

GROUP TEST



Our thanks to the Brooklands Museum Trust for allowing us on to the remains of the famous banked circuit. The Brooklands Museum housed in the restored clubhouse, is scheduled to open in 1991.

Pounds in your pocket

You don't need to dig deep into your pocket to buy these cars but can the Mini and Citroën 2CV compete with new wave bargain hatchbacks such as the Fiat Panda, Seat Marbella and Yugo 55? And what of the Skoda 120L – dependable or desperate? The answers may surprise you



GROUP TEST

The burning question when considering a car for around £4000 is this: a new economy car, or a more up-market car secondhand? When such low figures are involved, the secondhand option might seem the obvious choice but if you insist on brand-new metal for your money, it's there waiting in showrooms in an abundance of shapes and sizes. We've selected six representatives, but there's more diversity here than in any other market segment.

The Mini City E, the 2CV Special and the Skoda Estelle 120L Five are hardy perennials all three. Fiat's Panda doesn't come into this category just yet, being the most modern design among the six cars we've assembled here, but with its flat panels and minimalist styling it accepts the mantle of latterday 2CV with enthusiasm – particularly in its cheapest, most basic 750L form.

Fiat influence is strong in our remaining two cars, too. It's very obvious in the case of Seat's Marbella, just introduced to Britain at a very competitive price and tested here in 900L guise, for this car is a sparingly revamped version of the original leaf-sprung Panda which Seat made under licence in Spain in the last of their collaborative years with the Italian giant. It's not quite so obvious in the Yugo 55A GLS, though, for its Fiat 127-derived underpinnings and 128-derived engine are clothed in Yugoslavia's own Zastava designed three-door body. 'A' incidentally, stands for 'American', showing that the car incorporated improvements to cater for American buyers who are said to be more discerning than the Yugoslavs are.

What these cars do not offer is performance. Keeping up with the ebb and flow of surrounding traffic is about their lot. Nor do they offer cossetting luxury – but when it comes to individuality you're really spoiled for choice.

Pick either the Mini or the 2CV and you've bought a slice of motoring and social history – a car in which to form a straightforward assessment of pros and cons is to miss the point. These two, plus the Panda, offer a classless, functional chic not found in the others. All 2CVs, incidentally, now come from Portugal, the antediluvian Levallois factory in France having



finally closed its doors.

There's mechanical variety aplenty, though there are common themes. All except the rear-engined Skoda are driven by their front wheels. All except the air-cooled flat-twin 2CV have water-cooled straight-four engines, transversely mounted when matched with front-wheel drive. Five-speed transmissions are to be found in the Skoda and the Seat; MacPherson struts at the front of the Fiat, the Seat, and at both ends of the Yugo. Double wishbone geometry is used at the front of the Mini and the Skoda.

The Seat Marbella has a leaf-sprung dead beam axle at the back; it's denied the coil-sprung Omega beam semi-independent system gained by the Italian original at its facelift two years ago. Trailing arms continue as location for the Mini's rear wheels, sprung (as at the front) by rubber cones, while the Skoda shares with the Fiat 126 the distinction of being one of the two cars left on sale with swing axles at the rear. But it now has, in common with the other five cars, rack and pinion steering.

Citroën's 2CV suspension, of course, is a law unto itself. It uses leading arms at the front, trailing arms at the rear, interconnected by tension rods, plus a single longitudinal coil spring and hydraulic damper on each side. It's pure anti-dive geometry, combined with an unusually large steering castor angle. The 15in wheels are exceptionally large, too, but are shod with particularly skinny Michelin X tyres. Disc brakes at the front remove the erstwhile need to take off the front wings for a brake service. Current Minis, too, have disc front brakes within their 12in wheels.

The most modern engine belongs to the Fiat. Its 769cc, sohc Fully Integrated Robotised Engine (FIRE) is all aluminium, and develops a game 34bhp and 42lb ft of torque. That's 5bhp more than the featherweight 2CV's 602cc twin churns out. The Seat's engine is the venerable Fiat 903cc pushrod unit whose ancestry goes back to the Fiat 600; in common with the even older 998cc A-Series engine in the Mini, it delivers 40bhp, but the torque figure is 6lb ft lower at 44lb ft. It falls to the Eastern Europeans to provide the most muscle. The Czechoslovakian Skoda's aluminium block/iron head pushrod engine delivers 49bhp and

a healthy 64lb ft to haul along the largest bulk, while the sohc Zastava unit, similar to that found in some Uno models, gives 55bhp and 57lb ft.

Prices? Despite its minimalist architecture, the 2CV isn't the cheapest car here. Its £3630 selling price is undercut by the Skoda's £3597 tag, making the motor from Mlada Boleslav an impressive amount of metal for the money. The Panda, too, undercuts the £4K barrier (by one pound), but the Seat breaks it by £199 in 900L form (there's also an 850 model) as does the tiny, trendsetting Mini. This makes the Yugo the most expensive at £4292, though the cheaper Yugo 45a models, with the same body but with the 903cc engine found in the Seat, start at £3515.

PERFORMANCE

It takes the Citroën 2CV 6.8sec just to reach 30mph. You need an egg-timer rather than a stopwatch to record the 0-60mph time. But then, with only 29bhp from 602cc to offset huge aerodynamic drag (Cd is 0.51), it's a wonder it manages to reach 60mph at all, let alone a maximum 7mph beyond. By a comfortable margin, the 2CV is the slowest car of the group.

The differences between the remaining cars are smaller than the variation in power output – from 34bhp for the Fiat to 55bhp for the Yugo – would lead you to expect. Not surprisingly the Yugo is the fastest though at 82.2mph our top speed is some 8mph down on the maker's claim. The Fiat is slowest at 75.7mph, with the Seat and Skoda just exceeding 80mph. As regards through-the-gear 0-60mph acceleration, the ranking order is Seat (18.0sec), Austin (18.5sec), Skoda (18.6sec), Yugo (20.0sec) and Fiat (20.4sec). Differences of this size are too small to be of significance.

Cruising at the 70mph limit is just about the maximum you can reasonably expect from these cars, but here the Citroën regains some ground, since it will cruise comfortably at its maximum speed – even beyond it if there's a tailwind.

