested	4.12.91
Price now	£14,750





## BMW 318i



**For** Fine chassis, solid build, stylish, sweet engine, great value  
**Against** Disappointing interior fittings

**Verdict** ★★★★★ So good we've bought one

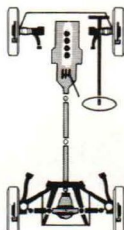
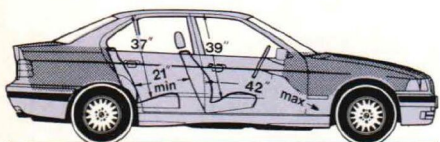
**W**hatever the traditional strengths that have made BMW one of the most coveted marques in the world, value for money has rarely been among them. That now looks set to change with BMW's latest interpretation of the definitive small sports saloon.

The 318i comes complete with all the solidity you expect from BMW and a chassis that resets the class standard. It proves you do not need massive power and fat tyres to enjoy swift, entertaining cross-country progress. Thanks to a near-perfect weight distribution, the 318i comes with enough precision, balance and poise to provide the fun without the expense.

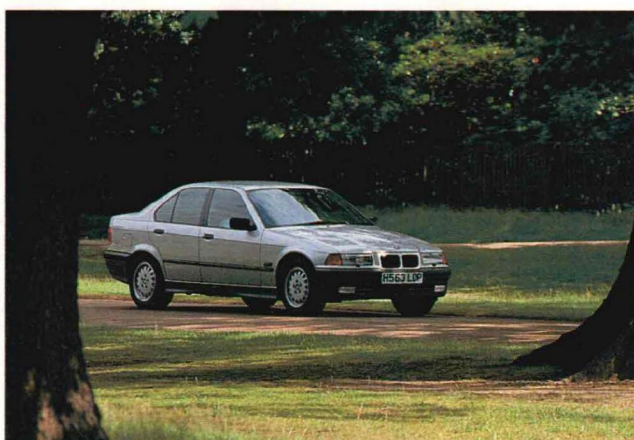
Speed fiends will find the engine lacking in power, though it still spins to its red line more smoothly than any non-counterbalanced four has a right to, and some will be surprised by some patchy interior fittings. Other than that, there is precious little to criticise.

Once again, the 3-series is the most desirable small sports saloon in the world and, for those with an eye for a bargain, there's none better than the 318i.

cc	1796
max bhp	113
max lb ft	119
max mph	122
0-60 (secs)	10.2
30-70	10.2
1/4 mile	17.2
30-50	8.8
50-70	12.1
Overall mpg	27.6
Touring mpg	31.9
mph/1000 rpm	20.5
Weight (kg)	1258
Tested	24.4.91
Price now	£15,815



## BMW 320i SE



**For** Smooth engine and driveline, handling, image  
**Against** A touch expensive, poor economy, inflexible engine

**Verdict** ★★★★★☆ Great small luxury saloon

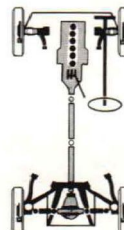
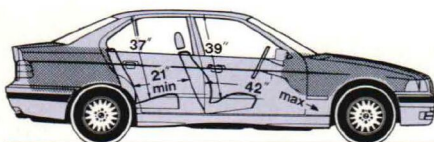
**T**he new 320i had probably the hardest act to follow of all the new 3-series. Its predecessor enjoyed a reputation as a super-smooth junior executive car whose modest power output fell comfortably within the limits of its chassis. Though a little limp-wristed, for overall balance it was hard to beat.

The change of character promised by the addition of a twin-cam, 24-valve head to the venerable straight six is not the one we expected. The uncanny smoothness remains, and the driveline and gearbox show further improvement, yet engine inflexibility and poor throttle response mitigate against the car's sporting pretensions. The subsequent need to work the excellent gearbox more than expected to keep the engine spinning leads to poor fuel economy, too.

The wider tyres fitted to the SE version also dull the sharp responses we experienced in the 318i and compromise the ride.

As a sporting saloon the 320i disappoints, but its smoothness, improved interior space and overall refinement make it one of the best small luxury saloons available. But driving enthusiasts would be better off with the cheaper 318i.

cc	1991
max bhp	150
max lb ft	140
max mph	132
0-60 (secs)	9.1
30-70	9.0
1/4 mile	16.9
30-50	9.1
50-70	12.4
Overall mpg	23.5
Touring mpg	27.3
mph/1000 rpm	20.6
Weight (kg)	n/a
Tested	7.8.91
Price now	£19,190





# BMW 325i SE



**For** Fabulous drivetrain, stable handling, excellent ride  
**Against** Poor packaging, patchy finish

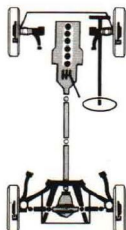
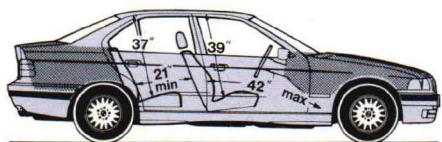
**Verdict** ★★★★★☆ Classy, accomplished executive

**T**he new 3-series marked a change in stylistic direction for BMW. This wasn't the scaled-down 5-series many had been expecting. On the contrary, its broad grille and hooded headlamps projected something approaching alternative thinking on the expression of the famous Munich car maker's identity.

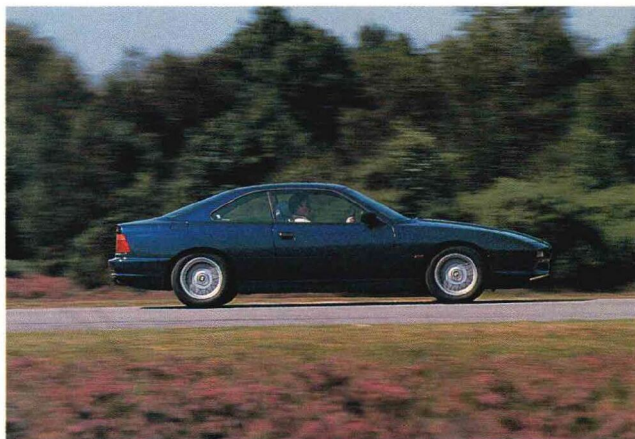
Almost a year on, the shock of the new has faded and the 325i is established as a glittering example of a compact executive saloon with bags of sporting appeal. It starts with the cracking 192bhp 2.5-litre straight six, which isn't just supremely smooth but also delivers sparkling performance. It's all gloriously exploitable, too, thanks to the light, slick gearchange.

The 325i's chassis behaviour has changed almost as much as the car's styling. Gone are the hair-trigger reflexes and overt agility, replaced by a slightly inert feel, but one that combines more grip with greater stability and poise. Less entertaining, certainly, but a higher standard of cornering and, despite the obviously taut damping, a more comfortable ride, too. Space efficiency isn't tops and cabin finish appears to have slipped back but, overall, the 325i is mighty desirable.

CC	2494
max bhp	192
max lb ft	177
max mph	141
0-60 (secs)	7.3
30-70	6.9
1/4 mile	15.8
30-50	7.3
50-70	9.7
Overall mpg	26.6
Touring mpg	27.0
mph/1000 rpm	22.5
Weight (kg)	1345
Tested	13.3.91
Price now	£23,800



# BMW 850i manual



**For** Superb six-speed gearbox, exquisite cabin, powerful and refined  
**Against** Lifeless steering, hopeless rear seats, very thirsty

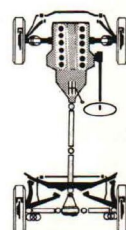
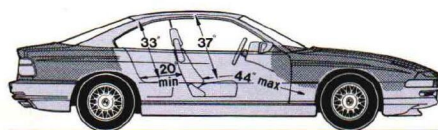
**Verdict** ★★★★★☆ No sports car but a fabulous GT

**T**o regard this flagship BMW as a sports car in the same vein as Ferrari's Mondial or a Porsche 928 GT is to miss its point. Even with the first truly convincing six-speed manual gearbox we've tested, the 850i is a disappointing entertainer. The fault lies chiefly with its steering, which, by failing to communicate adequately, refuses to let the driver fully indulge in the car's wonderfully balanced chassis.

Look at it instead as an ultimate two-seat grand tourer. The beautifully scalloped seats in the back are near useless, as if anyone near six foot is driving, rear leg room is literally non-existent. Use the back as additional luggage space instead and the 850i's role as continent-crusher extraordinaire becomes clear.

The mighty five-litre V12 will push the 850i to the door of 160mph, or rumble mellifluously at the legal limit, from where the engine's 332lb ft of torque will effortlessly whisk you up to double that speed with no more than a flex of the right foot. The driving position, cabin, and quality of materials are peerless and will cosset you painlessly for hour after hour. We only wish it were a little more fun to drive.

CC	4988
max bhp	300
max lb ft	332
max mph	159
0-60 (secs)	7.1
30-70	6.5
1/4 mile	15.5
30-50	5.6
50-70	10.0
Overall mpg	14.7
Touring mpg	19.2
mph/1000 rpm	30.4
Weight (kg)	1885
Tested	1.10.91
Price now	£63,950





# Citroen AX 10E Jazz



**For** Price, economy, space  
**Against** Light build, long gearing

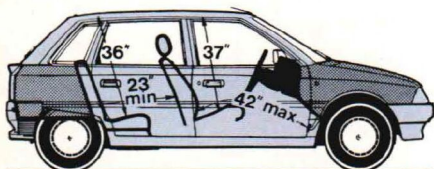
**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Needed the facelift

**W**e tested the cheapest version of the smallest Citroen before it received its facelift later on in the year. Therefore, we criticised its lightness of build but were generally impressed by the amount of fun you could have driving it. The well-judged, unassisted steering endowed it with eager turn-in, while the engine's 45bhp, without much weight to move, felt peppier than we expected. Helped but also hindered by a tall top gear, the little Citroen sipped fuel at a very slow rate but achieved its noisy maximum speed of 84mph in third gear.

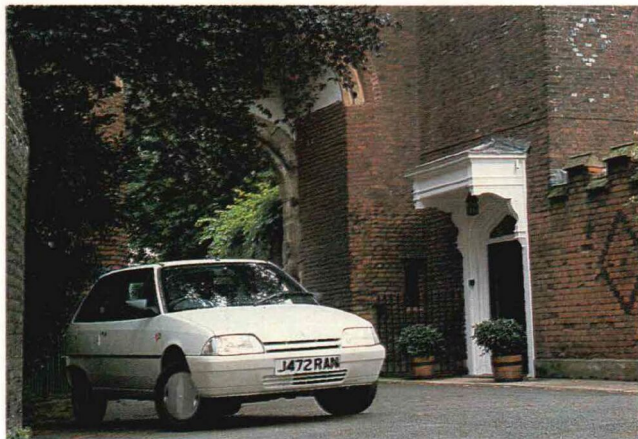
It also mopped up the worst bumps very well and had all the storage space you could wish for in a small shopping hatchback. Unfortunately, we couldn't ignore the AX's build, which purveyed a disposable and ultimately cheap feel. But the most basic AX makes a sensible first-time buy and is available with five doors at the same price as many three-door rivals.

We liked the AX 10E enough to place it third in a five-way group test. With the improvements it now sports, it could have stood a good chance of winning.

cc	954
max bhp	45
max lb ft	54
max mph	84
0-60 (secs)	18.1
30-70	22.5
1/4 mile	20.7
30-50	10.4
50-70	24.7
Overall mpg	36.9
Touring mpg	54.4
mph/1000 rpm	19.3
Weight (kg)	718
Tested	28.8.91
Price now	£6215



# Citroen AX 11 TZX



**For** Vastly improved quality, economy, crisp handling, price  
**Against** Mediocre front seats, over-long gearing

**Verdict** ★★★★★☆☆ Back near the top of the class

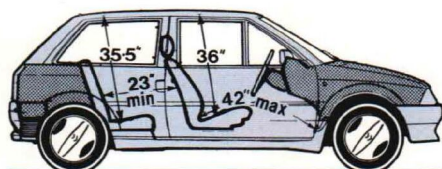
**S**uddenly, the AX seemed very out of touch with its market. The ruthless weight paring that had made the car such a hit for its combination of economy, performance and crisp handling endowed it with a flimsiness which put it to shame in the company of the new breed of supermini, epitomised by the Metro and Peugeot 106, in which perceived quality had become the big issue.

So the AX has undergone a quality reformation, and a very successful one, too. The interior is now a first-rate quality item and the exterior has been rounded off and lent a much-needed air of solidity.

Even better news is that, model for model, the AX gains just 13kg in weight. So its credentials as a spirited driver's car remain: performance may have taken a slight knock but its handling remains as good as ever, with crisp turn-in and great balance helped along by well-weighted steering. Economy is still excellent, too.

One of the year's most successful facelifts lands squarely on the competition's chin with a crushing price advantage — almost £700 cheaper than the equivalent Metro — putting the AX well and truly back into contention.

cc	1124
max bhp	55
max lb ft	66
max mph	94
0-60 (secs)	13.5
30-70	14.7
1/4 mile	19.5
30-50	10.2
50-70	17.5
Overall mpg	38.8
Touring mpg	54.0
mph/1000 rpm	20.3
Weight (kg)	740
Tested	13.11.91
Price now	£7995





# Citroen AX GTi



**For** Transformed handling, cabin and refinement  
**Against** Thirsty, slower than before, driving position

**Verdict** ★★★★★☆ Beaten only by the Peugeot 106 XSi

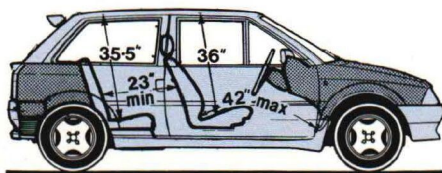
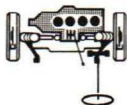
**T**he hottest AX of all may have had few changes on the outside — a new set of wheels, a redesigned hatch and a handful of badges being the biggest — but to drive it is completely different.

Citroen has answered criticism that the old AX was shoddily built by beefing up the body and adding a new interior while taking the time to tweak the suspension and, with the help of fuel injection, boost the engine's power from 85bhp to a round 100bhp.

The new engine's added power can't quite offset the AX GTi's extra weight, making it slightly slower than the old AX GT. Neither can it match the carb-fed engine's infectious enthusiasm for revs, resorting to coarseness long before its power peak. But where the GTi succeeds like never before is on the open road. The new suspension and fatter tyres have transformed the handling to the point where it vies with Peugeot's 106 XSi for the title of best-handling junior hot hatch in town.

The revamped cabin, cribbed from the ZX, is a big improvement, while the extra soundproofing is welcome on long journeys. Good value at £9995, the AX GTi is clearly worth a long hard look.

cc	1360
max bhp	100
max lb ft	90
max mph	114
0-60 (secs)	9.3
30-70	9.1
1/4 mile	17.1
30-50	8.4
50-70	12.7
Overall mpg	26.0
Touring mpg	41.2
mph/1000 rpm	18.5
Weight (kg)	820
Tested	189.91
Price now	£9995



# Citroen ZX Reflex D



**For** Performance, ride and handling, economy  
**Against** Offset steering wheel, poor seats, modest space

**Verdict** ★★★★★ Takes family diesels onto a new plane

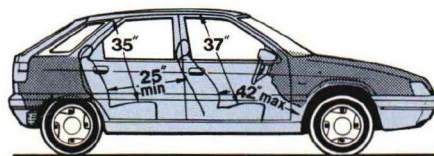
**T**ake a chassis that excels in suspension control, add an oil-burning engine that is as keen to provide performance as it is to avoid fill-ups, and you get Citroen's ZX diesel, a car that completely blitzes its opposition.

Composed and fluent through corners, able and willing to make road lumps and bumps just disappear, and ever eager to respond to your right foot, this ZX rewrites the diesel rule book. Why bother with petrol when you can enjoy the economy, cheaper fuel, reduced emissions and higher resale prices that oil-burners command? And, crucially, in the case of the ZX you don't have to suffer the noise and lethargy associated with owning a diesel. It is quiet at speed and the 71bhp engine is strong enough to keep you happy.

Equipment is reasonable at Reflex level with rear wash/wipe and folding rear seats standard, and the cabin benefits from some French flair and a build quality that won't disappoint. What might, though, is the offset steering wheel, poor lumbar support from the front seats and a lack of any real adult-sized space in the rear.

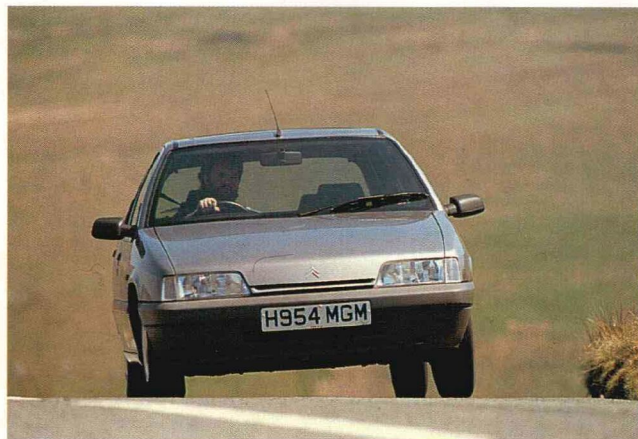
Be in no doubt, though: the ZX diesel is in a class of its own.

cc	1905
max bhp	71
max lb ft	90
max mph	97
0-60 (secs)	14.7
30-70	17.6
1/4 mile	20.7
30-50	10.4
50-70	20.0
Overall mpg	39.6
Touring mpg	47.7
mph/1000 rpm	23.0
Weight (kg)	1060
Tested	4.12.91
Price now	£9490





# Citroen ZX Avantage 1.4



**For** Punchy performance, excellent chassis, well packaged  
**Against** Bland styling

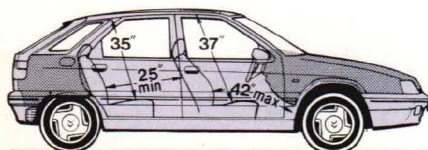
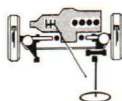
**Verdict** ★★★★★☆ Dull looks, dynamic flair

**T**he Citroen ZX Avantage is a great piece of unoriginal thinking. You'll look in vain for those quirky little touches and oddities that once made the French car maker's products so different. No, to all intents and purposes the new ZX is a simple and straightforward car. One with conservative and rather anonymous styling and conventional, steel-component suspension; one where the emphasis is on packaging, build quality and equipment levels rather than conspicuous flair and individualism.

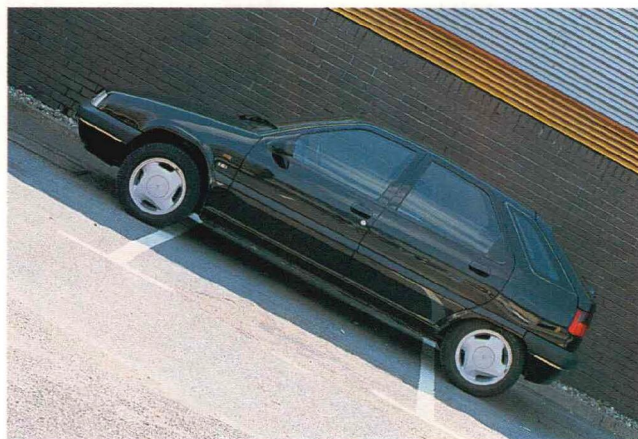
Its performance is brisk for a 1400 — 0-60mph in 11.9secs, 30-70mph in 12.5secs, 105mph flat out — and it combines this with a decent 26.5mpg overall. Where the ZX really shines, though, is in its ride and handling. Its steering is precise and communicative, grip good and cornering well balanced. Ride comfort is even better.

The cabin isn't particularly spacious but it does make good use of every available inch to provide adequate leg, shoulder and headroom for a quartet of adults. A good driving position loses marks for a slightly offset steering wheel and short seat cushion but control layout is fine. The ZX proves that ordinary needn't mean dull.

cc	1360
max bhp	75
max lb ft	85
max mph	105
0-60 (secs)	11.9
30-70	12.5
1/4 mile	18.7
30-50	9.4
50-70	14.7
Overall mpg	26.5
Touring mpg	41.3
mph/1000 rpm	20.6
Weight (kg)	1009
Tested	12.6.91
Price now	£9790



# Citroen ZX Aura 1.6



**For** Fine ride and handling, economical  
**Against** Harsh engine, gearchange

**Verdict** ★★★★★☆ An average engine in an excellent car

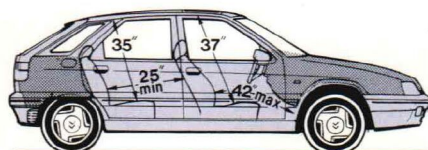
**T**he Aura's 1.6-litre engine lands it in the middle of the world-beating ZX range. Primary among its appeal is a sound and thoughtful basic design and build integrity that has taken a huge leap forward from the relative fragility historically expected of a French car maker.

And it has one of the most talented chassis in the business. Excellent suspension control provides big-car ride absorbency while succeeding in providing all the responses you'd wish for from many a more sporting hatch. Grip and turn-in are first class while the rear-wheel steer means your line through corners can be adjusted at will.

Citroen hasn't skimped on the equipment either, though the nicely trimmed cabin has only adequate space for a small family.