But what the figures can't convey is the manner in which these cars go about their work. The Citroën doesn't go fast, and has a flat-spot which extends throughout the rev range, but its two-cylinder air-cooled engine

chugs gamely along. Likewise the Fiat Panda, whose low-powered engine is always smooth and mannerly.

Subjectively, the Yugo feels much quicker than the figures (taken on a previous test car) indicate, the engine sounding distinctly cammy, as it used to in the Fiat 128.

The Seat also feels notably brisk, but the 903cc pushrod engine is plagued by poor carburation which hampers smooth driving.

The excellent fourth gear acceleration of the Seat and Skoda is partly a result of this pair having five-speed gearboxes (as a consequence their fourth gears are shorter than the norm), though in the Skoda's case the engine's very high 64ft lb torque undoubtedly helps.

All six cars rely on manually-operated chokes for cold starting.

ECONOMY

There's no clear winner here. In our hands, the Mini, 2CV, Panda and Marbella all returned figures close to 40mpg, which were comfortably better than either the Skoda (29.3mpg) or the Yugo (32.8mpg).

Driven with greater restraint – admittedly not easy with these cars – 50mpg should be possible, as evidenced by the touring consumptions of the Mini (49mpg), Citroën (50.2mpg) and Panda (49.2mpg). Here, the heavier Skoda and Yugo (36.8mpg and 36.9mpg respectively) are simply not in the same league.

The range of the Citroën and Yugo is restricted by their small fuel tank capacity (5.5 and 6.6 gallons, respectively). All six cars require four-star fuel.

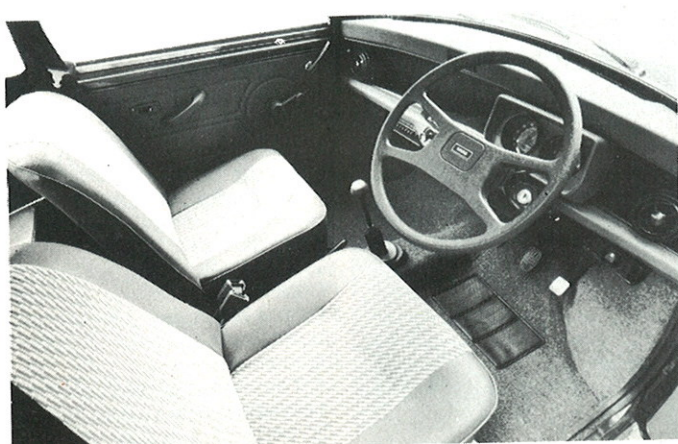
TRANSMISSION

There's some variety here. The Fiat, Seat and Yugo all use the contemporary layout of a transverse front engine with end-on gearbox. The Citroën and Skoda have their transmissions mounted end-on also – behind the engine in the former, and in front in the case of the rear-engined Skoda. Only the Mini has its transmission mounted in-sump (sharing engine lubricant). It is the only car of the group available with automatic transmission too. The Skoda and Seat alone possess five-speed gearboxes.

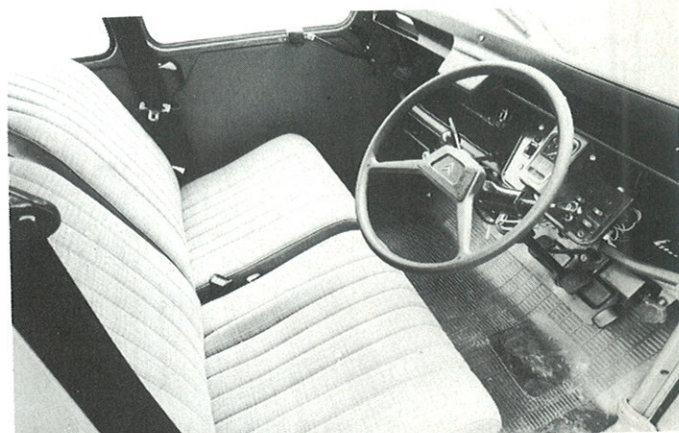
In the past, we've praised the Citroën 2CV's fascia-mounted push-pull umbrella gear selec-



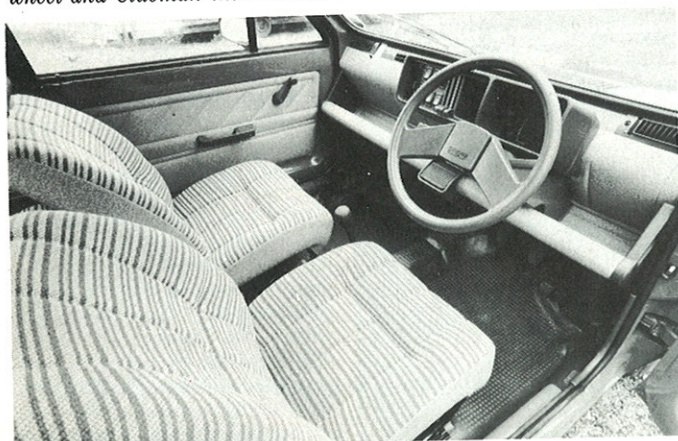
GROUP TEST



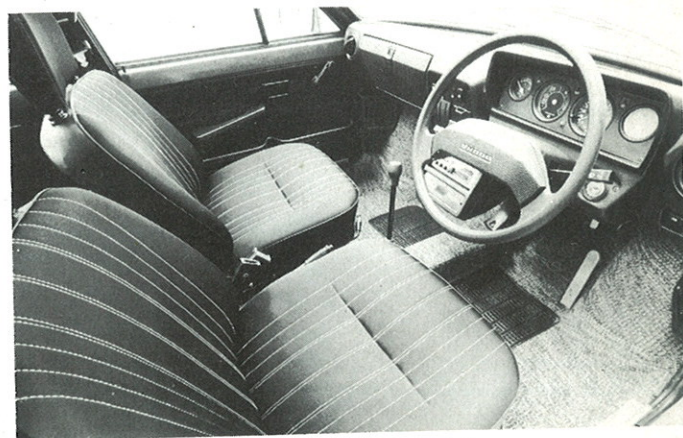
The trim has changed. Current Minis have Metro four-spoke steering wheel and Chubman instruments



Untidy fascia, crude instruments, but 2CV's driving position is comfortable and not much wrong with controls layout



Marbella has a more conventional interior with less painted metal; unlike the Panda its seat backrests recline



Skoda is comfortable despite offset-to-left pedals. Crude instruments, but radio/cassette is standard

tor as working very well. The 'gate' is unusual, since it places both first and fourth on a limb and requires a dog-leg second-to-third shift. However, this latest car had very stubborn first gear engagement, and needed well-timed upward shifts to avoid an engagement crunch. The more conventional floor-mounted shifts of the other cars proved vastly better.

The Skoda's transmission is hard to fault. It offers five well-chosen ratios, an excellent gearshift and a light and progressive clutch.

Clutch take-up is fierce in the Fiat Panda and Seat Marbella to the point where a conscious effort is needed. This is a pity because — especially in the Fiat's case — the gearshift itself is superb.

Unfortunately the Yugo's gearshift has inherited the stiction and vagueness associated with past Fiats, and despite only having four ratios it doesn't work anything like as well as the current Mini gearbox.

HANDLING

Despite its antiquity, the Mini leads the pack in this area. It has light high-g geared steering, quick responses, good grip and fine stability. The only trouble is that there's never enough power to take full advantage of the wild chassis.

That said, the Yugo is not far behind. But, inevitably, this car's extra weight results in heavier steering and duller responses, for which the 55GLS's wider (155/70SR13) tyres cannot fully compensate. Broadly, it handles much like a Fiat 127, power on understeer being the predominant trait.

Poor front-end grip and a reluctance to turn-in characterise both the Panda and Marbella, though the former is generally better behaved as a result of better rear wheel location and less pronounced body roll in corners. Both are safe, but their limited grip and dull response kills any entertainment for the enthusiast.

However, all things are rela-

tive. The Citroën 2CV has easily the most body roll and least grip. It feels markedly reluctant to deviate from the straight-ahead, and needs to be "persuaded" around corners. That said, it is stable and forgiving (safely scrubbing off excess corner entry speed) and it does not encourage the driver to push it beyond its modest limits.

How you view the Skoda depends upon what type of driver you are for, in this low cost guise, the swing-axle rear suspension makes itself very evident when you press on. Drive the car properly and smoothly when cornering — slow in, fast out — and it will reward you with its good grip, near-neutral balance and effortless steering. Get it wrong — by lifting-off on a wet downhill corner, for instance — and the Skoda will bite back with a vengeance. Whether you regard the handling as dangerous or merely entertaining, is really a question of viewpoint. Either way, the Skoda needs treating with a very reasonable

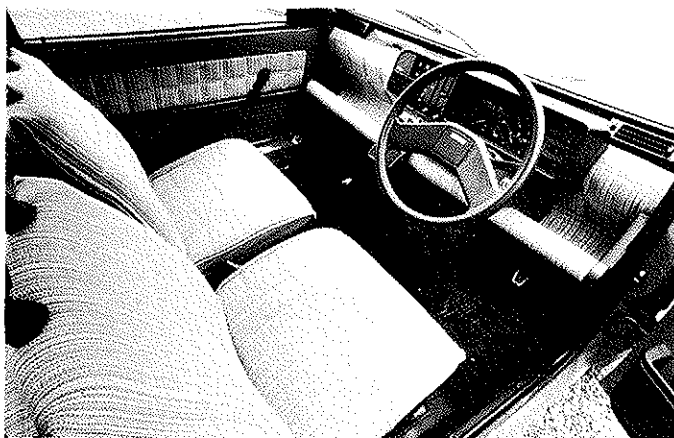
measure of respect.

RIDE

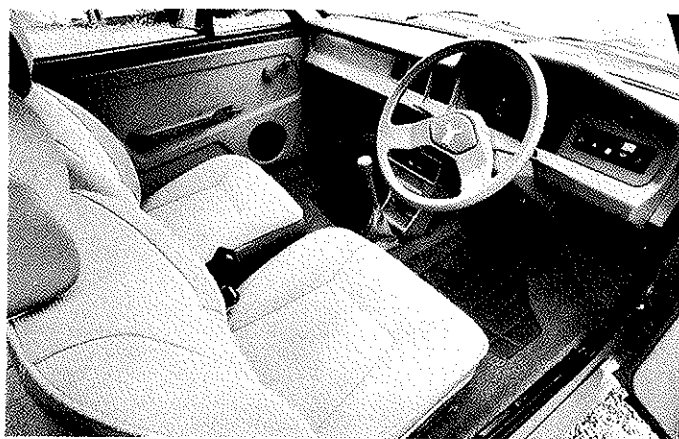
The variation here is immense. There's no question that the 2CV has the softest ride — and would probably tackle a ploughed field with aplomb — but whether this gives the best comfort is open to debate.

The Skoda provides the best ride in a conventional sense. Its suspension irons out ruts and broken surfaces most impressively and the car has an almost Mercedes-like feeling of solidity; the only real weakness is a tendency for the nose to bob up and down in a manner typical of rear-engined cars with lightly laden front wheels.

Almost as good is the Yugo. The suspension is pure Fiat 127 and it shows in generally fine road behaviour. Better, in fact, than the Fiat or its Spanish imitator. Of this pair, the Fiat is easily the more accomplished. Its Omega beam axle feels decidedly better than the crude semi-elliptic sprung and located



Attractive, modern, but Spartan in the extreme - Fiat Panda's interior design comes straight out of a Habitat catalogue



Sculptured door casings and shapely seats contrast with shiny plastic fascia in Yugo; driving position and instruments are poor

beam axle fitted to the Seat, especially when it comes to coping with both bumps and bends simultaneously.

The Mini has always been noted for its firm and uncomfortable ride, and nearly 30 years have done little to improve it (though current models running on 12in wheels are slightly better). It is the only car in the group that forced us to consciously slow down on bad roads merely to maintain some personal comfort.

BRAKES

Surprisingly, all six cars boast disc/drum braking systems, though front discs are a fairly recent addition to the Mini and 2CV (the latter being of generous 9.6in diameter and mounted inboard).