The only let down is the engine, which lacks the sparkle of the 1.4-litre Avantage unit and the bite of the 1.9-litre Volcane. Performance is only average and a coarse unpleasant drone towards the top of the rev range creates the impression that Citroen has concentrated so much on the rest of car that it has failed to bring the engine up to the same lofty standard.

cc	1580
max bhp	89
max lb ft	98
max mph	108
0-60 (secs)	11.5
30-70	12.1
1/4 mile	18.6
30-50	9.5
50-70	12.7
Overall mpg	29.1
Touring mpg	n/a
mph/1000 rpm	20.0
Weight (kg)	1044
Tested	11.9.91
Price now	£11,420





# Citroen ZX Volcane



**For** Value, handling, ride, styling, transmission, equipment  
**Against** Noisy on motorways, too thirsty

**Verdict** ★★★★★☆ Top of the class

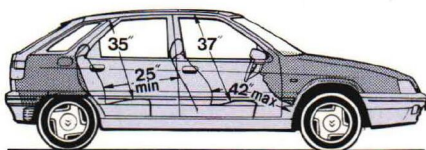
**T**he ZX Volcane is in the enviable position of sitting atop one of the best received new car ranges in modern times. We have conducted three group tests involving ZXs from the Reflex diesel through the 1.4-litre Avantage to the Volcane, and each time Citroen's hero pulverised the opposition.

Its not just that the Volcane's handling and ride are unsurpassed in its class. Nor is it because its chassis is in league with a fine engine and one of the slickest transmissions ever mated to a front-wheel-drive car. What strikes terror into the heart of every rival we've pitted against it is that it has all these talents yet is still one of the cheapest cars in its class. And it's not as if equipment has been sacrificed: alloy wheels, remote central locking, electric windows, mirrors and sunroof are all standard.

It has its faults though. Needlessly short gearing not only causes poor economy but also keeps engine revs and therefore noise levels too high for comfort on the motorway, while despite and ingenious sliding rear seat interior room is only average.

However, these gripes cannot cloud the fact that the ZX Volcane is not only brilliant, it's a bargain, too.

cc	1905
max bhp	130
max lb ft	118
max mph	124
0-60 (secs)	9.1
30-70	8.8
1/4 mile	17.1
30-50	6.6
50-70	9.3
Overall mpg	25.3
Touring mpg	31.0
mph/1000 rpm	19.9
Weight (kg)	1099
Tested	17.7.91
Price now	£12,670



# Citroen XM Turbo SD Estate



**For** Huge luggage capacity, performance, ride  
**Against** Lifeless steering, obstructive gearchange

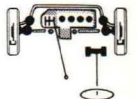
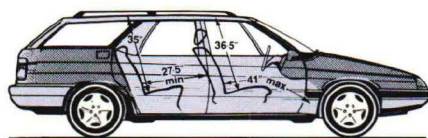
**Verdict** ★★★★★☆ Look out Volvo

**W**ith its rear seats in place the Citroen XM Turbo SD estate has the largest boot you can buy — 25.4cu ft of luggage space to be precise — and that's enough to beat established rivals like Volvo, Vauxhall and Mercedes. We decided to test the turbo diesel-powered variant (there's a V6 petrol-engined one, too) and were not disappointed by its performance. For a 1715kg car the big Citroen really moves; 0-60mph in 13.1secs, 30-70mph in 13.9secs and a top speed of 111mph.

We found it to be one of the best-riding estate cars too, thanks to its excellent hydropneumatic self-levelling suspension which also gives it the highest payload figure in its class (630kg). Neither does its handling deteriorate when fully loaded and when empty, the big Citroen offers plenty of grip, if not a lot of road information through its power-assisted steering.

Marketed as an executive estate, the XM's equipment list includes electric windows, mirrors and sunroof as standard. It's a fine return to the big estate car market for Citroen and one that should have the opposition worried. It's rather stylish, too.

cc	2088
max bhp	110
max lb ft	183
max mph	111
0-60 (secs)	13.1
30-70	13.9
1/4 mile	19.5
30-50	9.5
50-70	12.9
Overall mpg	32.0
Touring mpg	39.4
mph/1000 rpm	27.1
Weight (kg)	1715
Tested	1.1.92
Price now	£20,640





# Fiat Panda Selecta



**For** Compact, easy to drive  
**Against** Sluggish performance, choppy ride

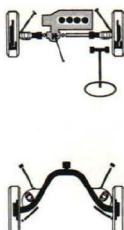
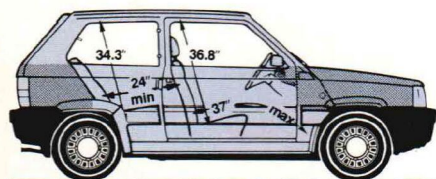
**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Urban minimalism gone too far

**I**MAGINE THE NEEDS OF the city car driver pared down to the bare minimum, and you'd probably be looking at a Fiat Panda Selecta. It's compact, easy to drive, seats four (just), and there's never a problem finding a parking slot big enough. And in Selecta form, the Panda gets an updated version of CVT auto transmission.

This CVT transmission is far smoother on drive take-up, thanks to a new type of electro-magnetic clutch. It is ideally suited to city traffic. At these slow speeds progress is both smooth and responsive, but venturing beyond city limits reveals a marked lethargy which makes overtaking a daunting prospect. With a one-litre engine and a tiny body, the Panda ought to perform more briskly, as it does in manual form. Economy is disappointing, too.

In its latest form, the Panda is reasonably quiet and refined for the class, although a choppy ride and soggy handling hamper its cause. The restrictive cabin and flawed driving position further spoil any chance of competing with newer designs. The Panda is an interesting experiment with its ECVT transmission, but falls short of the grade when set alongside many of the latest similar-priced superminis.

cc	999
max bhp	46
max lb ft	57
max mph	77
0-60 (secs)	19.2
30-70	27.9
1/4 mile	21.4
30-50	7.3
50-70	20.6
Overall mpg	31.2
Touring mpg	43.2
mph/1000 rpm	n/a
Weight (kg)	n/a
Tested	8.1.92
Price now	n/a



# Fiat Uno 1.4ie S



**For** Interior space, ride, adequate performance  
**Against** Handling, driving position

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Essentially sound but dated

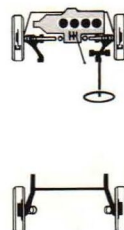
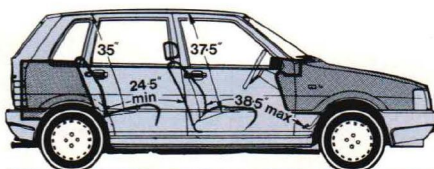
**T**HINGS CERTAINLY hotted up in the supermini class in 1991. The arrival of the Renault Clio and Peugeot 106 have made things extremely difficult for the older designs, none more so than Fiat's nine-year-old Uno. To keep the range on a competitive footing Fiat has added a fuel-injected, 1.4 litre, five-door Uno, fitted with a catalytic converter as standard.

Power output is still a healthy 71bhp which means the 1.4ie S never feels short of performance, although it doesn't have the engine response of its equivalent Rover Metro. A top speed of 102mph and 30-70mph through the gears in 13.2secs are good enough to be on the pace for the class.

The ride is quite acceptable too, and despite it being a little bouncy around town, it does the job of soaking up the large bumps well. It's over twisty roads that this Uno reveals its age. Such a soft ride is conducive to a lack of body control as well — things can feel seasick when pushing on.

The Uno's generous amount of interior space is its best feature but even that's compensated by a far from ideal driving position. Among such stiff opposition, it will remain a mid-field runner.

cc	1372
max bhp	71
max lb ft	80
max mph	102
0-60 (secs)	12.3
30-70	13.2
1/4 mile	18.8
30-50	10.4
50-70	14.9
Overall mpg	32.1
Touring mpg	35.7
mph/1000 rpm	20.0
Weight (kg)	n/a
Tested	24.7.91
Price now	£8950





# Fiat Tipo 1.8ie DGT SX



**For** Price, versatile and spacious interior  
**Against** Dull handling, mediocre performance

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Well equipped but off the pace

**T**he Fiat Tipo 1.8ie DGT SX was, for a short period of time, the fastest Tipo you could buy. By rights, this title should have been even shorter lived if it wasn't for the oft-delayed 16-valve car. Now it just claims to be the best equipped and most refined car in the range.

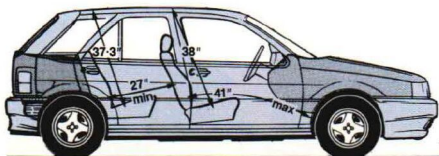
For £11,634, expect power-assisted steering, central locking, front electric windows and an electric sunroof but not the attractive alloy wheels pictured here. Still, that's a fine specification — the equivalent Vauxhall Astra SRi costs a comparatively pricey £12,750.

We liked the enthusiastic response of the twin cam, 1756cc engine but performance is only adequate and should be a whole lot better than the 1.9 turbo diesel Tipo, which gets embarrassingly close to the 1.8ie SX's figures.

The Tipo's chassis was our biggest disappointment. Even with its optional 185/60 tyres, understeer occurred too early and the steering lacked the feel a sporting car's should have.

Interior space and full five person accommodation are this Tipo's most attractive assets. The 1.8ie SX is a worthy addition to the range, if not a great one.

cc	1756
max bhp	110
max lb ft	105
max mph	120
0-60 (secs)	10.5
30-70	10.3
1/4 mile	17.9
30-50	8.6
50-70	13.4
Overall mpg	28.6
Touring mpg	32.7
mph/1000 rpm	19.5
Weight (kg)	1189
Tested	25.9.91
Price now	£11,634



# Fiat Tipo 16v



**For** Overall competence, mid-range response, value for money  
**Against** Flawed driving position, fiddly switchgear

**Verdict** ★★★★★ Fast, flattering and forgiving

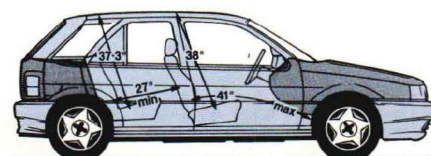
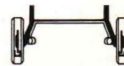
**I**t's been a long time coming — about three years — but the 16v Tipo has at last arrived and, furthermore, it was worth the wait. This much was proved when it scored a close win in our group test with the Vauxhall Astra GSi, Honda Civic VTi and the Ford RS 2000.

There is no single facet of brilliance to set the Tipo apart, but the key to its success is an overwhelmingly high degree of competence in every area together with a very few weaknesses. That can only add up to a winning formula.

From the fluent handling and well controlled ride to the roomy and practical cabin, it's a thoroughly well-sorted design. The engine is strong and responsive too, and the power is transmitted effectively by a chassis which combines decent grip with poise and communicative steering.

Faults or foibles? Well, the engine isn't quite as sparkling as some rivals, although its compensated for in its gutsy mid-range and delightfully encouraging note. The heavy clutch and slightly rubbery gearchange action, together with a slightly Italianate driving position, some clumsy switchgear, and a below-par heating system takes away some of the driver enjoyment. A strong package, nonetheless, and practical, too.

cc	1995
max bhp	148
max lb ft	131
max mph	128
0-60 (secs)	8.2
30-70	7.8
1/4 mile	16.3
30-50	7.3
50-70	10.4
Overall mpg	25
Touring mpg	28.3
mph/1000 rpm	19.8
Weight (kg)	1220
Tested	20.11.91
Price now	£13,949





# Fiat Croma 2.0ie SX



**For** Price, accommodation, improved build  
**Against** Driving position, handling

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Facelift doesn't hide fundamental flaws

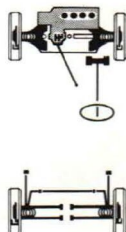
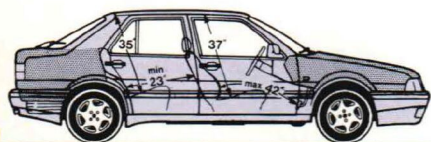
**T**he Croma was mildly facelifted in 1991 although only the keenest eye would notice the new family grille, smaller headlights and more steeply raked bonnet. Quite rightly, Fiat has concentrated its efforts on addressing the Croma's more fundamental weaknesses. For the 2.0ie SX we tested, these included using the iron block from the two-litre Lancia engine — complete with counter-rotating balancer shafts — and an all-new, rattle-free interior.

Both revisions are worthy: the twin-cam engine revs sweetly and develops 119bhp but any performance gains have been offset by a gain in weight — the 2.0ie SX is slightly slower than the model it replaces. The interior has a better looking, more rounded dash which is now much more solid.

But old flaws remain. An adjustable steering column and electric front seats can't disguise a long-in-the-arm, short-in-the-leg driving position and the power-assisted steering is lifeless. Neither has the stodgy handling been improved.

There's better news for passengers, who'll find plenty of leg and headroom. The boot is huge, too. But the Croma's lack of dynamism may be too much for some.

cc	1995
max bhp	119
max lb ft	122
max mph	120
0-60 (secs)	10.4
30-70	10.8
1/4 mile	17.9
30-50	12.7
50-70	17.2
Overall mpg	25.8
Touring mpg	34.6
mph/1000 rpm	24.1
Weight (kg)	1308
Tested	14.8.91
Price now	£15,695



# Ford Fiesta 1.0 Popular



**For** Quite refined, roomiest in class, good ride  
**Against** Very heavy steering, poor seating

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ More room than vroom

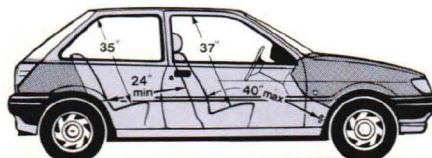
**L**ast year this was the cheapest Ford you could buy, but this year it's no longer available. That's a pity, because we liked the 1.0 Popular — enough for it to be placed second in a five-way test of the cheapest superminis.

The longest wheelbase in its class ensures the 1.0 Popular has excellent front and rear passenger space as well as a good sized boot — just what you need in a shopping car. The ergonomics are first-rate too, although the seats are rather slab-faced and offer little side support.

Providing its 999cc engine is not extended greatly the Fiesta is a pleasant companion in town, where it also rides very well indeed. The most striking flaw remains its appallingly low-g geared steering, which requires too much effort and makes parking a long-winded and tiresome affair.

Disregard this and the cheapest Fiesta has most of the fundamental ingredients essential to a town car. Sadly, though, it's just no fun to drive, and even among the most basic superminis that's a minus point — driver enjoyment is why we rate Rover's Metro so highly. Still, the Fiesta's excellent interior space and fine ride should suffice for most.

cc	999
max bhp	45
max lb ft	54
max mph	85
0-60 (secs)	19.9
30-70	28.5
1/4 mile	21.8
30-50	9.1
50-70	20.5
Overall mpg	35.3
Touring mpg	48.5
mph/1000 rpm	16.2
Weight (kg)	795
Tested	28.8.91
Price now	n/a





# Ford Escort 1.6 Ghia estate



**For** Rides and grips well, stylish, capacious cabin and boot  
**Against** Coarse engine, too expensive, inadequate seats

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Right car, wrong price

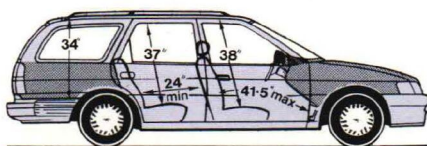
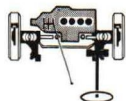
**E**state cars, sworn by design to be practical, don't usually get the chance to steal the thunder of their hatchback and saloon brethren. The Escort estate is different. With a longer wheelbase and wider track it not only carries off its role as a capacious estate with conviction, it also contrives to be more satisfying and pleasant to drive than other un-sporting Escorts and Orions.

True, many of the traits that made the Escort one of the worst received new cars in recent memory remain. The engine, in carburettor 1.6-litre form, is bland in the mid-range, coarse and unpleasant when extended. It provides barely adequate performance though economy is reasonable.

This Escort's strengths lie in other areas. It looks good and has a chassis that belies the poor standards set by its stablemates. Tricky, bumpy roads can be dispatched without effort and the steering, so long as you fork out for power assistance, is sensibly geared and well weighted.

The extra length and remarkably uncluttered load area mean large items are swallowed with ease. So if you need a small estate and can live with the engine and high price, this Escort is well worth a look.

cc	1597
max bhp	90
max lb ft	96
max mph	105
0-60 (secs)	12.3
30-70	12.3
1/4 mile	18.9
30-50	11.0
50-70	18.5
Overall mpg	27.8
Touring mpg	35.2
mph/1000 rpm	22.7
Weight (kg)	1114
Tested	3.4.91
Price now	£13,950



# Ford Escort RS2000



**For** Torquey engine, grip, gearchange, space  
**Against** Too expensive, noisy on motorways, poor steering feel

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Best fast Ford since the Sierra Cosworth

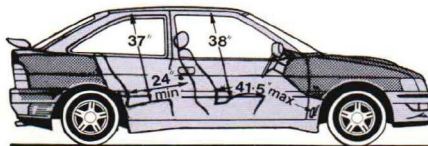
**T**o have only one serious criticism to level at a Ford Escort is not something were used to on this magazine. But it gives us great pleasure, especially as our gripe has nothing to do with the car's design. It's only the £16,495 price of the RS2000 that makes us gasp, and that was the main reason it lost a group test to the Fiat Tipo 16v, having convincingly seen off the Vauxhall Astra GSi 16v and Honda Civic VTi (20 November 1991).

Bolting a 16-valve, twin-cam cylinder head on to the I4 engine has resulted in a powerplant with vivid acceleration, a strong mid-range and minimal coarseness at peak revs. With it comes the new MTX75 gearbox, as quick and snappy as its predecessor was slow and slushy.

With beefed-up springs, dampers and anti-roll bars at each end, the RS2000 handles in a manner scarcely believable for an Escort. It flies through corners with iron suspension control, fine grip and a compliant ride. Only the lack of steering feel leaves the driver feeling a little short changed.

All the above combine with the usual Escort virtues of a roomy interior, clear instruments and fine ergonomics to make the RS2000 as easy to drive as it is satisfying.

cc	1998
max bhp	150
max lb ft	140
max mph	131
0-60 (secs)	8.3
30-70	7.8
1/4 mile	16.4
30-50	6.4
50-70	9.3
Overall mpg	26.4
Touring mpg	30.8
mph/1000 rpm	20.2
Weight (kg)	1124
Tested	2.10.91
Price now	£16,495





# Ford Orion 1.6i Ghia



**For** Secure handling, grip, economy  
**Against** Coarse engine, mediocre ride, poor seats

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Mediocre saloon with luxury pretensions

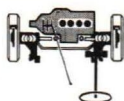
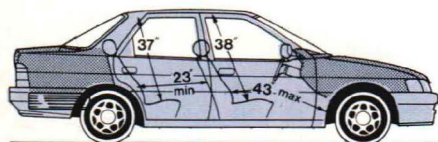
**T**he Orion Ghia had us puzzled when we tested it last May. How could a car of such modest ability and high price hope to compete against cheaper and conspicuously more talented opposition? We couldn't come up with an answer. These days, however, the price is almost £1000 less, and the Orion Ghia begins to make a little more sense.

Experience with our own long-term Orion has shown that it is well built, reliable and consumes little fuel. It's also reasonably well equipped apart from the omission of power steering as standard.

But it's all too easy to find areas where the Orion simply doesn't come up to scratch. The CVH engine is an obvious example. It is harsh and noisy, and the performance falls some way short of that of its arch-rival, the Rover 416 GSi.

In Ghia trim, the Orion is about as sporty as it gets, benefiting from uprated suspension and wide tyres. It grips tenaciously and handles competently but with a woolliness and a lack of subtlety in its responses. Too much thump and shake permeates the cabin on less smooth roads too, and the steering's lack of feel means the driver is denied any chance of enjoyment.

cc	1596
max bhp	108
max lb ft	104
max mph	119
0-60 (secs)	10.0
30-70	10.0
1/4 mile	17.6
30-50	9.9
50-70	15.1
Overall mpg	29.2
Touring mpg	33.7
mph/1000 rpm	22.8
Weight (kg)	1069
Tested	295.91
Price now	£12,450



# Ford Scorpio 24v



**For** Vastly improved engine, generous equipment, masses of space  
**Against** Tacky cabin, lifeless steering

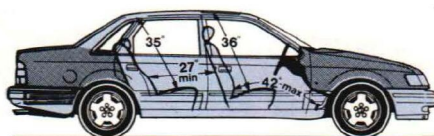
**Verdict** ★★★★★☆ Another fine fast Ford

**W**ith the full, four-cam, four-valve-per-cylinder Cosworth treatment for the Scorpio's V6 engine and with appropriate changes both to the suspension and brakes, the Scorpio 24v is lifted well clear of the standards set by its Granada bretheren. A third more power and a quarter more torque is just part of the story. Obviously this is enough to push performance up several notches but we were just as pleased to note how quiet and refined these modifications have made the engine.

The chassis is a reformed character, too. The handling is in a different league to lesser Granadas, but the steering still lacks feel and the ride is jittery over smaller bumps. It's the price paid for decent control at higher speeds and for strong grip from the bigger tyres.

No Scorpio driver has ever had cause to complain about the car's lack of equipment, but somehow the cabin, with a surfeit of fake wood and ruffled leather, misses the mark. At least the interior is extremely spacious. At last Ford has a large saloon with more than enough ability to take on the opposition on equal terms.

cc	2935
max bhp	195
max lb ft	203
max mph	136
0-60 (secs)	8.5
30-70	7.3
1/4 mile	16.6
30-50	2.9
50-70	4.4
Overall mpg	21.0
Touring mpg	23.2
mph/1000 rpm	25.5
Weight (kg)	1489
Tested	155.91
Price now	£28,370





# Honda NSX Auto



**For** Insuperable chassis competence  
**Against** Blunted performance, cumbersome gearshift

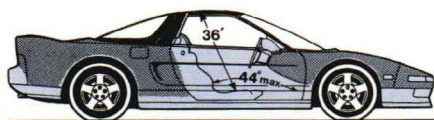
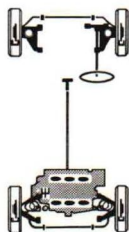
**Verdict** ★★★★★ Buy the manual version instead

**O**ur hearts were already won over by the prodigious talents of Honda's NSX long before we tried the auto version. We'd been impressed by the VTEC technology of the quad-cam V6 mid-mounted within a monocoque alloy body; we'd been wooed by the spine-tingling wail of the engine's note at 7000rpm and the breadth of its response. Then we were smitten by the numbingly effective chassis, able to provide such finesse, controllability and titanic grip, yet with fingertip control.