None of these cars has enough weight or performance to place heavy demands on its braking system, and it is significant that only the Skoda and Yugo possess brake servos. In-

evitably, this calls for higher pedal pressures from the other four cars, though this didn't give any great cause for concern. Most testers did, however, prefer the lighter pedal weighting of the Skoda and Yugo.

NOISE

It is unreasonable to expect quiet civilised motoring from any new car costing less than £5000, and none of these cars came anywhere close to meeting that ideal.

Most people would judge the Skoda to be the quietest, primarily because it is taller-gearred than its rivals and possesses low levels of wind and road noise. However, motorway cruising is marred by a prominent exhaust resonance which also acts as a real disincentive to driving the car very hard.

While not as quiet, the Citroën feels the most relaxed. Its throbbing two-cylinder engine creates the illusion of very tall gearing. Wind noise and road

roar are usually the dominant noise sources.

Much credit should go to the Fiat Panda. Given the obvious light construction and minimal soundproofing employed, the 750 version is tolerably refined and very smooth provided it is driven within a sensible performance limit. Except at very high speeds, it is quieter than the better trimmed and taller-gearred Seat. At high speeds general mechanical thrash predominates over other noise sources in both these cars. It is especially obvious in the pushrod-engined Seat.

The Yugo isn't particularly quiet, but the Fiat 128-sourced 1116cc overhead cam engine sounds sporting, thereby making the noise easier to tolerate.

Remember the so-called "quiet" Minis of a few years ago? Pure marketing hype; taller gearing and extra soundproofing have done little to quell the thrash of the pushrod A-Series engine. In fairness, though, Rover have gradually reduced the transmission noise to a point where it is now acceptable. You still buy a Mini and just have to put up with the racket!

AT THE WHEEL

Being objective, things don't look so good for the Mini from behind the wheel either. The addition of a Metro steering wheel and improved instruments in front of the driver don't alter what is fundamentally a cramped and uncomfortable driving position. It is fun, yes, but these days you have to be a masochist to appreciate it.

Just as quirky is the Citroën, which retains its usual push/pull fascia-mounted gear lever and spindly single-spoke steering wheel. True, those squashy front seats offer little support, but really there is not much wrong with the basic driving position and layout of the important controls. Instrumentation consists of a 70mph speedometer and fuel gauge together with a gearshift "map".

Those who have driven a Renault Dauphine or even a Porsche 911 will feel at home in the Skoda. Typical of a rear-engined car, the Czech contender has heavily offset pedals as a result of the driver's feet being placed between the front wheel-arches — and with no dividing centre tunnel. In its favour the Skoda boasts comfortable front seats with a fully

variable backrest recline. Instruments are old-fashioned round dials set in a black crackle-finish housing, while stalk controls would appear to have been sourced from the Rover parts bin.

The furnishing is different, but the Fiat 127 ancestry is obvious the minute you sit in the Yugo. Despite having a decently supportive seat, the driving position suffers that common Italian car problem of having the steering wheel too far away; a further snag is that the shape of the floorpan prevents a clean angle of attack on the clutch pedal. Instrumentation is basic, but there are, however, plenty of warning lights.

Befitting their relative modernity, both the Panda and Marbella have good driving positions, their tall boxy bodysheells catering well for drivers of different height and shape. Here the Seat's advantage of an adjustable backrest gives it the edge over the Italian car; its backrest also provides better sideways location too. The Panda's instruments conform to Fiat corporate style, contrasting with the more futuristic array (but devoid of a temperature gauge) present in the Marbella. Surprisingly given their price, both of these cars boast a low level fuel warning light.

ACCOMMODATION

It's no contest here. The Skoda is the only car capable of carrying four adults in any degree of comfort. It's not just roomy, but thoughtfully designed too, with plenty of footspace under the rear seats for passengers' feet, and a split folding backrest just like a Hillman Imp so that the small space behind the seats can be usefully extended. Effectively it has two boots — the front one huge — and the fact that it possesses four doors as well is just the icing on the cake.

Of course, the 2CV has four doors also, but there's considerably less fore and aft space and, more significantly, width. Headroom is no problem, however.

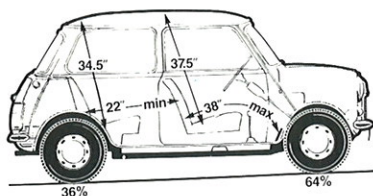
Between the Fiat, Seat and Yugo there's very little to choose; with the latter the driver has the option of more rearward seat movement, but it's at the expense of those sitting behind.

All these cars will accept four adults at a pinch, but the Italian/Spanish duo have the most versatile interiors with hammock-style rear seats. In both models,

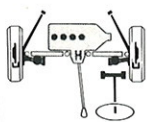
GROUP TEST

MINI CITY E

£4199



Length 3.07m (120.8") Width 1.41m (55.5") Front track 1.21m (47.5")
Wheelbase 2.03m (80") Height 1.35m (53") Rear track 1.17m (46")

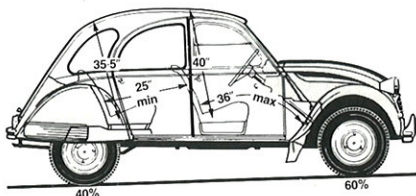


Capacity, cc 998
Cylinders Four in-line
Power bhp/rpm 40/5000
Torque lb ft/rpm 50/2500
Bore/stroke, mm 64.6/76.2
Valve gear ohv
Compression 10.3:1
Fuel system Single choke CD carb
Gearbox 4-speed manual
Turning circle, ft 28.5
Boot capacity, ft³ 3.9
Cd 0.48
Weight, cwt 11.9

Front sus Independent by transverse arms, tie rods, rubber cone springs, telescopic dampers
Rear sus Independent by trailing arms, rubber cone springs, telescopic dampers
Steering Rack and pinion
Brakes Disc/drum
Wheels 4.5B x 12
Tyres 145/70 R12

CITROËN 2CV SPECIAL

£3630



Length 3.83m (150.8") Width 1.48m (58.3") Front track 1.26m (49.5")
Wheelbase 2.40m (94.5") Height 1.60m (63") Rear track 1.26m (49.5")