So when the time came to try the auto version a somewhat less than orderly queue formed on its arrival. But most who tried it came away disillusioned. Sure, the chassis remains as brilliant as ever, and the power steering developed for the auto works a treat, but a wholly conventional four-speed auto with a cumbersome shift action and no special tricks other than a lock-up in each gear means the driver feels short-changed, especially as the auto costs some £3000 more than the regular NSX.

But there's more to it than the loss of a clutch and a fifth gear. In auto form, the NSX also loses 19bhp and that glorious top sector of the rev band. Not a fair exchange.

cc	2977
max bhp	255
max lb ft	209
max mph	155
0-60 (secs)	6.8
30-70	5.7
1/4 mile	14.9
30-50	2.2
50-70	3.5
Overall mpg	18.3
Touring mpg	23.8
mph/1000 rpm	22.8
Weight (kg)	1369
Tested	119.91
Price now	£58,000



# Honda Civic 1.6i VT



**For** Great performance, fascinating engine, economy  
**Against** Jerky driveline, heavy steering

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Magnificent engine, moderate car

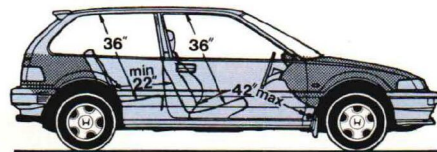
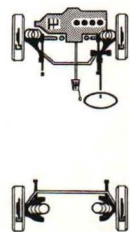
**N**ow superseded by a new shape car for 1992, we thought the old Civic 1.6i VT an uncompromising blend — a real enthusiast's car that requires unusual application to drive smoothly.

Powered by Honda's superbly engineered 1595cc VTEC engine, pumping out a pulse-quickening 150bhp at a sky-high 7600rpm, this car needs to be revved hard to give its best — there's only 106lb ft of torque, developed at an almost unbelievable 7100rpm. The engine's high-lift cam comes into effect at around 5500rpm with stunning results — a seemingly huge jump in power is accompanied by an exhaust note that goes from pleasant hot hatch fizz to quasi race-car blare. Surprisingly, fuel economy is very good for such a sporty engine — expect 30mpg.

But the unassisted steering — excellent at speed but much too heavy around town — is a disappointment. Annoying, too, is the abrupt clutch action and jerky driveline.

Passenger space is good but the boot is quite small. In this respect, the 1.6i VT fails as a truly versatile all-rounder, but for those who desire a state of the art engine with race-car responses it's just the ticket.

cc	1595
max bhp	150
max lb ft	106
max mph	127
0-60 (secs)	7.6
30-70	7.2
1/4 mile	16.1
30-50	7.0
50-70	10.9
Overall mpg	30.0
Touring mpg	36.3
mph/1000 rpm	18.7
Weight (kg)	1038
Tested	203.91
Price now	n/a





# Honda Civic 1.6 VTi



**For** Exuberant engine, well-balanced chassis, high fun quotient  
**Against** Shabby interior, poor space efficiency

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Effervescent hot hatch

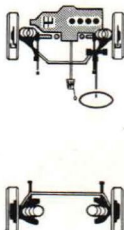
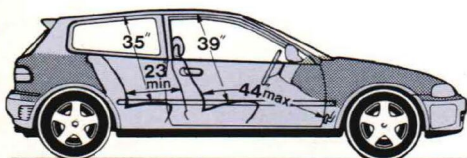
**B**igger, beefier, better looking and with an engine right at the cutting edge of volume-production technology, Honda's latest sporting Civic VTi just can't be ignored.

A specific power output of 99bhp per litre spells 158bhp from the 1.6-litre VTEC engine, enough to create a whimper of discontent among a good many fast hatches in the two-litre class. It's cheaper than many of them, too.

That it's quick is never in doubt, but finding the power involves a good deal of gearstick stirring to stay within the top sector of the revcounter. Keep the needle above 5000rpm and this jewel of an engine will keep you thoroughly amused for hours as it zips up to beyond a scalp-tingling 8000rpm time and again. There's crisp steering, fine poise and adjustability and a tolerably absorbent ride, too.

But when the fun has to stop, the VTi does have its downside. There's little room for rear passengers, and the interior as a whole suffers from a low-rent feel in contrast to the slickness of the overall engineering and controls. For sheer fun and zest, the VTi has much to recommend it but, like other Civics, it fails as a family car.

cc	1595
max bhp	158
max lb ft	111
max mph	132
0-60 (secs)	7.3
30-70	7.0
1/4 mile	15.8
30-50	6.7
50-70	9.8
Overall mpg	26.9
Touring mpg	35.8
mph/1000 rpm	18.0
Weight (kg)	1080
Tested	20.11.91
Price now	£14,495



# Honda Civic LSi



**For** Strong and willing engine, agile handling, fine styling  
**Against** Cramped in the back, silly tailgate, a little noisy at speed

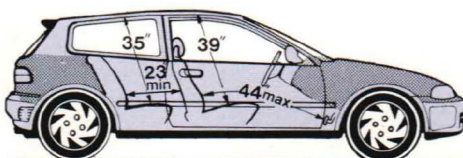
**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Good in theory, compromised in practice

**H**onda is not in the business of building cars that meet as wide a range of class averages as possible to appeal to a similarly wide range of buyers. Honda builds cars for individuals. It also makes sporting cars and is more than prepared to compromise other, static areas of design in this pursuit. So, if you expect the LSi to be a hold-all hatch, you're heading for a fall. It's cramped in the rear and the two-piece tailgate and small boot make carrying shopping a chore.

On the other hand, we can't think of another 1.5-litre, cooking hatchback that's half as much fun to drive as the Civic. In LSi form you miss out on Honda's VTEC trickery but still benefit from a strong and enthusiastic engine that revs to 7000rpm with a deal more alacrity than many 'hot' hatches. It also handles superbly, displaying the kind of balance that lets you trim your lines through corners with the throttle alone. It can also return some impressive fuel economy results when asked.

But the bland cabin only adds to the feeling that the LSi is outstandingly capable in some areas, infuriatingly flawed in others. It will only prove satisfying for those with extremely well-defined priorities.

cc	1493
max bhp	90
max lb ft	88
max mph	107
0-60 (secs)	10.9
30-70	11.7
1/4 mile	18.0
30-50	10.0
50-70	16.4
Overall mpg	29.1
Touring mpg	37.2
mph/1000 rpm	20.6
Weight (kg)	979
Tested	8.1.92
Price now	£10,795





# Honda Civic VEi



**For** Economy, throttle response, great fun to drive  
**Against** Minimal equipment, expensive

**Verdict** ★☆☆☆☆ Wholly convincing apart from the price

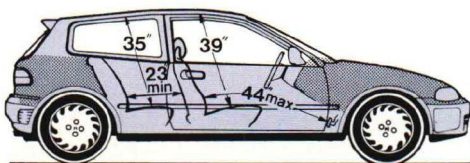
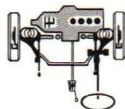
**H**onda's faith in its Variable Valve Timing and lift Electronic Control (VTEC) has never been stronger. And to prove that it's a system that can do more than produce improbable power outputs from comparatively tiny engines, Honda has now turned VTEC's attentions to matters of economy.

The result is this Civic VEi, which goes one step beyond altering the timing and lift of its valves to cutting one off altogether at low revs. Thus, below 2500rpm, the VEi uses just three of its four valves per cylinder. The results of this technology vary from merely good to bamboozling. You may not be impressed to learn that the VEi is 4.3 per cent more economical on a cross-country run than the VTEC-free but otherwise similar LSi, but it's 12.1 per cent more frugal on the motorway, a figure which rises to an amazing 20 per cent in town.

On top of this the VEi's engine shares the more sporting traits of the VTEC family — a super-sharp throttle response and tingling howl from the exhaust.

It's not all good news, though. The VEi is expensive even though equipment, bar a standard airbag, is pared to the bone.

cc	1493
max bhp	90
max lb ft	95
max mph	195
0-60 (secs)	11.2
30-70	12.1
1/4 mile	17.8
30-50	12.0
50-70	20.5
Overall mpg	31.9
Touring mpg	46.1
mpg/1000 rpm	23.6
Weight (kg)	946
Tested	8.1.92
Price now	£11,750



# Honda Concerto 1.5i



**For** Sweet engine, well built, well equipped  
**Against** Bland interior, dull to drive, lifeless steering

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Overshadowed by Rover's 214

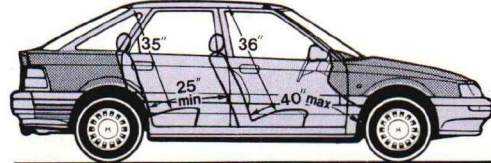
**I**t's a well-kept secret, but Honda's Concerto is substantially British. The body is assembled at Longbridge alongside the Rover 200, with which it shares its basic design, and the 16-valve engine is built at Honda's Swindon plant. It's a factor which should help generate sales, but the truth is that everyone's been so bowled over by its Rover-badged counterpart that the Concerto trails forgotten in its wake.

Yet there's no doubting the Honda's worth within its sector. The cat-equipped engine is sweet and free-revving, and with its carefully judged gearing it delivers strong performance. The chassis is capable too, with a fair level of comfort and a general air of competence.

But although it attacks the corners keenly enough, the Concerto is no driver's car. The steering, assisted as standard, is the main culprit. Mid-corner bumps jolt the wheel, it is devoid of communication, lacks precision, and poor self-centring makes constant corrections of line necessary.

The characterless interior with its drab and cheap-looking fabrics could stand improvement too, although the facia, controls and the driving position are fine. So nearly an excellent car.

cc	1493
max bhp	89
max lb ft	87
max mph	103
0-60 (secs)	11.8
30-70	12.1
1/4 mile	18.6
30-50	10.0
50-70	16.5
Overall mpg	27.5
Touring mpg	34.3
mpg/1000 rpm	19.4
Weight (kg)	1064
Tested	21.8.91
Price now	£11,145





# Honda Legend



**For** Exceptional ergonomics, performance, build, refinement  
**Against** Low-speed ride, cramped in the back, gearchange

**Verdict** ★★★★★☆ Sports saloon and luxury express in one

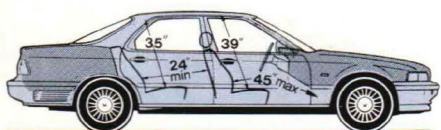
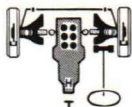
**F**orget the old Rover 800-series clone. This new Legend shares its name and nothing else. The V6 engine is half a litre larger, installed longitudinally and the Legend is a firm member of the 200bhp and over club of exalted sports saloons, where it rubs shoulders with the four-litre Jaguar XJ6 and the 24-valve versions of the Vauxhall Senator and Ford Scorpio. It's also faster than all of these, reaching 60mph in 8.2secs and 141mph.

At high speeds it is exceptionally effective. Noise levels are minimal, the all-wishbone suspension's composure over motorway undulations is unflappable and the driver's environment, ranging from the perfect driving position to near-flawless ergonomics, vies with BMW's.

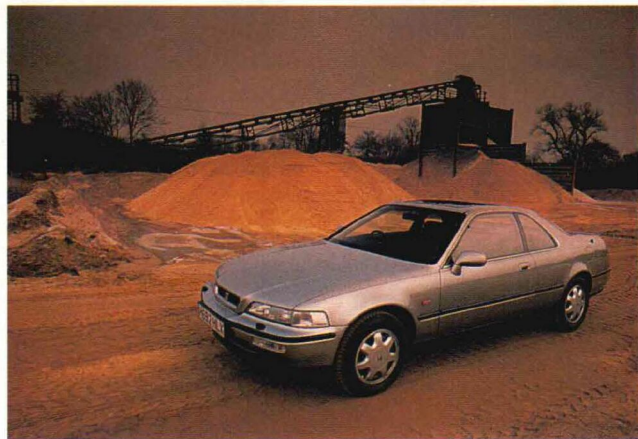
Yet the Legend is not an utterly convincing package. Around town, for instance, the gearbox is too jerky and the ride too lumpy for the luxury image it tries to convey. There is too little room in the back for a growing family and the blend of leather and wood still looks contrived.

Nevertheless it proves to be a likeable and worthy alternative to its more familiar rivals and, if kept on the open road, provides capable and rewarding transport.

cc	3206
max bhp	205
max lb ft	216
max mph	141
0-60 (secs)	8.2
30-70	7.0
1/4 mile	16.5
30-50	2.9
50-70	4.1
Overall mpg	19.1
Touring mpg	25.2
mph/1000 rpm	25.6
Weight (kg)	1610
Tested	19.6.91
Price now	£27,695



# Honda Legend Coupe



**For** Gutsy but smooth engine, refinement, generously equipped  
**Against** Lumpy low-speed ride, high price

**Verdict** ★★★★★☆ Well-equipped 140mph coupe

**L**ower, leaner and more costly than its saloon counterpart, the finely engineered Legend Coupe has few weaknesses and a glut of talent.

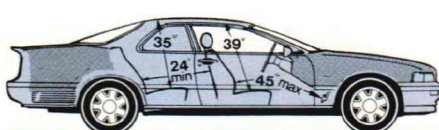
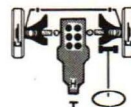
One of its greatest assets is the 3.2-litre V6 engine. It has a broad tract of easily accessible torque, with a depth and responsiveness that belies the car's weight and bulk.

It delivers its power with one silken shove though, like its four-door brother, often has its progress interrupted by a jerky change from the gearbox. For long-distance travel, the Legend is as effective as it is refined. High speed cruising is quiet and comfortable, but at lower speeds a certain lumpiness and an inability fully to absorb the sharper surface imperfections results in the odd shake and shudder through the structure. It handles neatly and crisply until the going gets too tight and twisty.

It's on an extended drive where the well-designed and extravagantly equipped cabin shows its effectiveness. Space, however, is not one of the Legend's strongest points, making this a car best suited to two people.

Overall it is a thoroughly capable and well-engineered coupe, but perhaps lacking that indefinable quality which separates the inspired from the merely good.

cc	3206
max bhp	205
max lb ft	216
max mph	141
0-60 (secs)	8.1
30-70	6.8
1/4 mile	16.3
30-50	2.8
50-70	4.0
Overall mpg	21.5
Touring mpg	25.2
mph/1000 rpm	25.6
Weight (kg)	1560
Tested	5.2.92
Price now	£29,695





# Hyundai Lantra 1.6 Cdi



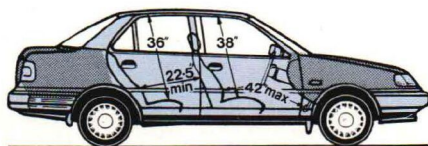
**For** Solidly constructed, comfortable and spacious, well equipped  
**Against** Noisy, could be quicker, poor damping

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Deserves to be taken seriously

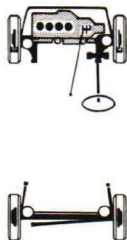
**N**ow, more than ever, Hyundai deserves to be taken seriously. Since 1989 it has produced the X2 hatchback, the S coupe and the Sonata where once it only had the Stellar and Pony. True, none of these are class-crumbly able, but neither are they lame, rudimentary transport like their predecessors.

And now Hyundai has the Lantra. Powered by its own, albeit Mitsubishi-derived, twin-cam 16-valve engine, it comes packed with ability and appeal. Nor has this achievement meant Hyundai has had to sacrifice its traditional strong selling suit: price. £11,498 for the range-topping Cdi represents extremely good value, especially if you consider its level of standard equipment which, for the first time on a car in this class, includes air conditioning.

Dynamically the Lantra concentrates on providing its occupants with comfort first, performance and handling prowess second. Hence, while many cars in its class will comfortably outrun the Lantra and entertain the driver more in the corners, few can match its soft suspension's control over motorway undulations. Build quality and interior accommodation are also excellent.



cc	1596
max bhp	112
max lb ft	103
max mph	110
0-60 (secs)	10.9
30-70	11.1
1/4 mile	18.1
30-50	9.6
50-70	15.3
Overall mpg	27.1
Touring mpg	31.9
mph/1000 rpm	18.9
Weight (kg)	1110
Tested	3.7.91
Price now	£11,498



# Jaguar XJS 4.0 auto



**For** Refinement, improved chassis and build quality  
**Against** Indifferent performance, meagre space

**Verdict** ★★★★★ A smarter, better XJS

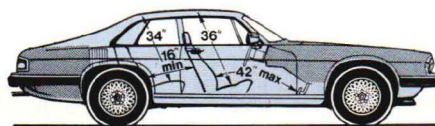
**J**aguar shelled out £50 million to facelift the XJS and, on first acquaintance, it's hard to see where all the money went. Apart from a fairly perfunctory nose and tail job, Jaguar's ageing coupe looks little changed.

You have to get in closer than that, though. The package of changes is wide-ranging and includes a revamped cabin with new seats and instruments and the adoption of the four-litre AJ6 engine in place of the 3.6.

On the whole the money has been well spent, but the performance is disappointing with the top speed improved only slightly from 134 to 136mph. Acceleration is significantly worse, 0-60mph taking 8.7secs against the 3.6's 7.8secs. But the bigger engine feels smooth and lusty, works well with the ZF four-speeder and gives over 20mpg on a long run.

The chassis feels tauter and more responsive than before and the ride is free from float, if slightly less supple over small bumps. Best news of all, though, is the revamped cabin which, as well as being more comfortable and convenient, looks a whole lot better, too, though the driving position still isn't good for the tall or large. Even so, this is the strongest XJS yet.

cc	3980
max bhp	223
max lb ft	278
max mph	136
0-60 (secs)	8.7
30-70	7.7
1/4 mile	16.7
30-50	3.2
50-70	4.5
Overall mpg	18.8
Touring mpg	24.6
mph/1000 rpm	29.1
Weight (kg)	1612
Tested	4.9.91
Price now	£33,400





# Jaguar V12



**For** Timeless elegance, low-speed ride, innate good taste  
**Against** Disappointing performance, refinement, woolly handling

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Off the pace but still charming

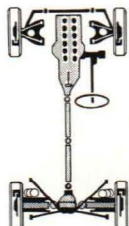
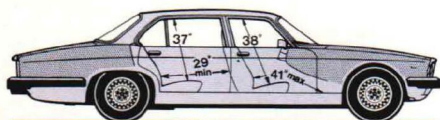
In an era of technological paragons such as the Lexus and Mercedes S-class, it is easy to forget that, not so long ago, the Jaguar V12 was the very essence of all that was desirable in luxury motoring. Its great subtlety and craftsmanship were wrapped up in one of the sleekest and most beautiful saloon bodies ever conceived.

The great shame is that the passage of time appears to have taken its toll. The inescapable truth was rammed home when the venerable Jag lined up alongside its high-tech peers in last year's 'world's best car' showdown and was blown away. Not least against the clock. Suffice to say that a top speed of 138mph, 0-60mph in 9.4secs and a 15.2mpg thirst isn't too hot for 5.3 litres.

But it wasn't just lack of pace that let it down. The mighty V12 simply couldn't live with its younger rivals. Once the world's greatest production engine, it couldn't muster the old magic. The serenity and effortlessness have been replaced by sluggishness and a perceptible sense of strain.

Yet there's still Jaguar's innate restraint, good taste and grace. It's a beautiful car. For some, that will always be enough.

cc	5345
max bhp	264
max lb ft	283
max mph	138
0-60 (secs)	9.4
30-70	8.0
1/4 mile	17.3
30-50	3.5
50-70	4.5
Overall mpg	15.2
Touring mpg	n/a
mph/1000 rpm	26.9
Weight (kg)	n/a
Tested	31.7.91
Price now	£39,340



# Kia Pride 1.3 LX



**For** Price, equipment, performance, interior space  
**Against** Bouncy ride, dated looks, silly tyres

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Pleasant Mazda clone

The Korean Kia Pride is essentially a repackaged old-shape Mazda 121 from Britain's newest importer. It impressed us no end. The five-door 1.3 LX we tested has the interior space to match a Ford Fiesta and a standard equipment list long enough to embarrass all its established supermini rivals — all for £6799.

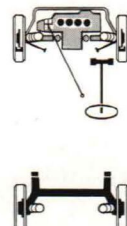
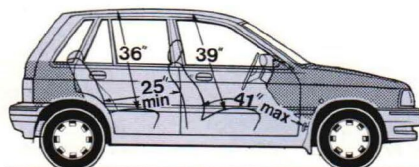
On top of that, it is surprisingly swift. Despite its six-year-old shape, the Kia can still crack 90mph and its in-gear performance should leave no cause for worry. Overall fuel consumption of 33.0mpg is on the pace as well.

It all sounds too good to be true, but one ride in the Kia shows it to lack the damping control of its more expensive rivals. The bouncy ride is annoying and bumps instantly recoil through the little car's body.

Reconstituted Mazda though it is, anyone thumbing the brochures in search of a small hatchback will look long and hard at the fine specification it offers.