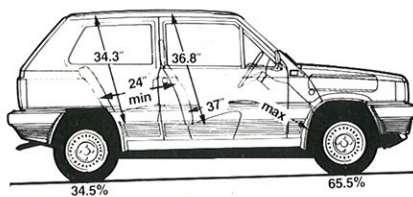


Capacity, cc 602
Cylinders Flat twin
Power bhp/rpm 29/5750
Torque lb ft/rpm 29/3500
Bore/stroke, mm 74.0/70.0
Valve gear ohv
Compression 8.5:1
Fuel system Twin-choke carb
Gearbox 4-speed manual
Turning circle, ft 35.0
Boot capacity, ft³ 7.5
Cd 0.51
Weight, cwt 11.6

Front sus Independent by leading arms and horizontal coil springs, interconnected with rear
Rear sus Independent by trailing arms and horizontal coil springs, interconnected with front
Steering Rack and pinion
Brakes Disc/drum
Wheels Pressed steel, 4J x 15
Tyres 125/15

FIAT PANDA 750L

£3999



Length 3.38m (133") Width 1.46m (57.5") Front track 1.25m (49.3")
Wheelbase 2.16m (85") Height 1.44m (56.8") Rear track 1.24m (49")

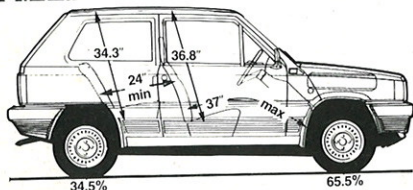


Capacity, cc 769
Cylinders Four in-line
Power bhp/rpm 34/5250
Torque lb ft/rpm 42/3000
Bore/stroke, mm 65.0/58.0
Valve gear sohc
Compression 9.4:1
Fuel system Single-choke carb
Gearbox 4-speed manual
Turning circle, ft 31.1
Boot capacity, ft³ 7.0
Cd 0.41
Weight, cwt 13.6

Front sus MacPherson struts, with lower transverse links and angled radius rods
Rear sus Centre pivoted Omega beam axle with trailing arms and coil springs
Steering Rack and pinion
Brakes Disc/drum
Wheels Pressed steel, 4.0B x 13 in dia
Tyres 135 SR13

SEAT MARBELLA 900GL

£4199



Length 3.38m (133") Width 1.46m (57.5") Front track 1.25m (49.3")
Wheelbase 2.16m (85") Height 1.44m (56.8") Rear track 1.24m (49")

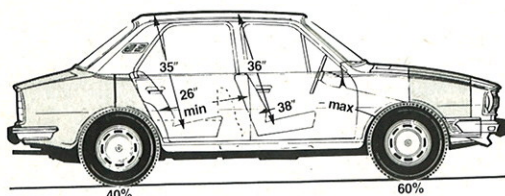


Capacity, cc 903
Cylinders Four in-line
Power bhp/rpm 40/5400
Torque lb ft/rpm 44/3000
Bore/stroke, mm 65.0/68.0
Valve gear ohv
Compression 8.5:1
Fuel system Single-choke carb
Gearbox 5-speed manual
Turning circle, ft 31.1
Boot capacity, ft³ 7.0
Cd 0.41
Weight, cwt 13.4

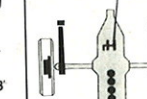
Front sus Independent by MacPherson struts with lower control arms, reaction tie rod, coil springs
Rear sus Dead beam axle supported on leaf springs
Steering Rack and pinion
Brakes Disc/drum
Wheels 4.5B x 13
Tyres 135 SR13

SKODA ESTELLE 120L

£3597



Length 163.8" Width 62.8" Front track 50.3"
Wheelbase 94.5" Height 55" Rear track 49.3"

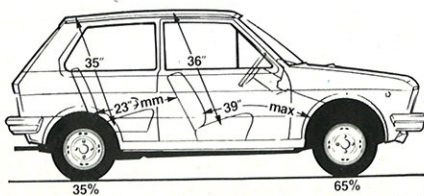


Capacity, cc 1174
Cylinders Four in-line
Power bhp/rpm 49/5000
Torque lb ft/rpm 64/3000
Bore/stroke, mm 72.0/72.0
Valve gear ohv
Compression 8.5:1
Fuel system Twin-choke carb
Gearbox 5-speed manual
Turning circle, ft 36.0
Boot capacity, ft³ 6.3
Cd -
Weight, cwt 17.1

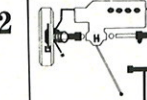
Front sus Independent by wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Rear sus Independent by swing axles, coil springs
Steering Rack and pinion
Brakes Servo-assisted, disc/drum
Wheels Alloy, 5J x 13
Tyres 165 R13

YUGO 55A GLS

£4292



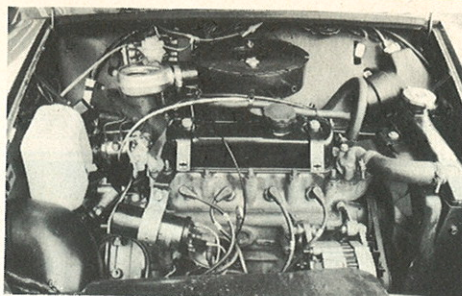
Length 3.50m (137.5") Width 1.31m (51.8") Front track 1.31m (51.5")
Wheelbase 2.15m (84.5") Height 1.40m (54.8") Rear track 1.31m (51.8")



Capacity, cc 1116
Cylinders Four in-line
Power bhp/rpm 55/6000
Torque lb ft/rpm 57/3000
Bore/stroke, mm 80.0/55.5
Valve gear sohc
Compression 9.2:1
Fuel system Single multi-jet carb
Gearbox 4-speed manual
Turning circle, ft 31.8
Boot capacity, ft³ 6.7
Cd 0.40
Weight, cwt 15.1