Perhaps its biggest problem is a lack of image. It looks dated and its whitewall tyres are a throwback to the '50s, but value for money never goes out of style and that's what the Kia Pride is all about.

cc	1324
max bhp	60
max lb ft	87
max mph	92
0-60 (secs)	12.8
30-70	14.3
1/4 mile	19.1
30-50	11.2
50-70	21.6
Overall mpg	33
Touring mpg	42.2
mph/1000 rpm	23.6
Weight (kg)	810
Tested	10.7.91
Price now	£6799





# Lancia Dedra 2000 Turbo



**For** Entertaining engine, tenacious grip  
**Against** Harsh ride, dull handling, odd driving

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Italian stallion

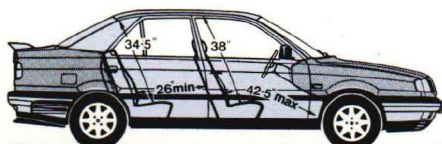
If you happen to spot a Dedra Turbo looming large in the rear-view mirror, it may not be too long before you watch it disappear ahead of you; ample reserves of mid-range punch give it giant-killing overtaking response. Clever electronic engine management and close gear ratios mean you rarely find yourself having to look for power, although turbo lag has by no means been eliminated.

Grip is tenacious; there is no doubting the Dedra Turbo's ability through the twisty bits. It is quick and secure, sometimes agile, but the distinctly inert steering dulls the handling when really pressing on. The brakes seem inconsistent, too, and the gearchange can be slightly obstructive until warmed up.

On the motorway, the Dedra Turbo is in its element. Here, engine and wind noise are restrained and the ride is far smoother than it is around town, where it can deteriorate quite badly to shake and shudder over ridges and pits.

But the cabin has a flawed driving position and an old-fashioned facia, which contribute to the overall impression that the Dedra is too uneven in its abilities to pose a really serious challenge to the class-leading 3-series BMW.

cc	1995
max bhp	165
max lb ft	201
max mph	132
0-60 (secs)	7.4
30-70	7.0
1/4 mile	15.9
30-50	6.4
50-70	6.2
Overall mpg	22.1
Touring mpg	28.0
mph/1000 rpm	22.5
Weight (kg)	1330
Tested	5.6.91
Price now	£18,034



# Mazda 323 1.8 GT



**For** Agile handling, gutsy engine, sporty character  
**Against** Harsh ride, sombre cabin

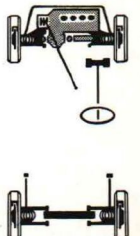
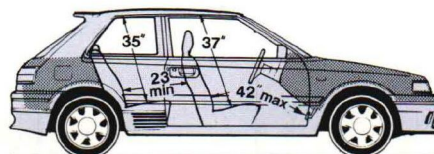
**Verdict** ★★★★★ Another winner from Mazda

The Mazda 323 GT not only looks great with its wheel-at-each-corner styling and purposeful stance, but is also every bit as fast and capable as its looks suggest. The responsive 140bhp engine might have an indulgently gruff rasp and a hint of mechanical coarseness as it approaches the red line, but it is still one of the most satisfyingly punchy power units in its class. Coupled with a close-ratio gearbox with a sweet and light action, it has a heart of solid gold.

The Mazda doesn't handle quite as crisply as the benchmark Peugeot 205 GTi, but it's not far behind. Scalpel-sharp turn-in, a neutral balance that is easily adjusted, strong grip, powerful brakes and roll-free cornering all work in harmony to produce a car that is quick and entertaining. Unfortunately, you pay the price when it comes to ride quality, which has a stiff, unyielding feel.

The 323 GT is nicely finished with a reassuringly solid feel to it. The cabin, a touch too sombre for some, has all the important bits right. The control positioning is good, the seats are supportive and the instruments are clear. In all, it is an enjoyable and worthy alternative hot hatch.

cc	1840
max bhp	140
max lb ft	121
max mph	120
0-60 (secs)	7.8
30-70	7.6
1/4 mile	16.3
30-50	6.8
50-70	9.6
Overall mpg	28.5
Touring mpg	30.4
mph/1000 rpm	19.3
Weight (kg)	1039
Tested	27.3.91
Price now	£12,599





# Mazda MX-3 1.6 auto



**For** Good chassis, ride quality, looks  
**Against** Lethargic performance, jerky transmission

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Sheep in wolf's clothing

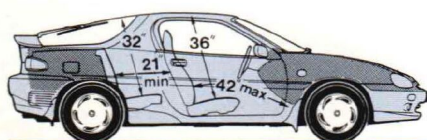
If the gap in the market for the MX-3 V6 is small, it's a positively minute one that the MX-3 1.6 automatic is hoping to fill. We couldn't understand the logic behind putting the engine and four-speed auto from the humdrum 323 1.6i into the little coupe's lithe body, less so after a trip to the test track.

The MX-3 is far too slow. A top speed of 101mph and a sprint to 60mph in 13.4secs make it the easiest of meat for any predatory hot hatch and even some of the 1.3 and 1.4-litre shopping cars. Neither does the gearbox go about its business in a satisfactory way — it's reasonably smooth on part-throttle changes but unacceptably jerky when kicking down through the 'box.

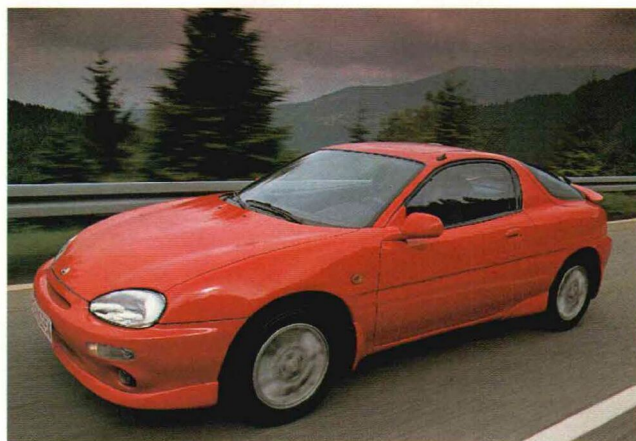
A beautifully sorted chassis does give it the ability to entertain, though. Provided you don't expect too much grip or the pin-sharp responses of the V6-engined car, the 1.6 auto offers some entertainment on favourite roads, thanks in no small part to its well-judged power-assisted steering.

In line with its shopping car performance, the MX-3 auto has plenty of space for the weekly groceries under its glassy hatch. And the supermarket car park is where it should stay, because as a sports coupe it is a definite failure.

cc	1598
max bhp	88
max lb ft	99
max mph	101
0-60 (secs)	13.4
30-70	14.3
1/4 mile	19.6
30-50	5.2
50-70	9.1
Overall mpg	27.9
Touring mpg	33.5
mph/1000 rpm	25.2
Weight (kg)	1090
Tested	15.1.92
Price now	£13,449



# Mazda MX-3 V6



**For** Nimble chassis, supple ride, smooth engine  
**Against** Lacks pace, dull cabin, road noise

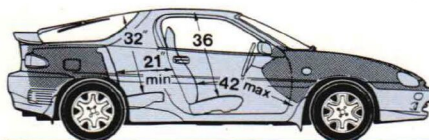
**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Fascinating alternative GTi

Mazda's style of doing things is sometimes unpredictable, often visionary. Witness the excellent MX-5. With the MX-3, Mazda is hoping its coupe will shake up the hot hatch establishment, at least in terms of redefining the concept.

With its enticing specification, diverting looks and a fresh design concept aimed at combining sporty handling with four seats and hatchback versatility, the MX-3 seeks to attract buyers away from more conventional fast hatchbacks, and it is priced accordingly. Where you might expect a twin-cam four, Mazda opts for a high-tech four-cam V6, yet, surprisingly, where you might expect a similarly lofty power output, disappointment is in store.

It doesn't take long to discover the MX-3's strengths. Not least is the uncanny engine smoothness and refinement, together with a free-revving exuberance that's a real pleasure to explore. There's further enjoyment to be found in the handling balance, crisp and accurate steering, fine brakes and slick gearbox. It's just a shame that the cabin lacks the inspiration that characterises the remainder of the car.

cc	1845
max bhp	134
max lb ft	118
max mph	124
0-60 (secs)	8.9
30-70	8.9
1/4 mile	16.9
30-50	7.6
50-70	10.1
Overall mpg	25.0
Touring mpg	29.6
mph/1000 rpm	18.8
Weight (kg)	1111
Tested	21.8.91
Price now	£15,449





# Mercedes-Benz 200E



**For** Build integrity, image, fine chassis  
**Against** Lacks power, spartan cabin

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Underpowered, ill-equipped quality saloon

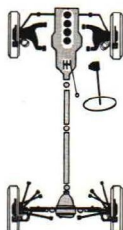
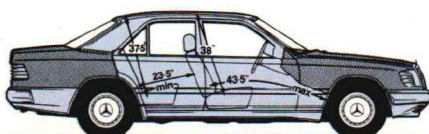
**M**id-size Mercedes saloons have the sort of reputation for quality that most other manufacturers would kill for, and that's as evident in the lowly models as with more exalted models.

But although the product is built as tough as you'd expect and engineered with a thoroughness that borders on the obsessive, the 200E is priced way above its specification. Basic items expected as standard, such as power windows and a radio, are to be found only on the options list.

It trails behind in engine power, too, further emphasised by long gearing and wide ratios in manual form, leading to poor low and mid-range punch.

The good news is that the engine is beautifully refined, and what power there is can be fully exploited by a chassis of immense competence. Tight control of damping, together with precise and communicative steering, spells driver confidence and allows safe cornering with commitment and security. However, an underlying firmness, together with the hard seats, means that the ride is intolerant of small bumps.

cc	1997
max bhp	118
max lb ft	127
max mph	119
0-60 (secs)	11.9
30-70	12.6
1/4 mile	18.6
30-50	7.6
50-70	11.0
Overall mpg	24.2
Touring mpg	30.2
mph/1000 rpm	25.7
Weight (kg)	1341
Tested	13.11.91
Price now	£20,740



# Mercedes-Benz 500E



**For** Power, ride, build quality  
**Against** Price, left-hand drive only

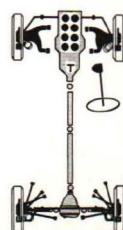
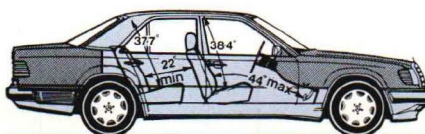
**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Awesome ability, but not for the UK

**M**ercedes' super saloon has the BMW M5 right in its sights. Out of the German companies' rivalry comes this W124 body packed with a 326bhp V8 (capable of mustering 354lb ft of torque), bigger wheelarches, fatter tyres and a steering wheel on the left only. Apart from that, you'd be hard pushed to pick out this car from its lesser brethren — until you floor the throttle. You rocket from rest to 60mph in just over six seconds, cover the 30-50mph gap in just over two and barrel up to the artificially limited 156mph with ease.

Despite wads of torque, low-rev response can be disappointing, but the close-ratio four-speed 'box will shift you into the powerband with barely a murmur. The ride is comfortable around town, yet the chassis is still capable of handling high-speed corners. Progress in the dry can be marred by the intrusive ASR traction control system, but it becomes necessary in the wet as the Dunlop D40s quickly lose grip.

Its superb engine and excellent build quality are overshadowed by high price, lack of right-hand drive and a traction system not suited to our tighter, wetter roads.

cc	4973
max bhp	326
max lb ft	354
max mph	156
0-60 (secs)	6.6
30-70	5.4
1/4 mile	14.7
30-50	2.3
50-70	3.1
Overall mpg	16.5
Touring mpg	19.5
mph/1000 rpm	26.4
Weight (kg)	1730
Tested	21.9.91
Price now	£59,140





# Mercedes-Benz 400SE



**For** Refinement, cabin ambience, build integrity, chassis capability  
**Against** Too heavy, thirsty, insufficiently equipped

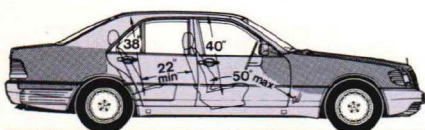
**Verdict** ★★★★★☆ The pinnacle of luxury motoring – almost

**M**ercedes makes no secret of the fact that the S-class was conceived to be the best luxury car in the world. That may well be true of the top-level 600SEL with its powerful V12 engine, but the 400SE is another matter. Compared with its predecessor, the V8-engined 400SE not only costs a third more but is almost half a tonne heavier. Even so, the 400SE rarely feels short of urge, and the 144mph top speed and 30-70mph time of 7.2secs prove it is no sluggard. Fuel consumption, though, is plain frightening.

But the big Benz is supreme champion of the refinement race. The double-glazed quietness and the sheer luxury are breathtaking, and few people will need the long-wheelbase version because there is more than enough room in the front and rear. As with all big Mercedes, the 400SE lacks the luxury equipment normally taken for granted in a car worth half as much.

Few cars, let alone huge limousines, handle as well as the 420SE, while its ride is exceptional. It all goes to prove that, after too many years away, the S-class Mercedes is once again the big car to beat.

cc	4196
max bhp	286
max lb ft	302
max mph	144
0-60 (secs)	8.4
30-70	7.2
1/4 mile	16.5
30-50	2.9
50-70	4.2
Overall mpg	14.6
Touring mpg	20.3
mph/1000 rpm	27.7
Weight (kg)	2120
Tested	11.12.91
Price now	£53,450



# Mercedes-Benz 600SEL



**For** Awesome performance, sports car handling, accommodation  
**Against** Offset steering wheel

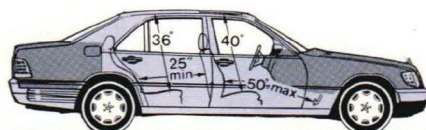
**Verdict** ★★★★★ The best luxury car in the world

**T**he 17ft-long Mercedes 600SEL, with its 408bhp six-litre V12, seeks not only to be the best car in the world but also to alter people's perception of how good a car can be. Mercedes knew that plain over-engineering wouldn't be enough in this endeavour. Its new standard-bearer had to be bigger because people are growing taller, quieter because noise is the true enemy of luxury. Faster and more agile, too, because without a combination of these virtues you can't build a genuinely safe car.

And without spending a great deal of money you can't do any of these things. The £1 billion research and development costs were money well used. When the big S-class took on the Lexus and the best from BMW and Jaguar in last year's most expensive group test, it simply clobbered them, combining supercar performance with standards of handling/ride, space, comfort and overall refinement that have no precedent in the big saloon sector.

But to suggest that it is perfect would be wrong. The only real success of the styling is to disguise the size, the ride doesn't cope too well with certain bumps, and for the price of a house it ought to be terrific. It is.

cc	5987
max bhp	408
max lb ft	427
max mph	159
0-60 (secs)	6.7
30-70	5.4
1/4 mile	15.1
30-50	2.2
50-70	3.2
Overall mpg	15.5
Touring mpg	16.8
mph/1000 rpm	29.5
Weight (kg)	2300
Tested	31.7.91
Price now	£89,600





# Mitsubishi Colt 1800 GTi 16v



**For** Fine grip, free-revving engine  
**Against** Lacks equipment, dowdy cabin

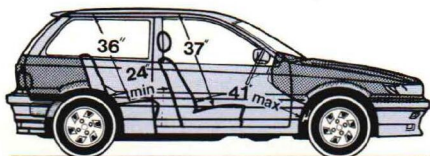
**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ A solid, if unexceptional performer

**B**ig wheels, a low front spoiler and the all-important red striping identifies this as the sporting model in the Colt range. And with tremendous grip and a sweet but vigorous 134bhp engine that is eager to rev to its 7000rpm red line, there's no denying that the Colt GTi 16v means business. The effervescent performance is sufficient to give the Peugeot 205 GTi 1.9 a run for its money, but even when worked hard the twin-cam powerplant never loses its composure.

The Colt's chassis might not be quite as well balanced as some, but it still holds its own well enough and there's compensation in the form of the light and delightfully direct steering, which turns the car crisply and accurately. The suspension proves to be intolerant of small bumps and can be firm and harsh around town, but otherwise it is acceptably pliant and well controlled. The brakes are fine, but the ultra-light gearchange has a slightly remote feel.

The only major criticism is the cabin. The interior styling and equipment level simply don't do the car justice. That said, the driving position, seats and controls are hard to fault.

cc	1836
max bhp	134
max lb ft	119
max mph	118
0-60 (secs)	8.3
30-70	7.8
1/4 mile	16.5
30-50	6.9
50-70	10.3
Overall mpg	26.9
Touring mpg	31.8
mph/1000 rpm	19.3
Weight (kg)	1071
Tested	27.3.91
Price now	£11,789



# Mitsubishi Shogun V6 LWB



**For** Refinement, versatile four-wheel drive system, equipment  
**Against** Needs more power, plasticky interior

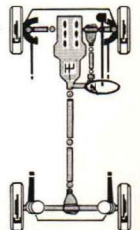
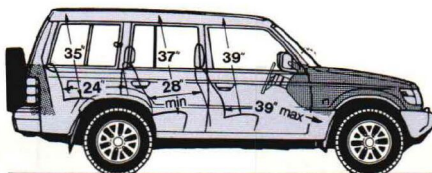
**Verdict** ★★★★★ Strong contender for best in class

**I**n its original form the Shogun was always a strong performer, but in rejuvenated second-generation trim it is now good in enough areas to trade punches with the best-selling Land Rover Discovery. The latest seven-seater Shogun looks good, while vast improvements in refinement and ride quality, plus the addition of a complex and effective four-wheel drive system, answer criticism of the earlier models with complete authority.

On-road handling and grip are vastly improved with the revised suspension and 'Super-select' 4wd, which is switchable from rear-wheel drive to 4wd while on the move. This, together with the car-like steering, smooth driveline, good noise suppression and an impressive level of standard equipment, makes it a fine choice for road work. However, the V6 engine, smooth and willing as it is, struggles with the two-tonne weight, and the otherwise good gearchange is hampered by a sudden clutch action and a long lever throw.

Off road, the Shogun is no wimp. It will get through most tricky situations in low range, but axle articulation is limited and there is noticeable shake and flex. A fine anti-lock braking system rounds off the specification of an exceptional off-roader.

cc	2972
max bhp	147
max lb ft	174
max mph	104
0-60 (secs)	13.1
30-70	14.2
1/4 mile	19.7
30-50	9.4
50-70	15.0
Overall mpg	16.1
Touring mpg	19.2
mph/1000 rpm	20.9
Weight (kg)	2055
Tested	26.6.91
Price now	£22,349





# Mitsubishi Sigma



**For** Comprehensive equipment, supple ride, smooth drivetrain  
**Against** Cramped in rear, technology overkill, lacks charisma

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ A complex character

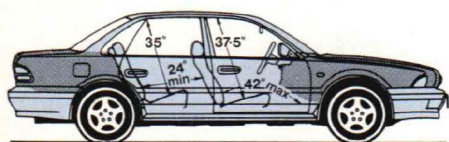
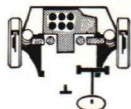
**T**he Sigma may be Mitsubishi's first serious foray into the prestige class, but it doesn't show. It might lack a classy badge, but the Sigma gives away nothing in refinement and quietness, and it comes loaded with luxury goodies and oozes high-tech hardware.

Armed with a silky 202bhp V6 engine and backed up by an arsenal of wizardry ranging from electronic suspension control to four-wheel steering, the Sigma comes prepared for stealing conquest sales from the less well-equipped European marques. But a fair amount of flab takes the edge off performance and the top speed of 128mph is way down for the class. Generally, the auto gearbox response is sharp enough, although it can jerk full-throttle upshifts.

On motorways the soft suspension proves exceptionally able, but with two thirds of its weight taken on the powered front wheels there is little hope of the chassis showing true poise or balance. Nevertheless, it is secure and has ample grip, with direct if lifeless steering.

Inside, the Sigma is comfortable and quiet, well equipped and well put together. However, some of the trim items spoil the effect, and rear room is restrictive.

cc	2972
max bhp	202
max lb ft	199
max mph	128
0-60 (secs)	9.3
30-70	8.1
1/4 mile	17.2
30-50	3.4
50-70	4.7
Overall mpg	18.3
Touring mpg	24.0
mph/1000 rpm	24.6
Weight (kg)	1626
Tested	10.4.91
Price now	£26,609



# Mitsubishi Space Runner



**For** Fast, fun, inexpensive, well equipped, comfortable  
**Against** Notchy gearbox, poor switchgear, grey interior

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Excellent alternative estate

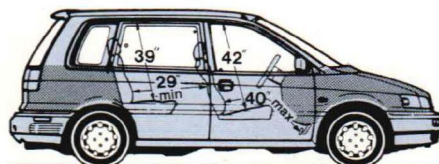
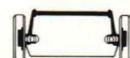
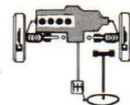
**F**or the Space Runner to make sense you have to view it as an alternative small estate. As it comes with an all-new 1.8-litre engine with 121bhp and is priced similarly to a 1.6-litre Escort estate with 90bhp, that shouldn't prove difficult.

Difficulties arise when you start levelling that MPV epithet at the Space Runner. Whatever it looks like, there's no escaping it will carry no more people than the Escort and has one less door. But the single rear door it does have is placed on the nearside — encouraging you to disgorge the kids on the pavement only — and slides instead of opening conventionally.

The Runner has no problem at all living up to its name. A little over-enthusiastic at high revs, the engine endows the car with the kind of performance that makes its only natural rival, the Nissan Prairie, seem slothful. Backing this up is tidy handling and an impressively absorbent ride.

Question marks remain over the cabin, which has all the headroom you could wish for but lacks leg space, while many will object to the vast expanses of grey plastic. Otherwise, as a fast, fun and alternative way to carry your family the Space Runner is very convincing.

cc	1834
max bhp	121
max lb ft	119
max mph	113
0-60 (secs)	10.6
30-70	10.4
1/4 mile	18.1
30-50	8.9
50-70	15.9
Overall mpg	27.2
Touring mpg	31.8
mph/1000 rpm	20.3
Weight (kg)	1260
Tested	1.12.91
Price now	£12,069





# Morgan Plus 8



**For** Driver involvement, vintage charm, sheer grunt  
**Against** Rock-solid ride, precarious handling

**Verdict** ★★★★★☆ There's still nothing quite like it

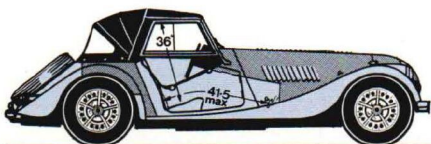
It's remarkable that in this age of engine management micro-computers and advanced tyre technology the Morgan continues to be made in exactly the same way as its forerunners of the pre-war years. But this unique vintage quality is the key to its survival.

Add a thunderous 3.9-litre V8 into the equation and the excitement and challenge of driving what many would term a relic is multiplied. This muscular powerhouse provides explosive acceleration, but, coupled with a flexible chassis and archaic suspension, it's best suited to smooth roads.

Anyone looking to pick fault will soon seize upon the rock-hard ride, the low-g geared and lifeless steering, the heavy action of the gearchange and brakes or the sheer unpleasantness of motorway driving.

But they'd be missing the point. Take the Morgan by the scruff of the neck and *really* drive it. It will tax your reactions and leap and skate over bumps, but it's enormously fast, offering total involvement with real seat-of-the-pants feel. In short, the Plus 8 gives the most attention-grabbing ride this side of Disneyland. Yes, it's riddled with faults, but a Morgan is a unique driving experience that many still find utterly compelling. We agree.

cc	3946
max bhp	190
max lb ft	235
max mph	121
0-60 (secs)	6.1
30-70	6.1
1/4 mile	15.1
30-50	4.1
50-70	6.3
Overall mpg	20.1
Touring mpg	n/a
mph/1000 rpm	27.6
Weight (kg)	935
Tested	15.5.91
Price now	£25,814



# Nissan Sunny 1.6 GS



**For** Crisp engine, good economy, refinement  
**Against** Not very roomy

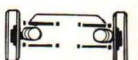
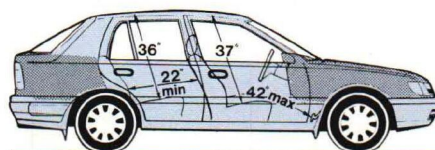
**Verdict** ★★★★★☆ A match for Europe's mainstream

Traditionally, it has been hard to envisage the Nissan Sunny getting serious with anything more stimulating than the import registration figures. To the end of last year, Sunny sales in the UK totalled an impressive 568,989, making the dependable but dreary saloon/hatch historically the biggest-selling model in Nissan's range. The new Sunny, however, is shooting for critical recognition. It wants to eclipse the Fiat Tipo, Peugeot 309 and Ford Escort on the road as well as in the showroom.

The 1.6 GS five-door is clearly pitched at the 'luxury' end of the lower-medium sector. Standard equipment includes speed-sensitive power steering, electric windows, electric tilt/slide sunroof, central locking, four-speaker stereo system and split-folding rear seats.

Performance is fine, but the overall consumption of 31.6mpg is perhaps the best news of all. As light and easy to conduct as its predecessor, the new model keeps plenty in reserve, not least generous grip, crisp turn-in and a surprising degree of attitude adjustability. The ride isn't bad, either. Cabin packaging isn't its forte, but its build and finish are hard to beat.

cc	1597
max bhp	94
max lb ft	99
max mph	112
0-60 (secs)	10.5
30-70	10.6
1/4 mile	17.9
30-50	8.7
50-70	12.5
Overall mpg	31.6
Touring mpg	38.0
mph/1000 rpm	23.6
Weight (kg)	1060
Tested	6.3.91
Price now	n/a





## Nissan 100 NX



**For** Build quality, supple ride  
**Against** Needs more power, lacks sporting character, ugly

**Verdict** ★☆☆☆☆ Mutton dressed as mutton

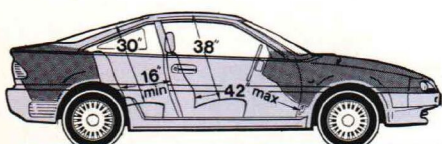
**F**ollowing in the wake of the stunning 300ZX and 200SX coupes, Nissan's distinctive 100NX was expected to set a similarly high standard. We were disappointed. Basically, it's a glitzy body built on to the Sunny 1.6 hatchback's floorpan and suspension. It even shares the same 16-valve carb-fed engine and tyre and wheel sizes.

Armed with just 95bhp, the front-wheel-drive coupe simply can't cut it among the sporty hatchbacks, and the engine never feels remotely sporty, even when revved to the limiter. Long gearing doesn't help its cause, either.

The chassis is competent enough in a friendly if uninspiring sort of way, but that in itself isn't enough for a sports coupe. The expected response and communication simply aren't there.

Inside, the gloomy and unimaginative cabin offers accommodation for two adults and two children, with a fair amount of luggage space. It's a reasonably pleasant and civilised coupe, but not a sports car. At its original price of over £15,000 it stood no hope at all against more sporting rivals. Even at its much-reduced price, the 100NX's future looks only slightly less dim.

cc	1597
max bhp	95
max lb ft	99
max mph	114
0-60 (secs)	10.1
30-70	10.5
1/4 mile	17.7
30-50	8.4
50-70	12.5
Overall mpg	27.2
Touring mpg	38.2
mph/1000 rpm	21.2
Weight (kg)	1030
Tested	24.4.91
Price now	£12,290



## Nissan Sunny GTi-R



**For** Heart-stopping acceleration, tenacious grip, balanced handling  
**Against** Feeble gearchange, preposterous looks

**Verdict** ★★★★★ Family hatch supercar

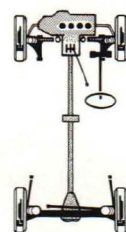
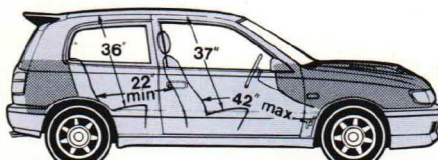
**A**tired and sub-standard car, imported for homologation purposes only, nevertheless provided a stunning foretaste of what is to come when Nissan Motor GB starts bringing in the GTi-R this year.

Our test car had worn tyres and brakes, suspect synchromesh and lacked the equipment of the official model. But it reached 60mph from rest in five seconds and hurtled on to a top speed of 140mph.

With 220bhp driving through all four wheels, we expected it to be quick and to grip well. But unlike its obvious rival, the Lancia Delta Integrale, it proved to be capable of more than just understeer on the limit. Turn-in is certainly sharper and there's more throttle adjustability, although the transition from power-on understeer to power-off oversteer comes rather quickly.

With central locking, electric windows, stereo and anti-lock brakes, the official car will no doubt be more civilised, but the two-litre, 16-valve turbocharged engine's capacity to thrill should not be diluted. It's hard to argue the case for a supercar against this level of performance with four seats, good luggage space, right-hand drive and an estimated £20,000 price.

cc	1998
max bhp	220
max lb ft	196
max mph	140
0-60 (secs)	5.0
30-70	5.3
1/4 mile	14.0
30-50	6.1
50-70	4.8
Overall mpg	18.6
Touring mpg	n/a
mph/1000 rpm	21.0
Weight (kg)	1231
Tested	17.7.91
Price now	£20,000 (est)





# Nissan Primera 2.0 GSX



**For** Refinement, strong and smooth engine, fine build  
**Against** Modest rear legroom, firm low-speed ride

**Verdict** ★★★★★☆ Fine to drive, even better to own

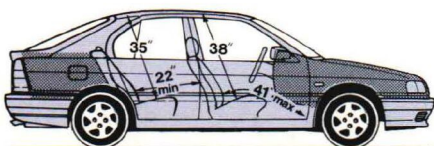
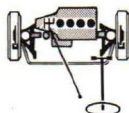
**N**ow that the uncertainty surrounding the sales of Nissan cars in the UK is at an end, perhaps the British-built Primera will begin to attain the fat slice of the market it so richly deserves. As we have pointed out many times in the past, the Primera in general and the 2.0 GSX particular are close to the top of the class in most areas and falls behind in none.

The chassis is secure and grippy, well balanced and turns in crisply while giving a pliant ride. This balance of flair and security is helped further by the slick gearchange and excellent brakes. Only the tendency to shake and shudder over sharp-edged potholes spoils its record, but few of its rivals fare better in these circumstances.

Likewise, the 121bhp twin-cam engine is up there with the best, pulling hard and strong without complaint or fuss.

The cabin is dull and sombre but well screwed together. Although front space is ample, seating five adults is more of a crush than it should be. Ventilation is first rate, and the equipment list in GSX form is impressive. Now consider that the Primera is built in the UK and, with competitive pricing, it has to be a winner.

cc	1998
max bhp	121
max lb ft	124
max mph	121
0-60 (secs)	8.9
30-70	8.8
1/4 mile	16.9
30-50	7.7
50-70	11.6
Overall mpg	26.0
Touring mpg	28.3
mph/1000 rpm	22.6
Weight (kg)	1225
Tested	17.4.91
Price now	£15,500



# Peugeot 106 XR



**For** Pretty lines, roomy interior, class-busting chassis  
**Against** Bland interior, body boom at 85mph

**Verdict** ★★★★★ The best supermini you can buy

**Y**ou are looking at what is very simply the best small car you can buy. That used to be Rover's Metro, but in a memorable fight (*Autocar & Motor*, 16 October 1991) the Peugeot 106 XR convincingly wrested its crown and now looks set to wear it in the '90s with the same conviction its 205 parent did during the '80s.

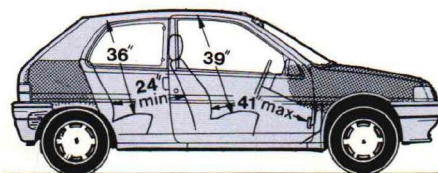
Faults are few. Its interior is a little bland and there is a boom at 85mph which, despite Peugeot's efforts, has yet to be exorcised, and economy is not as impressive as it should be from a 1.1-litre 60bhp engine.

But these niggles pale against a wall of strengths. It is exceptionally roomy for its class, more spacious in real terms than the ostensibly larger 205 and even prettier.

Out on the road it's clear Peugeot has produced yet another chassis that tops the class in both the opposed interests of ride and handling, which means you can tackle the most challenging roads with confidence and in comfort.

Add to these strengths the performance to maintain an easy 85mph and the gearbox and brakes to make it simple to drive smoothly in town and its clear why, so far, it's the supermini to top them all.

cc	1124
max bhp	60
max lb ft	66
max mph	96
0-60 (secs)	13.8
30-70	14.2
1/4 mile	19.5
30-50	10.1
50-70	16.9
Overall mpg	32.1
Touring mpg	48.5
mph/1000 rpm	20.2
Weight (kg)	790
Tested	1.10.91
Price now	£7650





# Peugeot 106 XSi



**For** Great styling, eager engine, superb chassis  
**Against** Could handle more pace

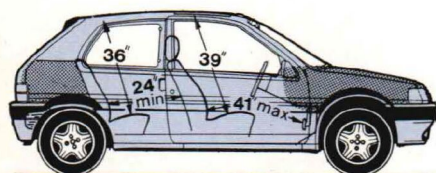
**Verdict** ★★★★★ Shows how it should be done

If first impressions count for anything, the 106 XSi delivered a knockout punch at the start of the opening round. On one particular mountain road in France at the launch, 1.4 litres, 100bhp and a chassis of exquisite poise and balance seemed like the ideal ingredients for automotive nirvana.

Our feelings towards the XSi only hardened when it clashed with the Citroen AX GTi and Rover Metro GTi 16v — both recently revamped. Against the stopwatch, it could only match its rivals — 117mph top speed, 0-60mph in 9.7secs, 30-70mph in 9.1secs — but on the road it was in a different league, winning the day for gearchange quality, handling, ride and accommodation. With the front seats set for our nominal six-footer, a 5ft 8ins passenger could sit in the back with space for head and knees — not much of the latter, but enough to make a long trip realistic.

What really sets the 106 apart, though, is the sheer intensity and balance of its virtues: the way it can tackle a twisty road as a whole rather than a bend at a time; the way it combines a supple ride with iron control; the way it packs so much space into such a compact shape. We knew the 106 was good, but the XSi is something special.

cc	1360
max bhp	100
max lb ft	89
max mph	117
0-60 (secs)	9.7
30-70	9.1
1/4 mile	17.5
30-50	7.9
50-70	11.1
Overall mpg	26.9
Touring mpg	36.3
mph/1000 rpm	17.7
Weight (kg)	894
Tested 18/25.12.91	
Price now	£10,395



# Peugeot 205 D Turbo



**For** Overtaking ability, handling, ride and refinement  
**Against** Too expensive and thirsty, modestly equipped

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ An unhappy marriage of opposing interests

This is a diesel with a difference — several, in fact. For a start, it is marketed as a sporting car — a concept common on the Continent but novel in Britain — which means GTi steering wheel and seats plus a big 'turbo' sign in place of the usual GRDT badge.

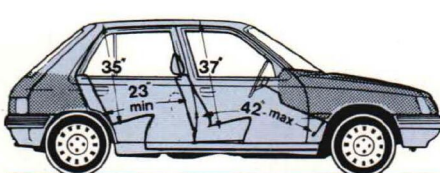
It means it, too. Although all-out acceleration is merely good by diesel standards, its overtaking ability is quite remarkable. For instance, it will sweep from 30-50mph in fourth in just 7.7secs, something that cannot be said for, say, a Renault Clio 1.6v.

This 205 also takes an alternative approach to traditional diesel car economy. Far from providing the buyer with a reason to accept the performance limitations of diesel motoring, it uses little less fuel than similar petrol-powered cars.

Thankfully, all other 205 strengths are included in abundance. It rides comfortably yet possesses ample grip and response through the power-assisted helm. The interior is roomy and the engine's refined nature makes for fuss-free long trips.

But it is not generously equipped and for £10,703, the 205 D turbo ought to be able to offer the diesel buyer a better blend of economy and performance than this.

cc	1769
max bhp	78
max lb ft	116
max mph	103
0-60 (secs)	12.3
30-70	13.4
1/4 mile	18.9
30-50	7.7
50-70	11.5
Overall mpg	34.4
Touring mpg	45.7
mph/1000 rpm	24.3
Weight (kg)	950
Tested 1.4.91	
Price now	£10,376





# Peugeot 309 GRDT



**For** Excellent grip, ride, well packaged, punchy performance  
**Against** Dated styling

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Getting on but still keenly competitive

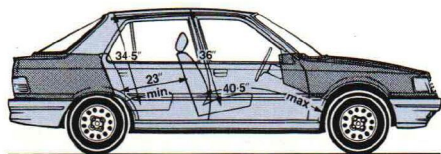
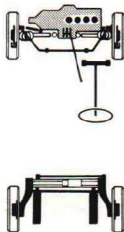
**T**he 309 may be Peugeot's oldest model, but it has to make surprisingly few excuses for its conduct, and the turbo diesel version is no exception. It uses Peugeot's 1769cc XUD 7T unit, which develops a healthy 78bhp and 116lb ft of torque. This translates into respectable performance, and not just by the standards of oil-burners. Top speed is 104mph, 0-60mph takes 12.8secs and 50-70mph in fifth comes up in 11.7secs.

To some extent, the Peugeot is handicapped by a gaping hole in its gear ratios between second and third, a problem only partially masked by a sweet, lightning-swift gearchange and a broad spread of mid-range torque. The gearing doesn't put an edge on the engine's thirst, though. An overall figure of 31.1mpg is good considering the performance.

The 309's handling is taut and agile, although the sharp steering must be treated gently. With ample grip and little body roll, it feels overtly sporty for a diesel.

Although it feels dated from behind the wheel, the Peugeot's fascia is businesslike and its seats comfortable. The boot is a good size, but, compared with the likes of the Fiat Tipo, the cabin feels cramped.

cc	1769
max bhp	78
max lb ft	116
max mph	104
0-60 (secs)	12.8
30-70	14.2
1/4 mile	19.2
30-50	15.5
50-70	11.7
Overall mpg	31.1
Touring mpg	44.8
mph/1000 rpm	24.3
Weight (kg)	n/a
Tested	225.91
Price now	£12,031



# Peugeot 605 SVE 24



**For** Stunning looks, performance, terrific handling  
**Against** Obstructive gearchange, cheap switchgear, light steering

**Verdict** ★★★★★ A fitting flagship

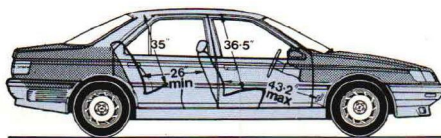
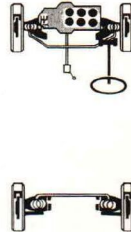
**T**he exquisitely styled Pininfarina lines of the biggest Peugeot saloon have always looked the part but lacked the necessary commitment needed from underneath the bonnet. With the three-litre V6 24-valve PSA engine installed there, the 605 SVE 24 has a gutsy 200bhp and 191lb ft of torque to propel it on its way.

Which it does in suitable fashion — 0-60mph in 7.9secs is moving for a such a big car and a top speed of 142mph proves its pretty lines are also good at cleaving the air.

Its chassis is more than up to the job, too. With double wishbones at the rear and electronically controlled adjustable dampers all round, enthusiastic executives should enjoy a challenging road.

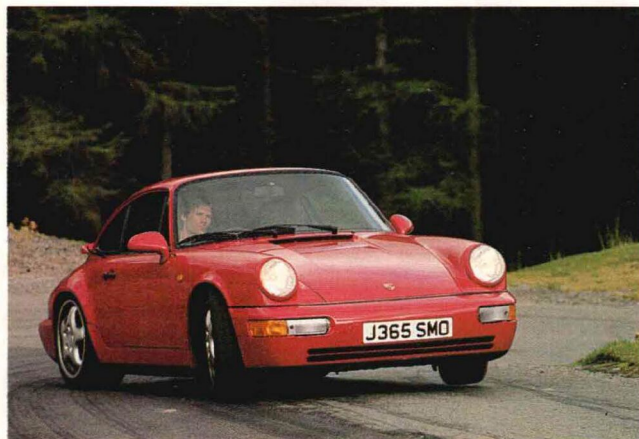
But it lacks the quality feel that a BMW 525i offers in abundance. Not that the interior feels cheap as a whole; just the switchgear. Also, drive the Peugeot in heavy traffic and the throttle is so sensitive to small openings that it makes for jerky progress, and smooth driving is further hampered by the obstructive gearchange. But if you can ignore these foibles, the 605 SVE 24 is an excellent car and a fine flagship for Peugeot.

cc	2975
max bhp	200
max lb ft	191
max mph	142
0-60 (secs)	7.9
30-70	8.1
1/4 mile	16.3
30-50	7.7
50-70	10.7
Overall mpg	20.4
Touring mpg	22.5
mph/1000 rpm	23.1
Weight (kg)	1585
Tested	295.91
Price now	£27,250





# Porsche 911 RS Carrera



**For** Gutsy engine, powerful brakes, crisp gearchange  
**Against** Over-harsh ride, nil refinement, price

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ A Carrera 2 is a vastly better road car

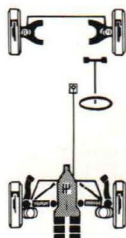
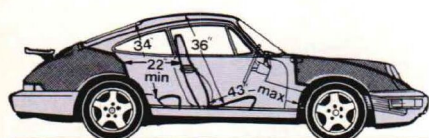
If you like your thrills raw, you'll love the Carrera RS. In lightweight form it's bereft of flab, sits on rock-solid race suspension and surrounds the driver with the hard-edged metallic growl that only Porsche's high-revving flat-six could provide.

On the open road, there's no other production car we've driven that can match the RS for sheer overtaking ability. While third-gear pull is phenomenal, in second it's simply devastating. The gearchange is a delight, and the race-style brakes haul it down from high speed with contemptuous ease.

Be in no doubt, the RS goes and stops better than almost anything else you can buy. But in other respects it's a far from rosy picture. The stiff suspension produces a bone-hard ride on anything other than a billiard table surface, and on rough roads it leaps and skitters from bump to bump.

Road rumble from the tyres is deafening, and the combined effect of this, the resonating engine note and the grating transmission makes it unsuitable for long journeys. For all its sheer excitement, the Carrera RS is simply too uncompromising to be anything other than a parody of everything the 911 stands for as a road car.

cc	3600
max bhp	260
max lb ft	232
max mph	161
0-60 (secs)	4.9
30-70	4.3
1/4 mile	13.4
30-50	5.0
50-70	7.0
Overall mpg	19.3
Touring mpg	n/a
mph/1000 rpm	24.3
Weight (kg)	1195
Tested	16.10.91
Price now	£63,544



# Porsche 911 Turbo-Look Cabriolet



**For** Grip, brakes, cabrio thrills  
**Against** Blunted performance, knobby ride, price

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Poseur's Porsche

To Porsche enthusiasts, a 911 Carrera 2 with dual-mode Tiptronic gearbox, soft-top and wider Turbo body may sound like a concept about as far removed from raw, rear-engined traditions as possible. A 911 for the Kings

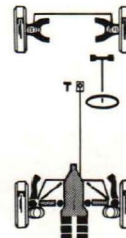
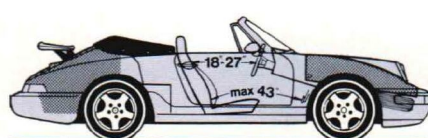
Road rather than the A9 past Pitlochry? Absolutely not. The 911 Carrera 2 Tiptronic Turbo Look Cabriolet may be a mouthful of words, but they spell a fabulous car in which to drive fast, smell the grass, see the stars and hear the engine.