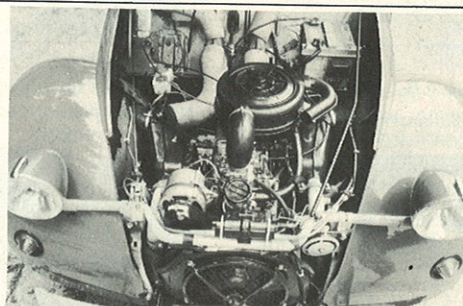
Front sus Independent by MacPherson struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Rear sus Independent by struts, transverse leaf springs
Steering Rack and pinion
Brakes Servo-assisted disc/drum
Wheels Alloy, 5J x 13
Tyres 155/70 x 13

MADE BY: Austin Rover Group Ltd
 AT: Longbridge, Canley Road, Canley, Coventry CV5 6QX
 TEL: 0203 70111
 NUMBER OF DEALERS: 1001
 LIST PRICE INC. CAR TAX AND VAT: £4199
 EXTRAS FITTED TO TEST CAR: Metallic paint £110
 OTHER OPTIONS: Automatic transmission £823, Black paint £65
 PRICE AS TESTED: £4309



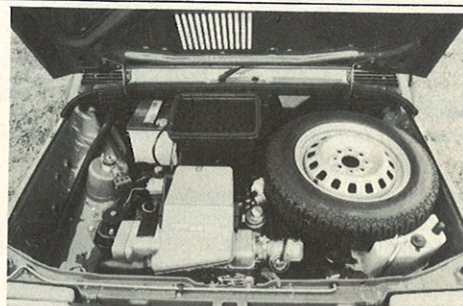
Mini's "A Plus" ohv engine delivers 40bhp as well as plenty of noise

MADE BY: Automobiles Citroën
 AT: Mangualde, Portugal
 SOLD IN THE UK BY: Citroën UK Ltd, Mill Street, Slough, Berks SL2 5DE
 TEL: 0753 23808
 NUMBER OF DEALERS: 271
 LIST PRICE INC. CAR TAX AND VAT: £3630
 EXTRAS FITTED TO TEST CAR: None available
 PRICE AS TESTED: £3630



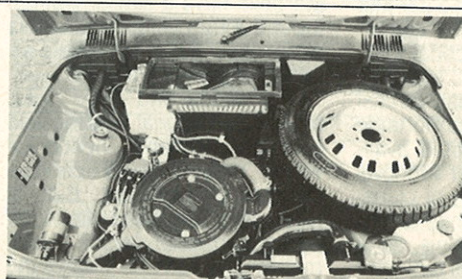
Citroën's air-cooled flat twin – not much power, but with legendary reliability

MADE BY: Fiat S.p.A., Italy
 AT: Desio, or Termini Imerese, Sicily, Italy
 SOLD IN THE UK BY: Fiat UK Ltd, 199 Knightsbridge, London SW7 1DE
 TEL: 01-225 1266
 NUMBER OF DEALERS: 325
 LIST PRICE INC. CAR TAX AND VAT: £3999
 EXTRAS FITTED TO TEST CAR: None available
 PRICE AS TESTED: £3999



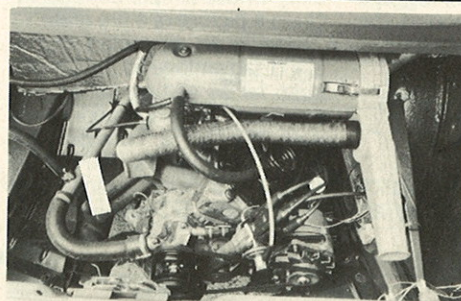
FIRE engine is smooth and efficient, but lost in Panda's engine bay

MADE BY: Seat SA, Spain
 AT: Barcelona
 SOLD IN THE UK BY: Seat Concessionaires (UK) Ltd, King's Court, Reading, Berks RG1 4EX
 TEL: 0734 593131
 NUMBER OF DEALERS: 145
 LIST PRICE INC. CAR TAX AND VAT: £4199
 EXTRAS FITTED TO TEST CAR: None available
 PRICE AS TESTED: £4199



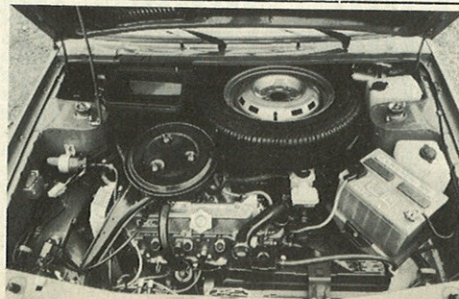
Spot the difference. Marbella is powered by 903cc ohv engine as was used in the original Fiat Panda

MADE BY: Motokov, Foreign Trade Corporation NA, Czechoslovakia
 AT: Mlada Boleslav, Czechoslovakia
 SOLD IN THE UK BY: Skoda (Great Britain) Ltd, 150 Goswell Road, London EC1V 7BS
 TEL: 01-253 7441
 NUMBER OF DEALERS: 293
 LIST PRICE INC. CAR TAX AND VAT: £3597
 EXTRAS FITTED TO TEST CAR: None available
 PRICE AS TESTED: £3597



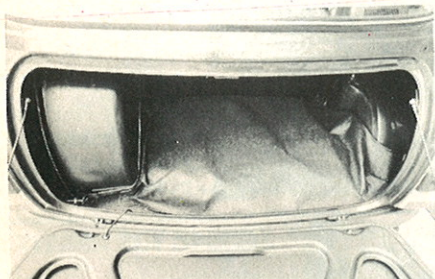
Skoda's rear-mounted ohv engine is unique in having an aluminium block with cast iron head

MADE BY: Zavodi Crvena Zastava
 AT: Kragujevac, Yugoslavia
 SOLD IN THE UK BY: Yugo Cars, Worcester House, Basingstoke Road, Reading, Berks RG2 0QB
 TEL: 0734 866921
 NUMBER OF DEALERS: 150
 LIST PRICE INC. CAR TAX AND VAT: £4292
 EXTRAS FITTED TO TEST CAR: None
 PRICE AS TESTED: £4292