Equipped as it is with the massive wheels, tyres, brakes and body from the 911 Turbo, dry-road grip is phenomenal and stopping ability no less so, although its big boots are more likely to aquaplane in the wet and contribute to a knobby ride.

Performance is slightly dented by the wide body addenda. A top speed of 153mph is some 4mph down on that of a Tiptronic Carrera 2 and the 0-60mph time is up by 0.4secs.

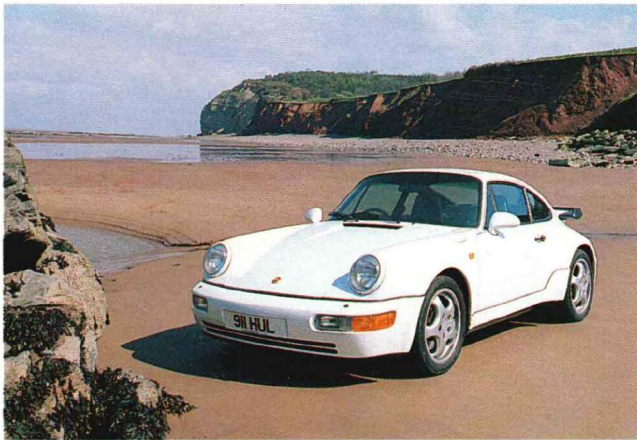
The Tiptronic gearbox is very much a matter of taste, too, although we think it's a marvellous compromise. Ultimately you're paying a lot more money for questionable looks and a bit more grip, but that doesn't mean this 911 is not a great car.

cc	3600
max bhp	250
max lb ft	219
max mph	153
0-60 (secs)	6.6
30-70	5.3
1/4 mile	14.9
30-50	8.6
50-70	9.1
Overall mpg	17.2
Touring mpg	n/a
mph/1000 rpm	27.0
Weight (kg)	1440
Tested	8.1.92
Price now	£73,106





# Porsche 911 Turbo



**For** Explosive acceleration, agile chassis, stunning brakes  
**Against** Very expensive, dashboard, tyre noise, low-speed ride

**Verdict** ★★★★★☆ For 911 addicts, the ultimate fix

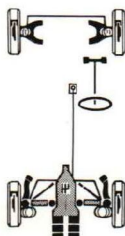
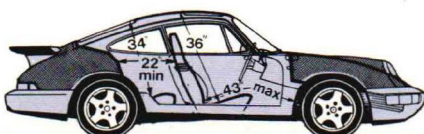
**M**any believed the reason the old 911 Turbo provided just about the biggest buzz you can have in a car was because every time you stepped out at the end of a hard run you felt mildly surprised that you and the car were still in one piece. Take that away and its magic would disappear quicker than an old Turbo's tail on a greasy roundabout.

They were wrong. This new Turbo is faster, more exhilarating and no longer requires the hand of a master to tame. Acceleration from the 320bhp flat six is such that, if you wanted even to keep it in sight, you'd need to forgo the Testarossa for a Lotus Carlton. Grip does not seem as limitless as a Honda NSX's or Ferrari 348's, but you can now exploit the 911's chassis to a hitherto unimaginable extent.

Age-old problems — a ludicrous dash layout and choppy low-speed ride — remain and have been joined by some new ones. Its price is breathtakingly high and tyre noise inhibits relaxed touring.

Yet for those who still regard the 911 as the ultimate sports car there can still be no substitute for this, the ultimate 911.

cc	3299
max bhp	320
max lb ft	332
max mph	167
0-60 (secs)	4.7
30-70	4.0
1/4 mile	13.3
30-50	7.1
50-70	9.0
Overall mpg	15.1
Touring mpg	21.2
mph/1000 rpm	27.8
Weight (kg)	1460
Tested	1.5.91
Price now	£78,319



# Renault Clio 1.2 RN



**For** Fine ride and handling, roomy  
**Against** Woolly steering, long gearing

**Verdict** ★★★★★☆ Pleasing and distinctive supermini

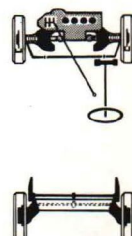
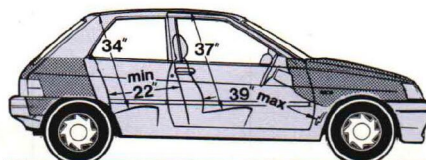
**W**ith a distinctive shape, peppy performance, excellent interior space and just the right ride/handling balance, the Clio in 1.2-litre form shows great promise.

It's certainly in a different league entirely from the 5 that it effectively replaces, not least for its interior, which is not only roomy and brightly trimmed but feels durable, too. Even so, the switchgear and some interior plastics aren't quite as solid as those of the Fiesta or Metro, and instrumentation is meagre.

For a small car, the Clio rides especially well and refinement is more than acceptable for the class, with only the occasional patch of resonance and some tyre noise. With skinny tyres and soft springing, grip is modest and it leans a fair bit, but the cornering balance and adjustability are excellent. The steering is a good blend of weighting and directness, if slightly woolly.

The cat-equipped engine is peppy enough to see off most of its rivals, and it's good for a 99mph top speed while retaining fine economy. An abrupt clutch action and wide gearing takes the edge off its appeal, but the Clio remains a talented all-rounder.

cc	1171
max bhp	60
max lb ft	65
max mph	99
0-60 (secs)	14.0
30-70	15.0
1/4 mile	19.7
30-50	10.6
50-70	18.9
Overall mpg	36.8
Touring mpg	44.1
mph/1000 rpm	18.8
Weight (kg)	847
Tested	7.8.91
Price now	£8260





# Renault Clio 1.4 RT



**For** Super-economical, excellent ride quality, styling  
**Against** Cheap-looking facia, no fun to drive, poor performance

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Not for enthusiasts, fine for everyone else

If you are after the state-of-the-art hatchback for the '90s you may not need to look any further than this. Like all Clios, the 1.4 RT provides family-sized accommodation that only Ford's Fiesta can rival. Unlike the Ford, though, every petrol Clio sold comes with fuel injection and a catalytic converter.

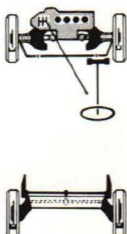
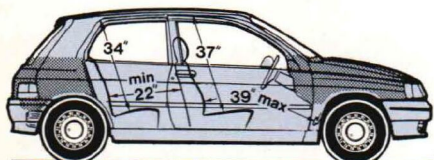
Backing up this ecological awareness is exceptional fuel economy. Our overall consumption of 38.3mpg is likely to be the worst that owners will see in day to day driving. The Clio also takes small car ride comfort onto a higher plane with soft, long-travel springing allied to effective damping.

If it is to fall down, it will be when an enthusiastic driver sits behind the wheel. Like its older sister, the 19, the Clio has poorly spaced pedals and cheap looking instrumentation and switchgear, all of which combine to make a bad first impression.

Take it for a drive and you will find that though the engine revs freely, the performance is mediocre and swift progress difficult. Corners can be taken at decent speeds in total security but, thanks to lifeless steering, there's little fun to be had here either.

As it is this Clio is an attractive and worthy new hatch. If it had a bit more life it would be a winner too.

cc	1390
max bhp	80
max lb ft	79
max mph	106
0-60 (secs)	12.0
30-70	10.8
1/4 mile	18.7
30-50	11.3
50-70	19.3
Overall mpg	38.3
Touring mpg	42.0
mph/1000 rpm	22.0
Weight (kg)	885
Tested	2.3.91
Price now	£9000



# Renault Clio 16v



**For** Excellent chassis control, strong engine, styling, space  
**Against** Poor instruments and switchgear, patchy build

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Another world-beating Renault hot hatch

It doesn't take much of a drive in Renault's latest, greatest hot hatch to realise it has yet another winner on its hands. The spiritual successor to the much loved 5 GT Turbo, some will suggest that, as the Clio is slower in a straight line, heavier and narrower tyred, it cannot be a patch on its vaunted predecessor.

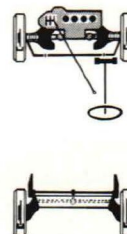
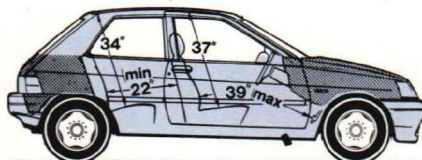
Nothing could be further from the truth. In real, point-to-point terms it is the Clio that's swiftest, aided by a strong twin-cam engine and one of the friendliest, most capable front-drive chassis there is. All it lacks is the 5's near telepathic steering response.

Nor is the Clio's ability kept solely in the domain of flat-out, cross-country driving. Owners will be thankful for the exceptional amount of room inside, rivalled in its class by only the Fiesta, and be flattered by the number of admiring glances the tasteful beefed-up bodywork attracts.

Like many other Renaults, though, the Clio's ergonomics are poor and our test car gave a couple of worrying indications that Renault's rapidly improving build standards still show a few holes.

But this does not detract from the fact that Renault again leads this class of hot hatch and it will take a formidable opponent to dislodge it.

cc	1764
max bhp	137
max lb ft	119
max mph	126
0-60 (secs)	8.6
30-70	8.3
1/4 mile	16.7
30-50	7.9
50-70	11.9
Overall mpg	26.0
Touring mpg	36.5
mph/1000 rpm	19.4
Weight (kg)	1019
Tested	9.10.91
Price now	£12,725





# Renault 19 D Prima



**For** Decent performance, good value, quite spacious  
**Against** Not frugal enough, dull to drive, messy fascia

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Not up to current diesel standards

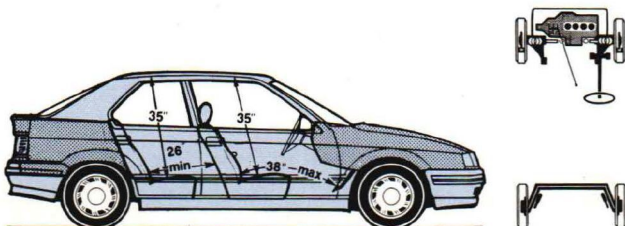
**Y**ou'd have had to have tried hard not to notice the ever increasing impact diesel cars are having and just how much the breed has improved recently.

Yet as comparison with the latest Citroen ZX diesel shows, the Renault 19 D Prima is in danger of being left stuck in the old school. For all its fine value for money and reasonable performance, it's too noisy and burns too much fuel to match the standards of its most modern rivals. For instance, after 1000 miles running side by side with the significantly swifter Citroen, the Renault could only manage 36.4mpg while its opponent managed a quieter 39.6mpg.

Similar comments can be directed at the 19's chassis, which provides adequate handling and a good ride but without coming anywhere near the top of the class. Inside the 19 does make a passable stab at looking after the family, providing reasonable room, but drivers may well be put off by the messy switchgear and driving position.

Though much better built than Renault's reputation would have you believe, the fact is this 19 is simply not up to coping with the furious speed of advance the diesel car is currently enjoying.

CC	1870
max bhp	65
max lb ft	87
max mph	97
0-60 (secs)	23.4
30-70	18.6
1/4 mile	20.6
30-50	12.2
50-70	20.7
Overall mpg	36.4
Touring mpg	43.6
mph/1000 rpm	22.6
Weight (kg)	1035
Tested	4.12.91
Price now	£9195



# Renault 19 16v Cabriolet



**For** Styling, performance, excellent chassis, hood design  
**Against** Too much scuttle shake, noisy, shoddy cabin

**Verdict** ★★★★★ As good to drive as it is to look at

**T**he combination of stylish new lines from the doors back and the energetic twin-cam engine from the 19 16v has resulted in a convertible of such speed and sophistication that it's hard to believe it's so closely related to the rest of the bland but worthy 19 range.

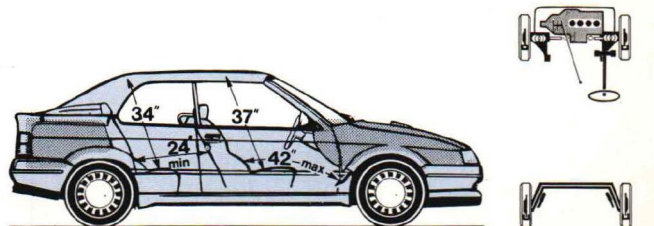
The convertible design, created by Karmann, means the Cabrio is a fair bit heavier than its hatched sister, but that did not stop the test car producing substantially better performance figures.

However, Cabriolet owners will not be able to enjoy the sensational handling of the hard-top. That said, those used to the way converted hatches usually grip, turn-in and respond to the throttle will find the 19 illuminating to say the least.

A pity, then, that Karmann has not been able to tackle that perennial convertible bugbear, scuttle-shake, with anything like the success it brought to the Escort and Golf. Pot-holes and bumps set the whole body creaking and we fear for the long-term integrity of the fascia. It also creates noise on motorways, even with the neat hood raised.

Yet despite these niggles the 19 16v Cabriolet is one of the most entertaining converted hatches we've yet tried.

CC	1764
max bhp	137
max lb ft	119
max mph	128
0-60 (secs)	8.8
30-70	8.7
1/4 mile	16.9
30-50	9.1
50-70	12.8
Overall mpg	24.9
Touring mpg	31.3
mph/1000 rpm	20.3
Weight (kg)	1180
Tested	2.1.92
Price now	£TBA





# Renault Espace 2.0 RXE



**For** Able chassis, versatile cabin  
**Against** Mediocre performance, imperfect driving position

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Go for the V6 version instead

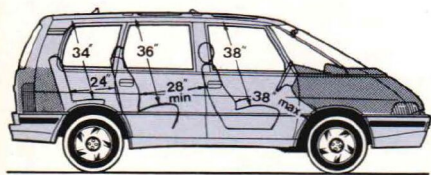
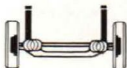
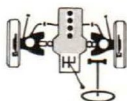
**F**ew will dispute it: Renault's Espace is the car that gave us the MPV concept. Now new pretenders to its crown are appearing with ever greater frequency, the Espace has received its first major facelift.

In two-litre trim, not all the changes are for the better. Equipped with a catalytic converter, it's substantially down on power from the old version, and the deficit is enough to change a brisk performer to a fairly sluggish one. Economy takes a slight tumble too, and there is an annoying drone at cruising speeds further to dull the Espace's otherwise good nature.

We wouldn't take issue with the styling changes though, and the overall nature of the chassis behaviour is better than ever. It's always had crisp steering and pliant suspension, but with stiffened anti-roll bars and softer springs there's a noticeable improvement in agility. Indeed, the Espace will out-handle a good few conventional cars, and rides surprisingly well, too.

For the driver, the seating position with pedals set too close and the gear lever too distant is a disappointment. Also, even in the top-spec RXE form, the seven-seater comfort pack is an optional extra.

cc	1995
max bhp	105
max lb ft	117
max mph	103
0-60 (secs)	12.9
30-70	13.6
1/4 mile	19.1
30-50	10.0
50-70	16.6
Overall mpg	26.2
Touring mpg	27.1
mph/1000 rpm	21.2
Weight (kg)	1379
Tested	6.11.91
Price now	£19,795



# Renault Espace V6



**For** Versatile interior, torquey V6, cruising ability, chassis  
**Against** Rubbery gearchange, awkward driving position

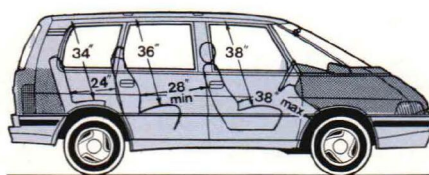
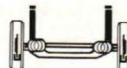
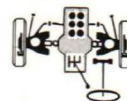
**Verdict** ★★★★★ The most capable MPV yet

**T**here's a strong argument for calling this Espace the most versatile MPV ever. Not because it's the roomiest — the Toyota Previa comfortably wins the space race — nor because of its wealth of seats; if you want to carry more than five, you will have to fork out for the seven-seat 'comfort pack'. No, this Espace's overwhelming strength is its V6 which, for the first time, injects real grand touring potential into a people carrier.

Acceleration is strong enough, not only to outdistance all competitors, but also to frighten many an alleged sporting car. The Espace handles well enough not to have to compromise its speed in corners and rides so well you never feel uncomfortable once used to sitting higher up and further forward than usual. High speed touring is quiet, while your family enjoys the legendary Espace chairs that swivel, can be removed, turned into beds or a dining table.

It's a shame Renault left some age-old design faults in the new Espace. Worst is the arrangement and positioning of the pedals. The gearlever is a stretch away and so rubbery and obstructive in its action you'll be thankful for so much torque that gearchanging can be kept to the minimum.

cc	2849
max bhp	155
max lb ft	166
max mph	116
0-60 (secs)	9.4
30-70	9.2
1/4 mile	17.2
30-50	6.9
50-70	10.3
Overall mpg	19.9
Touring mpg	22.5
mph/1000 rpm	22.6
Weight (kg)	1469
Tested	10.7.91
Price now	£23,875





# Mini Cooper S



**For** Lightning throttle response, forgiving and enjoyable handling  
**Against** Noisy, expensive, bouncy ride, cramped interior

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Obsolete but irresistible

**N**ot so much a car as a factory-approved and warranted aftermarket conversion, the Cooper S uses twin SU carbs, a new cylinder head and specially shaped combustion chambers to boost power output from the standard Cooper's 61bhp to 78bhp.

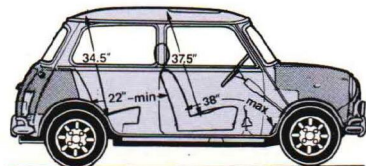
Bespoke Dunlop tyres, Koni adjustable dampers and a myriad of other minor tweaks bring roadholding and handling in line with the extra performance to produce a car that can still show the best contemporary superminis a trick or two on the road.

It isn't very quick, the ride is harsh and bouncy, the interior is cramped and dated, the driving position uncomfortable. It's also expensive. But nothing this side of a Caterham 7 turns in quicker, responds more instantly to the throttle, or has such forgiving, communicative handling.

The car's tiny dimensions and excellent visibility make it perfect for whipping through heavy traffic. At higher speeds, the steering weights up and there's a disappointing lack of grunt above 4500rpm.

Judged by rational criteria, the Cooper S fails on most counts. But it's hard to be rational when you're having this much fun.

cc	1275
max bhp	78
max lb ft	78
max mph	97
0-60 (secs)	11.0
30-70	11.8
1/4 mile	18.1
30-50	9.6
50-70	12.7
Overall mpg	26.5
Touring mpg	n/a
mph/1000 rpm	18.6
Weight (kg)	706
Tested	8.5.91
Price now	£10,000 (approx)



# Rover Metro 1.1C



**For** Big car feel, fun to drive, good build quality  
**Against** Slightly firm ride, price

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Pipped by Peugeot 106 but still terrific

**I**n its cheapest guise, Rover's supermini is perhaps at its most impressive. Priced at £6790 it's certainly more expensive than its immediate rivals — Fiesta, Nova, Polo and AX — but dynamically it gives nothing away.

Drive it against its rivals — as we did — and the 1.1C feels sophisticated. This is partly due to the big car feel its interior purveys but more to the excellent responses of its crisp chassis and eager steering. And it turns in on a sixpence.

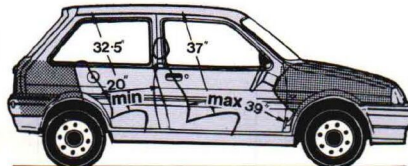
Moreover, the Rover Metro 1.1C is actually some fun to drive, a rare quality among bargain basement shopping hatchbacks.

Don't expect a hat-full of options and a burgeoning equipment list though; you even have to pay £404 for a catalytic converter.

Still, in this class we consider build quality much more vital, and the 1.1C is exceptionally well screwed together — better than nigh-on any other supermini in fact. One look at the mature interior proves this.

Scan the price lists at the back of *Autocar & Motor* and the cheapest Metro will appear expensive. Drive it and you'll understand why we came to the conclusion that it's worth paying that little bit more.

Acc	1120
max bhp	60
max lb ft	66
max mph	92
0-60 (secs)	15.4
30-70	17.1
1/4 mile	20.2
30-50	8.5
50-70	18.1
Overall mpg	35.5
Touring mpg	45.7
mph/1000 rpm	18.4
Weight (kg)	817
Tested	28.8.91
Price now	£6790





# Rover Metro GTi 16v



**For** Sweet engine, agile chassis, fine build quality  
**Against** Nervous handling, heavy-handed body kit

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Needs some fine-tuning

**R**ecently revitalised with multi-point fuel injection, a catalyst and 103bhp (up from 95bhp), the fastest Metro seems to have the credentials to make good. Certainly, with a top speed of 115mph and 0-60mph in 9.6secs, it's quick enough to hold its own with the likes of Peugeot's 106 XSi and Citroen's AX GTi.

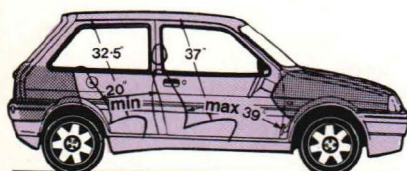
Subjectively, too, there's plenty to admire. Its 16-valve K-series engine is a sweet-spinning and refined unit, only starting to sound strained as it nears its 6800rpm red line. Economy is good, too.

Somewhere along the line, though, things go a little awry. On a twisty road, the Metro's basic agility and sharp steering are fun, but its nimble reflexes feel more like twitchiness at higher speeds and the ride doesn't cope well with big bumps and dips.

And the Metro is hurt by its driving position, which, despite generations of evolution, still has traces of sit-up-and-beg Mini. Meanwhile, adults are likely to run out of headroom in the back seats.