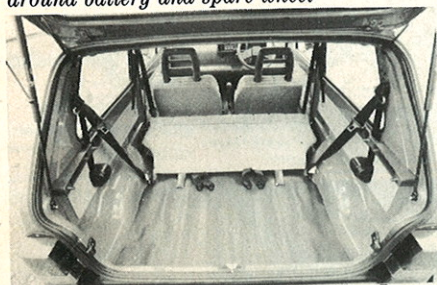


Yugo has the most powerful engine, a 55bhp ohc unit borrowed from the Fiat 128

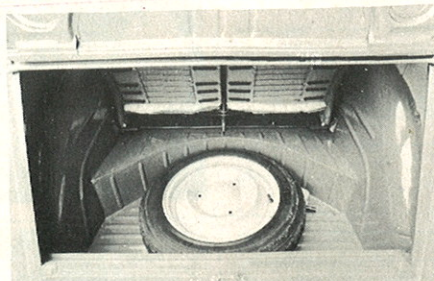
GROUP TEST



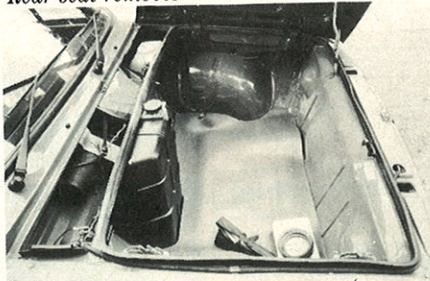
Enlarged fuel tank makes the Mini boot smaller than ever – luggage must be packed around battery and spare wheel



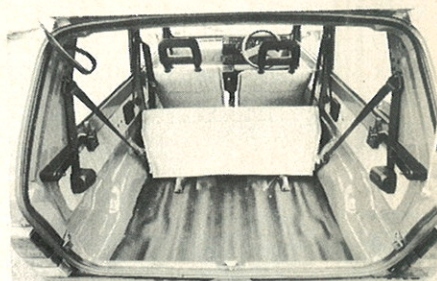
Marbella boot area is identical to Panda



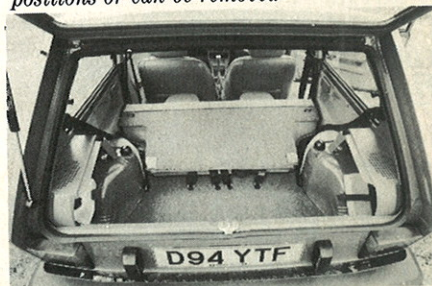
Citroën has the biggest boot, with an enlarged opening available as an option. Rear seat removes



Side-hinged lid reveals large boot for Skoda



Hatchback versatility for the Panda; hammock-style rear seat clips in various positions or can be removed



Yugo's boot is small with high lip

the rear seat position can be fine-tuned with multi-position mounting points; a decent-size boot is further common ground.

It may be a miracle of packaging efficiency within a car just 10ft long, but the Mini cannot be considered a practical four-seater. With limited legroom, low-mounted and near vertical seats it's not very comfortable either, within the limited available space. Fixed rear windows only add to the sense of claustrophobia. Boot size has diminished on current Minis as a result of the larger fuel tank now fitted – and, as before, luggage has to be packed around the battery and spare wheel.

HEATING AND VENTILATION

With the 2CV, you get to swallow your insects whole (if they are

small ones), and raindrops too – which is one way of saying that its scuttle-mounted adjustable flap provides highly effective ventilation! Both the Panda and Marbella have a similarly direct input through vents at the fascia extremities, but at least there's a token attempt at filtration.

The Skoda and Yugo boast more conventional heating and ventilation systems, neither of which delivers such copious volumes of fresh air. But, at least, they do admit fresh air free of corruption by the heater matrix. The same is true of the Mini, whose simple controls include a picture of a fire grate.

Having an air-cooled engine is a disadvantage to the Citroën in so far as getting hot air into the cabin is concerned. Air is bled through a collector box from the engine's air cooling system – a crude arrangement which works, but only just.

The water-valve heaters that are fitted to most of these cars give good heat output but relatively poor regulation.

EQUIPMENT

The remarkable Skoda has as many goodies as a mid-range Montego. With a list that includes alloy wheels, a glass sunroof, stereo radio cassette player, who could reasonably ask for more?

It costs more, but the Yugo misses out on a sunroof. Instead, it also comes equipped with a so-called 'body-kit' which we consider dubious value. The cheaper 55A looks a better bet.

To its credit, the Marbella is also very well kitted out, gaining a rear wiper, five-speed gearbox, two-speed wipers, reclining front seats and body side graphics compared with the cheaper Panda – though you still have to

put up with a rubber floor covering and only a single-speed heater fan. The rear windows hinge open, though.

The Mini? These days it has cloth seats, carpeted floor, and two-speed wipers. It's undeniably basic, but there's always the Mayfair if you're not all that satisfied...

FINISH

Look closely at any of these cars and you'll notice scrappy rough edges, orange-peel paintwork and ill-fitting trim. They're built down to a price, not up to a standard – and it shows.

Once again, however, the Skoda provides the most acceptable compromise. It both looks and feels durable, its failings being virtually confined to the interior – poor seat trim is one example.

The Panda is superbly built,

RATING

	Austin	Citroën	Fiat	Seat	Skoda	Yugo
Performance	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Economy	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Transmission	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Handling	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Brakes	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Ride comfort	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Accommodation	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Boot/storage	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
At the wheel	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Visibility	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Instruments	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Heating	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Ventilation	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Noise	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Finish	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Equipment	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
VALUE RATING	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
MOTOR RATING	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

but the very Spartan trim and wide (but consistent) panel gaps create an unfortunate first impression. Somehow, the very similar Marbella doesn't match this standard, failing on poorer quality trim materials.

The Yugo's flamboyant exterior isn't mirrored by the interior furnishings. In particular, the shiny plastic mouldings for the fascia and door trims confirm this car's East European origins. In other respects, though, the Yugo appears to be very well screwed together.

Frankly we were disappointed with the Mini. It had a superb metallic paint finish, but beyond that all the evolutionary improvements made over the years have come to naught—for the body assembly can only be described as very poor, with none of the panels fitting as they were designed to. It's as if the Rover Group have simply lost interest and given up.