The least of the Rover's problems is that its go-faster cosmetics are heavy-handed and make the car look vaguely ridiculous. That said, it is very well made.

cc	1396
max bhp	103
max lb ft	94
max mph	115
0-60 (secs)	9.6
30-70	9.4
1/4 mile	17.3
30-50	8.1
50-70	11.3
Overall mpg	30.5
Touring mpg	39.0
mph/1000 rpm	18.9
Weight (kg)	885
Tested	18.12.91
Price now	£11,340



# Rover 218 SD



**For** Modern design, well finished, roomy and comfortable  
**Against** Weak performance, inert handling, pricey

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Sluggish but otherwise competitive

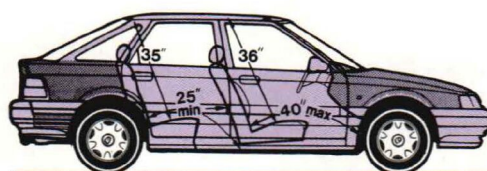
**W**ith the 218 SD, Rover is presuming to sell a plain diesel for the price of a good turbo. It comes with the full weight of the 200-series' reputation behind it but a distinct lack of firepower. The 1905cc Peugeot XUD 9A four-cylinder diesel it uses, for instance, develops a modest 66bhp and 89lb ft of torque.

Top speed is a middling 94mph, but even this looks good compared with a 0-60mph time of 16.9secs and 50-70mph in fifth in 19.4secs. That said, the Rover's engine revs quite freely and, whatever the figures might say, it never feels hopelessly sluggish. An overall consumption figure of 35.3mpg is fair compensation for the lacklustre acceleration.

The Rover's chassis does nothing badly and most things very well. Its steering feels a little vague but responds consistently and grip is more than adequate.

Good marks, too, for the cabin, which boasts clear instruments, supportive seats and easy-to-use switchgear. But pleasant, refined and generally capable as it is, the 218 SD is simply too slow. Slow enough to suggest that its turbo cousin is better value.

cc	1905
max bhp	66
max lb ft	89
max mph	94
0-60 (secs)	16.9
30-70	19.5
1/4 mile	20.9
30-50	11.7
50-70	19.4
Overall mpg	35.3
Touring mpg	48.9
mph/1000 rpm	22.8
Weight (kg)	1199
Tested	22.5.91
Price now	£11,195





# Rover 220 GTi



**For** Friendly chassis, classy interior  
**Against** Unrefined engine, disappointing performance

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Buy the 216 GTi instead

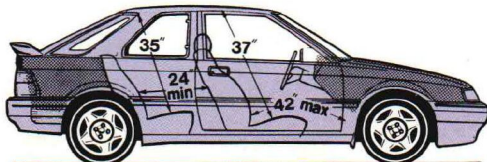
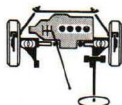
**F**or the cost of a Rover 216 GTi you can buy a similarly equipped two-litre version. Instead of Honda power, the 220 GTi gets the M16 twin-cam Rover unit from the old-shape 820, and it comes with catalytic converter as standard. It's a second-division engine, though, and lacks the sweetness of the Honda unit. That said, it pushes out a reasonable 140bhp and has enthusiastic low and mid-range response.

One area in which the 220 GTi shines is chassis dynamics. Its incisive turn-in, trustworthy steering, superb grip and inherent chassis friendliness make it a fine companion for dispatching demanding backroads — but its alacrity can't quite match that of the lighter 216 GTi.

The gearchange is light and positive, while the brakes haul the car down from speed with reassuring ease. There's little wrong with the ride quality, either.

Rover has worked hard to create a pleasant driver environment with a dash of British tradition in the wood facia strip and half-leather seat trim. It's a classy cabin, as well as being functional and cohesively designed. The 220 GTi is available in three-door form only.

cc	1994
max bhp	140
max lb ft	132
max mph	000
0-60 (secs)	8.8
30-70	8.7
1/4 mile	16.9
30-50	7.5
50-70	10.2
Overall mpg	27.1
Touring mpg	31.7
mph/1000 rpm	20.7
Weight (kg)	1170
Tested	4.9.91
Price now	£15,495



# Rover 820 Turbo



**For** Good looks, fine ride, comfortable and commodious cabin  
**Against** Engine and handling lack vitality, thirsty

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Misses the mark by a mile

**W**hatever the Rover 800's strengths, it has never been able to offer convincing performance. The Vitesse utterly failed to capture the magic of the vivid SD1 it was named after. Rover's latest attempt to build a sporty 800 involved employing Tickford to turbocharge and tune Rover's four-cylinder, twin-cam M16 engine, but it misses the mark by a similar margin.

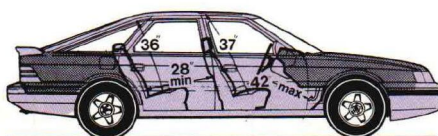
Acceleration is unremarkable, and although the engine will push the 820 to 135mph, it clearly has little enthusiasm for the job while it glugs unleaded with unreasonable haste.

The uprated suspension serves up a fine ride and secure grip without treating the driver to the adjustability and steering response that should accompany such a car.

Good points are numerous. A roomy cabin, fine ergonomics, large and convenient boot and quality feel to the controls are just some of the highlights. But these are common to any 800 hatch.

This 820 gets the T-series engine soon, and with it Vitesse badging. Let's hope it carries the mantle of the large sporting Rover more convincingly than this.

cc	1994
max bhp	180
max lb ft	159
max mph	135
0-60 (secs)	9.0
30-70	8.8
1/4 mile	16.9
30-50	7.6
50-70	10.6
Overall mpg	20.8
Touring mpg	n/a
mph/1000 rpm	22.5
Weight (kg)	1408
Tested	26.6.91
Price now	n/a





# Rover 820i



**For** Strong performance, cabin ambience  
**Against** Engine drone, damping control, lifeless steering

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Not as improved as it looks

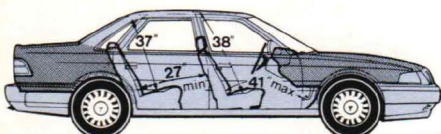
**W**ith softer lines and a stately chromium grille to help cultivate Rover's new image, the second-generation 800-series symbolises Rover's return to the quality car league. Dressed to impress, the bigger new executive-class Rover aims to carve a much deeper niche than that of its clinically razor-edged predecessor.

The ritzier perceived image is reinforced by a stronger engine. It boasts significantly improved mid-range urge and a fair measure of top-end zip to make this one of the strongest performers in its class. Shame it's spoiled by a harsh engine drone and a cumbersome gearchange.

As for the rest of the car, it's business as usual. The chassis offers decent grip and good small-bump absorption, but the damping can't adequately cope with successive long-wave undulations. The steering is disappointingly wooden, while the body rolls too much and tends to push the front tyres wide.

Inside, you'll find a homely cabin: well trimmed, comfortable, practical and with all the usual Rover ambience. Remote central locking is a useful feature.

cc	1994
max bhp	136
max lb ft	136
max mph	125
0-60 (secs)	9.2
30-70	9.2
1/4 mile	17.2
30-50	7.3
50-70	11.0
Overall mpg	27.4
Touring mpg	31.9
mph/1000 rpm	22.5
Weight (kg)	1355
Tested	13.11.91
Price now	£17,495



# Saab 9000 CS 2.3



**For** Terrific engine, capable chassis, very roomy  
**Against** Flawed driving position, mediocre gearchange

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Strong all-round package

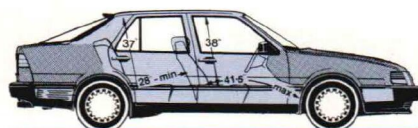
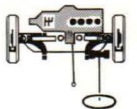
**R**ather overlooked in the ballyhoo surrounding the Ferrari-frightening 2.3 Turbo, the normally aspirated 9000 2.3 CS is actually far more pertinent to Saab's commercial fortunes.

In spite of the power advantage over its two-litre predecessor (150bhp compared with 130), the 2.3 would appear to offer few advantages, reaching 60mph in 9.5secs against 9.3secs. Don't be fooled by that, though. The 2.3 goes on to a top speed of 127mph and is usefully quicker where it matters. It's an impressively flexible unit, building a head of steam from around 2000rpm and not letting up until beyond 6000rpm. The gearshift still feels sloppy, but it doesn't trip over its laces any more.

Helm responses are perhaps a little overdamped for some tastes and the chassis isn't the last word in adjustability, but the Saab has bags of grip and poise and its suspension control is exceptional.

The Saab is conventional in its big hatch values — space, comfort, versatility, secure handling, solid engineering and more than adequate performance — but it is much more than that if you value driveability and smoothness as much as outright punch.

cc	2290
max bhp	150
max lb ft	156
max mph	127
0-60 (secs)	9.5
30-70	9.1
1/4 mile	17.4
30-50	7.2
50-70	11.0
Overall mpg	23.6
Touring mpg	28.4
mph/1000 rpm	23.1
Weight (kg)	1390
Tested	29.1.92
Price now	£22,995





# Saab 9000 CS 2.3 Turbo S



**For** Stunning performance, build integrity, pliant ride  
**Against** Sloppy gearchange, traction limitations

**Verdict** ★★☆☆ Rocketship big saloon, but lacks subtlety

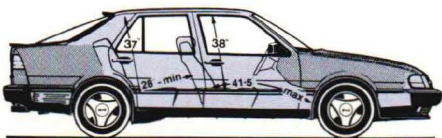
**F**reshly facelifted but not necessarily any prettier for it, Saab's latest 9000 Turbo packs one hell of a punch. Top-gear acceleration is stunning and on-boost overtaking ability is phenomenal. But channelling 244lb ft of torque through the front wheels is its undoing. Traction control is a necessary option, but while it tames the excesses at low speeds, it creates a nose-led character to its handling in twistier going.

Once speeds rise, though, the big Saab regains confidence and poise. It can be piloted at improbable speeds and with a fair margin of safety with acceptable economy. The brakes are excellent, but the same cannot be said of the gearchange.

On the motorways, the beautifully finished cabin and good ergonomics can be fully appreciated, as can the supple ride and refinement. The ambience is definitely in the quality car league and, apart from a slightly cramped footwell, the Saab is roomy and well equipped.

One unusual aspect of the Saab 9000 is that it is a big car with hatchback versatility and space. As a luxury saloon it makes sense, but as a sporting saloon it lacks that essential singularity of purpose.

cc	2290
max bhp	200
max lb ft	244
max mph	137
0-60 (secs)	8.0
30-70	7.3
1/4 mile	16.3
30-50	5.3
50-70	6.2
Overall mpg	22.2
Touring mpg	27.6
mph/1000 rpm	21.6
Weight (kg)	1420
Tested	30.10.91
Price now	£27,395



# Saab CD Carlsson



**For** Awesome mid-range acceleration, ride, grip  
**Against** Torque steer, numb steering, chassis lacks balance

**Verdict** ★★☆☆ Fast but ultimately unrewarding

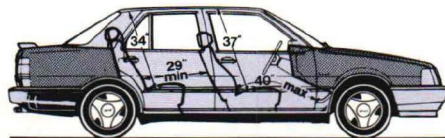
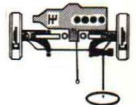
**T**he title of "most powerful front-wheel-drive car in production" sounds impressive and is one to which the Saab CD Carlsson lays convincing claim. With 220bhp and 246lb ft of torque, this car can outrag a Testarossa or Countach from 50-70mph in top.

But that's not the whole story. There is a fundamental dichotomy between putting such monster power through two wheels and then asking them to steer the car. The result is torque steer. The fact that the car is eminently controllable, thanks to a quick-witted traction control system, is some achievement.

What it's not is anything like as much fun to drive as rear-wheel-drive rivals such as the Vauxhall Carlton 24v or BMW 535i. It lacks their balance and steering response while still being affected to an annoying extent by the influence of the power and torque on the front wheels.

For an executive sports saloon costing close to £30,000, even one of the most effective and smooth four-cylinder engines in production is no substitute for a silky six. While we admire the superb engineering, we can only conclude that Saab has taken front-drive powerplay one step too far.

cc	2290
max bhp	220
max lb ft	246
max mph	141
0-60 (secs)	7.4
30-70	6.5
1/4 mile	15.9
30-50	4.5
50-70	5.7
Overall mpg	20.7
Touring mpg	27.6
mph/1000 rpm	24.0
Weight (kg)	1420
Tested	27.3.91
Price now	£29,495





# Seat Ibiza 1.2 GLX



**For** Mildly improved looks, solid interior, manoeuvrable in town  
**Against** Reduced performance, poor economy, harsh engine

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Replacement coming, and needed

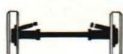
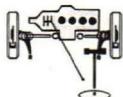
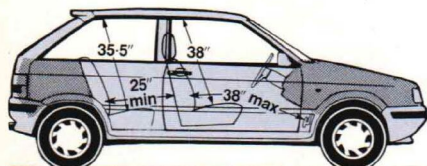
**S**eat describes its third generation Ibiza as the 'New Look', a description more apt than perhaps its maker intended. The truth is that its third facelift is just that — a cosmetic pep-up that addresses few of the Ibiza's fundamental flaws, although it does benefit from extra sound proofing and a new exhaust to improve refinement.

Outside, new front wings, lamp clusters, wheels, bumpers and front grille contribute to an improved Cd of 0.33. Unfortunately the 1.2 GLX has put on weight and consequently performance is slightly dented. The single-cam, Porsche-designed engine doesn't like being revved but even more disheartening is an average fuel consumption of 28.2mpg — way off the pace.

Best news is the interior, which has a Germanic solidity — a welcome legacy of Seat's six-year-old connection with Volkswagen — even if the switchgear is rather scattered. Outdated suspension has little subtlety to it and the steering is lifeless. Fortunately, it's also light, which is good for car park work, an environment where the diminutive Seat can cause least offence.

We look forward to the Ibiza's replacement in 1993.

cc	1193
max bhp	63
max lb ft	65
max mph	93
0-60 (secs)	15.0
30-70	17.3
1/4 mile	20.0
30-50	13.0
50-70	27.9
Overall mpg	28.2
Touring mpg	39.0
mph/1000 rpm	19.5
Weight (kg)	915
Tested	26.6.91
Price now	£7149



# Seat Toledo 1.9 CL Diesel



**For** Price, refined engine, fun handling, economical  
**Against** Awkward gearchange, driving position

**Verdict** ★★★★★ Should do well at the price

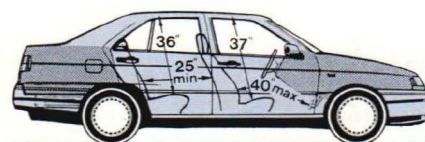
**Y**ou'd have expected that the time was right for Seat to introduce a diesel version of the Toledo, its Ford Sierra-sized hatchback. Launched in November last year — the month when diesel car sales broke 10 per cent in the UK — and priced to undercut all its rivals, it looked certain for success.

Only 480 sales up to the end of January 1992 must hurt the Spanish car maker a little, then. Not that the car is poor; far from it. The 1896cc engine is the very latest incarnation of Volkswagen's long-serving diesel, now benefiting from cylinder head work to reduce noise.

Indeed, refinement is one of the Toledo 1.9 CL Diesel's strong suits and it's not gained at the expense of performance. While 0-60mph in 15.6secs and a top speed of 101mph are hardly results that suggest a donning of the driving gloves, the Toledo is a capable cruiser that won't cause hassle on long journeys.

Fuel consumption of 37.6mpg isn't up to Citroen BX diesel frugality but it's still a light thirst all the same. Best news though is its £9999 list price which has to make this Toledo one of the best diesel bargains on the market.

cc	1896
max bhp	68
max lb ft	94
max mph	101
0-60 (secs)	15.6
30-70	17.7
1/4 mile	20.4
30-50	11.3
50-70	17.5
Overall mpg	37.6
Touring mpg	47.2
mph/1000 rpm	24.1
Weight (kg)	1058
Tested	22.1.92
Price now	£9999





# Seat Toledo 2.0 GTi



**For** Fun handling, economical, huge boot, good ride  
**Against** Poor performance, cabin space, unconvincing build

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ A capable and welcome newcomer

**T**his is the first Seat to be produced under the auspices of its new owner, Volkswagen, and the difference is clear to see. A £200 million injection and a helping hand from Giugiaro has created a good-looking Sierra-sized hatch that looks for all the world like a saloon.

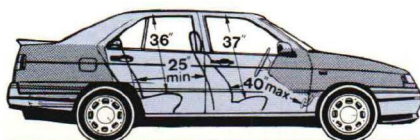
Power comes from a two-litre single-cam VW engine, which provides adequate, if hardly electrifying, performance coupled with class-leading economy.

Its handling is close to the top of the class too, offering fine grip and split second reactions to the throttle. Only a lack of ultimate damping control comes between the Toledo and top chassis honours.

Inside the Toledo is less impressive. The rear compartment is cramped for adults while front headroom is only adequate. The boot is simply enormous, capable of swallowing more holiday luggage than most families small enough to fit the Toledo will ever generate.

Seat still builds the Toledo in Spain, and build quality doesn't match the Germans. Despite a number of obviously VW parts inside, the Toledo has an insubstantial feel while trim seems a little cheap. But it is a fine newcomer to the market.

cc	1984
max bhp	115
max lb ft	122
max mph	123
0-60 (secs)	10.6
30-70	10.2
1/4 mile	17.9
30-50	9.5
50-70	14.2
Overall mpg	31.8
Touring mpg	32.1
mph/1000 rpm	22.2
Weight (kg)	1155
Tested	2.10.91
Price now	£13,499



# Subaru Legacy Turbo estate



**For** Performance, grip, steering, price  
**Against** Turbo lag, dull interior

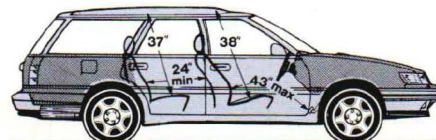
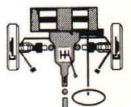
**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ The fastest estate we've driven

**A**udi and BMW must be rather disgruntled by the Subaru Legacy 2.0 quad-cam Turbo Estate. As we write, both German companies have high performance estate cars up their corporate sleeves, the 100 S4 Estate and M5 Estate, but neither could release them soon enough to make the impact that Subaru's Q-car estate has made. We were certainly impressed, returning from Millbrook with 0-60mph in 7.0secs and 133mph in the bag.

Such figures would be meaningless without a capable chassis, but the Legacy doesn't disappoint. The viscous-coupled four-wheel-drive system has a limited slip differential at the rear and gives levels of grip and traction we've never experienced in an estate. The steering is up to the job too, with a sporty 3.1 turns lock to lock.

Faults? The two-litre, turbocharged and intercooled quad-cam boxer engine — a development of the successful Legacy rally car's engine — has a little bit too much lag. Witness the in-gear times of 30-50mph in fourth and 50-70mph in fifth of 10.2secs and 12.9secs respectively — brisk, but nothing special. Still, it's the fastest estate car we've ever tested and we like it a lot.

cc	1994
max bhp	197
max lb ft	193
max mph	133
0-60 (secs)	7.0
30-70	7.4
1/4 mile	15.6
30-50	10.2
50-70	12.9
Overall mpg	21.8
Touring mpg	27.5
mph/1000 rpm	23.4
Weight (kg)	1415
Tested	20.11.91
Price now	£18,998





## Toyota Camry 2.2 GL



**For** Strong and refined engine, all-round competence  
**Against** Bland interior, poor rear space

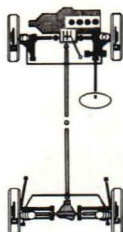
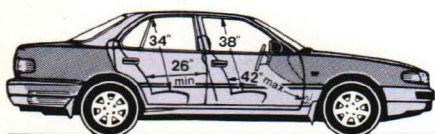
**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Fine all-round saloon

Look beyond Toyota's obvious blunder in failing to take account of the two-litre tax-break for UK-bound cars and the Camry 2.2 GL is an executive saloon that's remarkably hard to fault. From the smooth delivery of power and the well-balanced handling to the supple ride and sweet gearchange, the Camry does everything competently and unobtrusively.

The bland but balanced styling probably won't bowl you over, and neither will the effective but uncharismatic cabin with its slick controls and far from generous rear passenger space. No two-litre normally aspirated car in this class can claim strong performance but the Camry's added displacement means it is right up there with the best in class. Refinement isn't lacking either, apart from a tendency for the tyres to rumble on some surfaces, while it's easy to drive smoothly and quickly and the standard anti-lock braking is reassuringly effective.

The Camry won't knock you out with shining brilliance in any one area, but its solid all-round strengths and comprehensive specification create an overwhelming impression of competence that's hard to better at the price.

cc	2164
max bhp	134
max lb ft	145
max mph	125
0-60 (secs)	9.7
30-70	9.4
1/4 mile	17.4
30-50	7.7
50-70	11.0
Overall mpg	24.5
Touring mpg	31.2
mph/1000 rpm	23.3
Weight (kg)	1320
Tested	13.11.91
Price now	£17,520



## TVR V8S



**For** Incredible acceleration, fine steering, well built  
**Against** Noise, gearchange, poor instruments and driving position

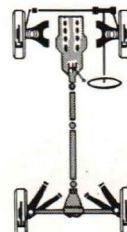
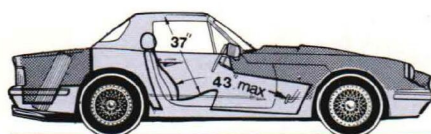
**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ The best TVR yet

If the V8S is anything to go by, TVR is maintaining its tradition of automotive unsubtlety to the end.

The marriage of the pretty S3 bodywork to the violent 400SE engine produces a car fast enough to keep pace with a Testarossa and sporting one of the loudest, rudest exhaust notes you can buy. An embarrassment in town, find an open road and it becomes inspirational. This is matched by the handling — up to a point. Turn-in is swift and precise and though we would like a little more grip to control the car's 240bhp. At least the steering is sufficiently responsive to give due warning of impending trouble. And it's a warning you'd better heed, for once the TVR starts sliding you need to be swift and accurate with steering and throttle to restrain the tail.

With 275lb ft of torque on tap the need to change gear is thankfully rare, as the dreadful shift quality is just one of a range of faults taking the edge off driver enjoyment. There's nowhere to put your clutch foot, the steering wheel is set too low, the instruments are tricky to read and excessive wind noise wrecks any chance of the V8S making a convincing tourer. Instead it remains a weekend, short distance sprinter and as such is a simply stunning device.

cc	3950
max bhp	240
max lb ft	275
max mph	146
0-60 (secs)	5.2
30-70	5.1
1/4 mile	14.0
30-50	4.2
50-70	6.0
Overall mpg	20.1
Touring mpg	n/a
mph/1000 rpm	26.9
Weight (kg)	1020
Tested	25.9.91
Price now	£23,595





# Vauxhall Nova 1.0 Trip



**For** Very frugal, strong performance, well built  
**Against** Heavy steering, dull handling

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Honest, but lacks flair

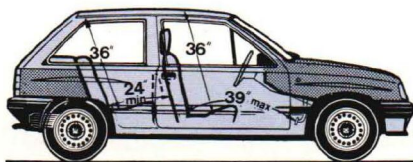
**S**upporting a more coherent interior and a more attractive grille, Vauxhall rejuvenation of the Nova, which we sampled it in its cheapest 1.0 Trip form, certainly looks convincing.

No complaints can be levelled at a lack of performance either. The 993cc pushrod engine may pump out only 45bhp and 50lb ft of torque, but well-judged gearing makes best use of it. The Nova will crack 90mph in its fourth gear top and has the lugging ability to make motorway work merely tiresome where in some rivals it's painful. We found fuel economy to be its best characteristic — 39.4mpg is as good as some diesels.

It's a pity the cheapest Nova is a less successful town car. The steering is appallingly heavy, which makes parking a long-winded and energy-sapping affair. Neither will the chassis entertain. Riding on slender tyres the Nova gives up gripping early and understeers doggedly. Such behaviour was acceptable in such cars a few years ago but today it's indicative of age.

At least the revamped interior is well designed and nicely put together. The whole car feels dated, though. Honest is probably the best word for the cheapest Nova.

cc	993
max bhp	45
max lb ft	50
max mph	91
0-60 (secs)	15.7
30-70	18.0
1/4 mile	20.3
30-50	8.7
50-70	18.9
Overall mpg	42.6
Touring mpg	42.6
mph/1000 rpm	18.4
Weight (kg)	750
Tested	28.8.92
Price now	£6580



# Vauxhall Nova 1.5D



**For** Very economical, quiet engine, respectable performance, build  
**Against** Nasty gearchange, heavy to park, bouncy ride

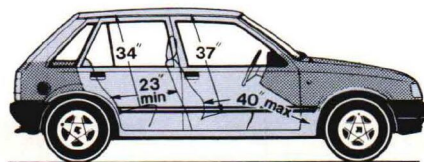
**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Only if ultimate economy is everything

**A**cosmetic refit does little to disguise the fact that the Vauxhall Nova is getting old. Only the 1.5-litre turbo diesel is left with any tricks with which to bamboozle the opposition, and with nigh-on the same amount of torque as a Peugeot 205 GTi 1.6 it produces extraordinary performance while returning 43.8mpg overall.

Removing the turbo sees this figure rise a little to 46.7mpg, yet performance takes a disproportionate fall. The 0-60mph sprint takes 15.4secs instead of 12.2 while top speed has fallen almost 10mph to 92mph. For dedicated economy enthusiasts, this may seem like a reasonable sacrifice to make, especially as over 50mpg is available on any motorway run. They will also appreciate the engine's largely smooth and quiet running, while the useable torque spread reduces the need to use the notchy, sticky gear-lever.

The rest of the car is less impressive. The chassis and steering contrive to kill driver enjoyment, the ride is jiggly and the steering heavy. In the end, unless economy is everything to you we could not recommend this Nova. It's just too compromised in other areas to be truly appealing.

cc	1488
max bhp	50
max lb ft	66
max mph	92
0-60 (secs)	15.4
30-70	17.9
1/4 mile	20.1
30-50	12.2
50-70	28.6
Overall mpg	46.7
Touring mpg	54.8
mph/1000 rpm	24.2
Weight (kg)	865
Tested	1.1.92
Price now	£8300





# Vauxhall Astra 1.7D Merit



**For** Looks, fine build, impressive interior, comfortable and refined  
**Against** Painfully slow, overlong gearing

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Solid effort let down by inadequate engine

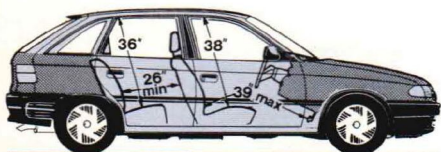
It has been our experience that the simpler and cheaper the new Astra, the better it is. Whereas the GSi 16v fails to make the grade in the 150bhp hot hatch class, the diesel-powered Merit makes a convincing case for itself.

Unfortunately, the one problem area is its engine, which is a diesel of the old school. With only 1.7 litres and 57bhp in a 1075kg car, keeping up a decent average on a windy motorway is extremely hard work. Acceleration in top gear is lamentable and you nearly always have to drop down to fourth at the first sign of a gradient. On A-roads, it helps to know the terrain so overtaking manoeuvres can be planned well in advance. Impressive economy only goes part of the way towards making up for this performance shortfall.

Otherwise, the Astra gives a good account of itself. It doesn't represent the last word in handling prowess, but at least it has a fine ride and a comfortable, stylish interior, and it is commendably quiet at speed.

It also looks and feels solidly put together and is the first car in its class to combine side-impact bars in its doors with pre-tensioned seatbelts. With a better engine, it would be a winner.

cc	1700
max bhp	57
max lb ft	77
max mph	96
0-60 (secs)	17.5
30-70	22.5
1/4 mile	21.0
30-50	17.1
50-70	26.7
Overall mpg	37.7
Touring mpg	47.1
mph/1000 rpm	24.7
Weight (kg)	1075
Tested	4.12.91
Price now	£9200



# Vauxhall Astra 1.4 GLS



**For** Showroom appeal, refinement, build quality, equipment  
**Against** Indifferent ride, mediocre acceleration

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Competent but dull

Roomed as a best seller, the Astra 1.4i GLS goes about its business with a wide-ranging brief, seeking to marry the common touch of Ford's Escort with the flair and ability of the Fiat Tipo, Citroen ZX and Rover 200.

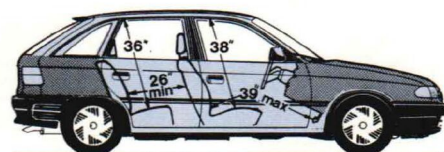
While the top speed of 106mph is close to the top of the class, the 0-60mph time of 12.4secs bumps along near the bottom. A long-striding top gear reduces lugging to a feeble momentum-gaining exercise. But there are compensations in the form of excellent cruising refinement and a frugal (34.7mpg overall) thirst.

The chassis deals with small bumps well and the steering feels reasonably precise and fluid, if largely devoid of feel. Yet there's an underlying floatiness that makes the Astra less than completely secure.

The new cabin is more adventurous than before and far more attractive. There's more space than before, too, and the level of standard equipment is impressive.

Where the Astra 1.4i GLS is good, it's very good: roomy, practical, refined at speed, well put together and outstandingly economical. But enthusiasts for performance and entertaining handling might feel inclined to look elsewhere.

cc	1398
max bhp	82
max lb ft	83
max mph	106
0-60 (secs)	12.8
30-70	13.2
1/4 mile	19.0
30-50	12.8
50-70	21.9
Overall mpg	34.7
Touring mpg	37.4
mph/1000 rpm	22.2
Weight (kg)	1035
Tested	9.10.91
Price now	£11,030





# Vauxhall Astra GSi 16v



**For** Gutsy engine, sporty looks, well-planned cabin  
**Against** Twitchy handling, ride refinement

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ So near and yet so far

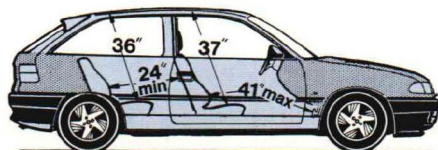
**T**he born-again sporty Astra looks every inch a winner in its latest GSi 16v guise, and with a gutsy 150bhp engine it's a winner at the test track, too. Now consider the smart, well-planned interior and the decent build integrity and it's clear that this is a car that should also be a winner in the showrooms.

But despite the GSi's undoubted appeal in many areas, it's a car that falls some way short of the mark in others. Not least of these is the flawed steering. The worst effects are tamed by electronic traction control, but it remains twitchy and lacks directness. Another area of inconsistency is the ride, which allows the wheels to skip and skate over bumps, and communicates a harsh and jiggly ride to the occupants. That the GSi has ample grip on smoother going is only partial compensation for a basic lack of balance and fluency.

In terms of acceleration, however, the Astra is almost without peer in its class with performance is both instant and accessible.

A cabin that's sporty and attractive makes the car easier to live with further adds to its potential appeal but until Vauxhall sorts the chassis it will remain a large disappointment for the drive.

cc	1998
max bhp	150
max lb ft	145
max mph	130
0-60 (secs)	7.2
30-70	7.2
1/4 mile	15.9
30-50	7.1
50-70	9.9
Overall mpg	26.4
Touring mpg	34.1
mph/1000 rpm	21.9
Weight (kg)	n/a
Tested	20,11.91
Price now	£15,600



# Vauxhall Frontera 2.3 TD Estate



**For** Versatility, refinement, car-like handling and ride  
**Against** Mediocre performance, limited off-road ability

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Good estate, poor off-roader

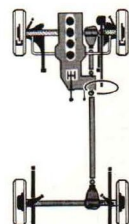
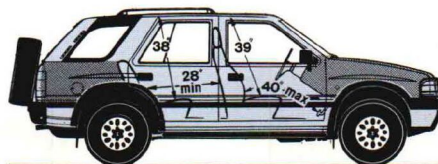
**F**or its belated assault on the burgeoning 'leisure vehicle' market, GM didn't start with a clean sheet of paper but adapted an existing design from Isuzu. In essence, the Frontera is the same vehicle Isuzu sells as the Mu in Japan and the Amigo and Rodeo in the US. In Europe, it comes in three and five-door forms with a range of GM powerplants, including the 100bhp 2.3-litre turbo diesel.

Fast it isn't. The top speed of 83mph doesn't even match that of Mercedes' sedentary 300GD (84mph), and it takes 18.1secs to get from nothing to 60mph.

On the rough stuff the Frontera acquires itself competently and is good enough to cope with muddy hills and rutted tracks. But it's no Discovery, lacking the ground clearance and axle articulation to earn true 'go-anywhere' status. On tarmac, however, the Vauxhall has the measure of the Land Rover, feeling much more like a large estate car than a tall-bodied off-roader.

And that's where the Frontera succeeds. It's a lifestyle-orientated car that's most at home ferry families or loads around, not plugging through swamps. The facia and switchgear look old-fashioned but the cabin is big, comfortable and versatile.

cc	2260
max bhp	100
max lb ft	158
max mph	83
0-60 (secs)	18.1
30-70	25.0
1/4 mile	20.9
30-50	11.6
50-70	29.0
Overall mpg	22.8
Touring mpg	28.4
mph/1000 rpm	21.8
Weight (kg)	1880
Tested	30,10.91
Price now	£16,830





# Volkswagen Polo 1.0 Fox

# Volkswagen Polo 1.3 CL Coupe



**For** Big boot, good economy, standard cat  
**Against** Poor performance, jerky driveline

**For** Quick, economical, well built, stylish facia  
**Against** Uninspired handling, nervous ride, cramped in back

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ Ecologically aware but dynamically flawed

**Verdict** ★★☆☆☆ New clothes fail to hide an old car

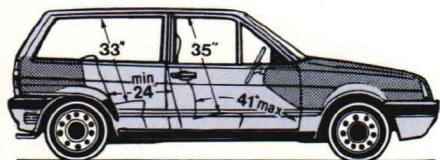
**R**ead the specification for the cheapest Polo you can buy and it sounds like an advanced package. Where most budget cars draw their fuel through carburettors, the one-litre Polo Fox is fuel-injected and also comes equipped with a catalytic converter as standard.

A power output of 45bhp backed by 56lb ft of torque sounds about right for the class too, but the resultant performance is very poor. The car struggles to a top speed of just 84mph and fourth gear performance is equally weak.

We were also surprised at how awkward the Polo is to drive. Tested against four carb-fed rivals, the injected VW felt jerky — a characteristic exacerbated by a notchy gearshift action.

We found the interior to be something of an acquired taste too. Stripy, deckchair-like trim is contrasted against a very sombre dash constructed of hard black plastic. To its credit, though, there is at least a pleasing lack of painted metal for a budget model.

We think the fuel economy of 38.4mpg and a large boot are the Polo Fox's best features. Enough said.



cc	1043
max bhp	45
max lb ft	56
max mph	84
0-60 (secs)	21.4
30-70	27.0
1/4 mile	22.4
30-50	10.4
50-70	24.1
Overall mpg	38.4
Touring mpg	38.5
mph/1000 rpm	16.9
Weight (kg)	780
Tested	28.8.91
Price now	£6799



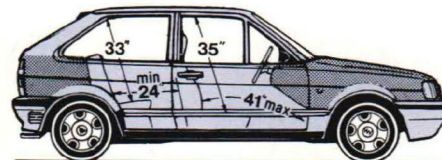
**I**t would be easy to look at this Polo and be fooled into thinking it has received the sort of update recently bestowed on Rover's Metro and Citroen's AX. Certainly that's the breadth of revisions that would be required to put the Polo back at the cutting edge of '90s hatches.

But look past the new lights, grille, bumpers and smart new facia and it's very much the same as before. True, like the Nova and Clio, all Polos have now been fitted with fuel injection to accommodate the standard catalytic converter and VW has taken the time to revise the suspension settings. But it feels little different to drive.

Thanks to an enthusiastic engine its performance places it towards the top of its class yet economy, even with the catalyst, remains excellent. The new facia is also a triumph of clarity.

Its age shows in the suspension's inability to cope with the demands of enthusiastic drivers and rutted roads. Where newer superminis sweep effortlessly round corners and over bumps the Polo feels nervous.

Despite the cosmetics, this Polo is based on an old design and feels it. and with a genuinely all-new Polo scheduled for next year the argument for this one seems all the more tenuous.



cc	1272
max bhp	55
max lb ft	72
max mph	95
0-60 (secs)	13.5
30-70	14.8
1/4 mile	19.4
30-50	9.7
50-70	15.2
Overall mpg	35.2
Touring mpg	40.1
mph/1000 rpm	21.2
Weight (kg)	770
Tested	6.3.91
Price now	£8321





# Volkswagen Polo G40



**For** Astonishing performance for a 1.3, entertaining  
**Against** Poor gearchange, dubious finish

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Almost a great hot hatch

**T**he nomenclature that promises some real action in the new Polo range is G40. And the supercharger's effect on the injected and catalysed Polo's modest 1272cc is nothing less than dramatic: 113bhp at 6000rpm, 111lb ft at just 3600rpm.

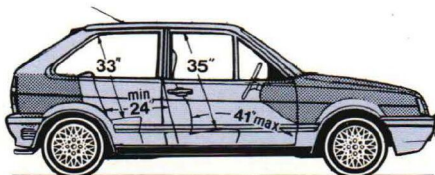
And a top speed of 119mph leaves Ford's 118mph Fiesta XR2i red-faced while, the Peugeot's 122mph 205 GTi just about fights off the challenge.

The G40 is embarrassingly accelerative, too, sprinting from rest to 60mph in 8.4secs, (0.5secs XR2i, 0.3secs 205 GTi). When it comes to the in-gear increments, the Polo is even more accomplished: 30-50mph in fourth takes just 6.4secs (6.5secs 205, 7.5secs Ford).

The G40 is a little twitchy on some roads but quite fun, serving up mild understeer as the staple handling characteristics and garnishing it with a generous dollop of adjustability which allows an unusually neutral balance to be achieved mid-bend.

As a feat of engineering, a 1300 that goes this well can't fail to impress. As a fully fledged hot hatch, however, it falters. That said, the G40 is tantalisingly close to being an excellent car.

cc	1272
max bhp	113
max lb ft	111
max mph	119
0-60 (secs)	8.4
30-70	7.8
1/4 mile	16.5
30-50	6.4
50-70	9.3
Overall mpg	38.4
Touring mpg	38.5
mph/1000 rpm	16.9
Weight (kg)	845
Tested	196.91
Price now	£11,799



# Volkswagen Golf VR6



**For** Almost everything  
**Against** Next to nothing

**Verdict** ★★★★★ The best car we drove last year

**J**ust like its GTi predecessor, the Golf VR6 looks set to form a new class of car — the six-cylinder hot hatch. Regular readers will know how well this new formula works: we named the VR6 our 1991 Car of the Year.

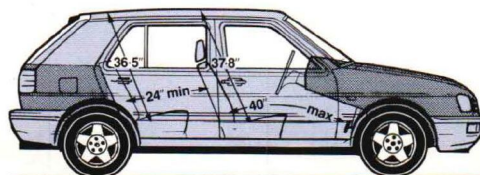
Obviously a lot of the credit for that title goes to a 2.8-litre V6 which has near-BMW levels of smoothness yet belts out so much torque at low revs progress seems effortless. With a snarling, biting exhaust note and enough power to reach 60mph in 7.1secs and a maximum of almost 140mph, the 15deg six is one of the most invigorating companions available for a favourite road.

But a car cannot live off its engine's credentials alone and it is the Golf's success in other areas that made selecting it as our favourite car so easy. The chassis handles the 174bhp with ease, grips with a vengeance and can be drifted through bends with safety and composure.

Inside, this is the roomiest Golf ever, with more than enough space for four adults, while its driving position and ergonomics are near faultless.

If this Golf represents the way forward for the hot hatch, and we believe it does, then that's great news for all enthusiasts.

cc	2792
max bhp	174
max lb ft	173
max mph	138
0-60 (secs)	7.1
30-70	6.4
1/4 mile	15.7
30-50	6.7
50-70	9.3
Overall mpg	24.0
Touring mpg	27.7
mph/1000 rpm	23.4
Weight (kg)	1220
Tested	6.11.91
Price now	£19,085





# Volvo 940 SE Turbo



**For** Well made, good ride, safe  
**Against** Not great to drive

**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ A lot of car from another era

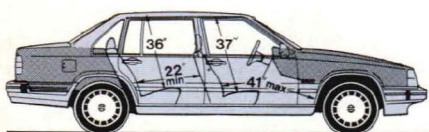
**C**onceived as a tax-break special rather than a bold step forward for Volvo's big car range, the 940 SE Turbo is a deftly assembled package of virtues and compromises likely to appeal to a driver who is better friends with his accountant than his driving gloves.

The 'Turbo' nomenclature will be a little misleading for anyone expecting fire-breathing performance. The job of the blower in this instance is to stiffen the wrist of the feeble two-litre injected four, that it may more effectively do battle with the bulky 900-series bodyshell.

Peak outputs are 155bhp and 169lb ft of torque, which translates into a top speed of 122mph and 0-60mph in 9.3secs. Subjectively, however, there's not much to write home about. Mechanical smoothness and refinement are quite impressive on a light throttle, but the engine feels harsh and sounds asthmatic when worked hard.

Put mechanical matters to one side and the picture brightens. The chassis has great reserves of stability, while the ride quality is more than respectable. And the cabin, while rather crudely styled, is both spacious and comfortably appointed.

cc	1986
max bhp	155
max lb ft	172
max mph	122
0-60 (secs)	9.3
30-70	8.8
1/4 mile	17.2
30-50	8.2
50-70	11.9
Overall mpg	21.2
Touring mpg	26.5
mph/1000 rpm	25.3
Weight (kg)	1388
Tested	17.4.91
Price now	£19,245



# Westfield SEiGHT



**For** Explosive performance, fine handling  
**Against** Nil refinement, (but will you care?)

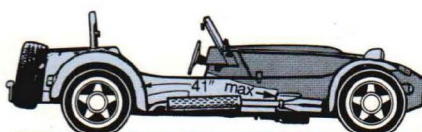
**Verdict** ★★★☆☆ Four-wheeled motorbike

**T**he formula is simple. Take a spaceframe chassis, add double wishbone suspension at each corner, clothe it in skimpy bodywork, then add a set of fat wheels and sticky tyres. Finally, bolt in the beefiest engine you can lay your hands on. In this instance it's a tuned version of Land Rover's 3.9-litre V8 topped by eight open bellmouths.

The hissing inlets and snorting exhausts can only hint at the 400bhp per ton ferocity unleashed when the throttle is floored. Wheelspin all the way from rest to 70mph is one way to demonstrate its potency. Another is to blast past cars with an instant burst of its 273bhp power. Accelerating from 40-60mph takes just a second and a half. Keep on the power and 140mph-plus is within reach. Imagine that in an open cockpit with your eyes at headlamp level and your bum just inches from the ground.

But there's more to it than supercar-crushing grunt. It handles with precision and balance, although it's not for the inexperienced. The steering is precise and quick, as indeed it needs to be with oversteer so accessible. A tonic so potent and so refreshing that it ought to be available on the national health.

cc	3946
max bhp	273
max lb ft	260
max mph	140 (est)
0-60 (secs)	4.3
30-70	3.6
1/4 mile	13.2
30-50	3.7
50-70	4.8
Overall mpg	12.2
Touring mpg	n/a
mph/1000 rpm	n/a
Weight (kg)	690
Tested	5.6.91
Price now	£22,000





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