Nevertheless, the Mini's problems pale compared with those of the 2CV, which still looks as though it was home-made from corrugated iron. The recent shift in production to Portugal doesn't seem to have improved matters, and the panels remain both wafer thin and ill fitting. But at least it's likely to stay that way, for the underbody rustproofing (probably carried out in UK) appears to be exceptionally thorough. Exposed screws, rivets and bare metal are all part, however, of the aura of 2CV ownership.

VERDICT

It would be easy to dismiss the Fiat Panda because the trim is basic and it's not very fast, but that would be to miss the point. In this case, the low purchase price is matched by low running and servicing costs, it is safe and pleasant to drive, it is well built and thoroughly practical—in short it does the job. If you're looking for a *sensible* small car then it is the logical choice.

But what of the Marbella? Superficially it looks a better bet. The trouble is that under the surface the Seat is really a Mark One Fiat Panda—and it shows. The engine is noisier and less smooth, the ride much worse and the handling untidy over bumpy surfaces. It uses more fuel, doesn't appear to be as well built, and as yet residual values are unproved (Pandas hold their value well). However, that is not to deny the fact that

in 900GL form you get more performance, more equipment and an extra gear for just a couple of hundred pounds more. It runs the Fiat close, but the design student purity has been diluted.

If you simply want the most car for your money, buy the Skoda. It's a sturdy, well-built car at a giveaway price, really the only choice if you need a comfortable and practical four-seater.

But there are a few snags. It's likely to be the most expensive car of the group to run, with the worst fuel consumption, Group 3 insurance and long servicing times (more than twice as much servicing is needed as the Fiat, notwithstanding the fact that the Skoda's parts prices are dirt cheap). The other problem is that its handling isn't completely idiot-proof.

Based as it is on a Fiat floorpan and drive train (127 and 128 respectively) and built with a purpose-designed hatchback body in Yugoslavia, the Yugo must be seen as a compromise between the traditional Eastern Bloc cars and the cheap Italian/Spanish models. It felt the liveliest car in the group, had the best ride and handling compromise and, in 55GLS form, well equipped and trimmed. However, it costs more than its rivals, only has four gears (resulting in fussy cruising and poor economy), offers only cramped accommodation, and build quality and finish are below par. Frankly, the £400 cheaper 55A looks a better bet.

Great *lifestyle* machines though they are, it is not possible to justify either the Mini or 2CV in any objective purchasing decision: both have too many serious drawbacks.

The Mini is still great fun to drive, and you can park it anywhere, but those are its sole virtues. In other respects, it's noisy, cramped, uncomfortable, ill-equipped and poorly constructed. It's not *that* cheap these days either.

But the Citroën 2CV is cheap. If all you need is a machine for ambling along on quiet country roads, preferably with the canvas roof folded back, then buy it. But you have to accept that it is sluggish, crude beyond belief, and can be unpleasant to drive—though drivers with a masochistic nature will relish the challenge.

Sales figures suggest that an increasing number do.

PERFORMANCE

	Austin	Citroën	Fiat	Seat	Skoda	Yugo
Max speed mph	81.3	67.0	75.7	80.1	82.0	82.2
3rd	73	57	66	63	66	69
2nd	47	38	43	43	44	45
1st	28	20	23	24	24	28
0-60mph, sec	18.5	32.1	20.4	18.0	18.6	20.0
30-50 in fourth, sec	15.6	20.2	14.6	12.6	11.5	14.7
30-70 through gears, sec	29.5	—	31.9	23.7	22.4	29.7
Standing ¼ mile, sec	—	23.6	21.9	21.0	21.5	21.7
Standing km, sec	—	45.6	41.8	40.3	40.1	41.3
mph/1000rpm	18.9	12.4	15.1	18.0	19.3	15.3

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

	Austin	Citroën	Fiat	Seat	Skoda	Yugo
Door bins (*1)			■*		■	
Lockable glovebox						
Rear parcel shelf	■		■	■	■	■
Split folding rear seat					■	
Map reading light						
Boot light						
Remote boot/hatch release					■	
Remote fuel flap release						
Locking filler cap					■	■
Passenger door mirror			■	■	■	■
Remote mirror adjustment						
Dipping interior mirror		■	■		■	■
Flick wipe	■					
Intermittent wipe			■	■	■	
Programmed wash/wipe						
Rear wash/wipe				■		■
Headlamp wash/wipe						
Internal headlamp levelling		■				
Laminated screen	■		■	■	■	
Tape player					■	□
Stereo radio					■	□
Clock						□
Cigar lighter						■
Sunroof		■			■	□
Seat height adjuster (driver)						
Seat tilt adjuster (driver)						
Head restraints			■	■	■	■
Rear compartment heating					■	
□ Option						

COSTS AND SERVICE

	Austin	Citroën	Fiat	Seat	Skoda	Yugo
Price, inc VAT & tax	4199	3630	3999	4199	3597	4292
Insurance group	1	1	2	1	3	2
Overall mpg	38.5	38.8	39.8	37.6	29.3	32.8
Touring mpg	49.1	50.2	49.2	44.4	36.8	36.9
Fuel grade (stars)	4	4	4	4	4	4
Tank capacity, galls	7.5	5.5	8.9	7.7	7.9	6.6
Major service interval, miles	12,000	12,000	12,000	10,000	12,000	12,000
Intermediate service, miles	—	—	—	5000	6000	6000
Oil change, miles	6000	6000	6000†	5000	6000	6000
Set brake pads (front) £	34.48	13.59	20.56	15.12	5.66	8.82
Complete clutch £	146.62†	43.30	61.20	97.06	56.72	65.04
Complete exhaust £	38.10	37.04	110.83	76.96	21.08	84.47
Front wing panel £	27.31	76.66	21.61	14.81	44.21	29.90
Oil filter £	4.77	5.07	6.65	5.69	3.54	4.85
Starter motor £	80.50	72.85	97.30	122.48	55.63	91.72
Windscreens £	47.73	16.17	69.84	71.70	74.18	85.28
Tyre £*	32.45	29.90	29.37	29.37	34.44	39.10
Total service time, hrs up to 50,000 miles	14.3	10.3	9.3	13.6	24.5	22.4
Time to change clutch, hrs	2.3	4.0	3.1	3.6	3.7	3.0

†Fully balanced assembly includes flywheel

*Owner's responsibility