

Daihatsu Sirion

Featuring Sirion Plus



IS THE SIRION A CHARADE REPLACEMENT and a Ford Fiesta or Vauxhall Corsa rival, or is it one of those new, smaller “city car” contenders? Its external size, with five doors, points to the former, whereas its diminutive three-cylinder motor makes it more like a posher Cuore – which now has the same engine. One thing’s certain – Sirion is a mainstream product intended for sale in significant numbers – not a niche offering like Move or Terios.

Our Sirion Plus test car was well endowed with all the niceties of modern small car motoring, such as standard ABS, central locking, air conditioning and airbags, and a price check will confirm that it’s pitched midway between the smallest and the next size up; the £1400-cheaper Sirion doesn’t lose any doors or the power steering, and although its interior (door) trims look cut-price, in most functional respects it’s well worth considering. Indeed, the limitations of Sirion’s power unit seem less conspicuous at the lower price, whereas its mixture of limited performance, mechanical activity and so-so fuel economy failed to convince us on our higher-flying test car.

The three-cylinder engine pulls reasonably affably from 20mph in fourth, does even better on the open

road (it’s firing 25 per cent less often, remember), but it’s really rough if you pull away in first or second with any determination; at such times it gives a fair imitation of a chain saw felling timber. Neither does it have enough puff to undertake any real overtaking, especially when laden or when the automatic gearbox (no cost) option is fitted. This four-speed auto, with a torque converter but no lock-up in top, is certainly easy to get along with, so long as you’re not in a rush; but expect its added convenience to put a dent in the fuel economy figures.

Our consumption tests on the manual confirm what we experienced on the Hijet – over 50mpg is easily attained on any reasonable run, but higher-speed cruising (which doesn’t cause distress) nevertheless plays havoc with economy; our motorway result is 6mpg worse than for the one-litre Corsa, for instance.

The driving position is blessed with light major controls and a “straight-ahead” pedal set (with a wider brake pad on the automatic) but no left footrest. There’s no wheel or seat height adjustment, but it’s set-fair for most small-to-average-build drivers and the seat supports spines well – though taller types will find it a bit short in the cushion. Some of the minor

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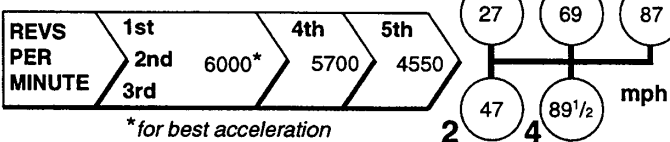
PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS	2.8 → 6.5 → 11.7 → 19.6				
IN 5TH GEAR	8.5 → 17.7 → 28.3 → 41.1				
IN 4TH GEAR	6.1 → 12.3 → 19.0 → 27.8				

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES	17.1/12.3		19.8/12.9		23.4/15.5
	17.7/12.3			23.4/15.5	

Maximum speeds



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Type of use – with air conditioning off *	mpg
Urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	34
Suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start) [6.2%]	42
Motorway (70mph cruising [2.8%])	40
Cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	49
Rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	60
Typical mpg overall	47
Realistic tank range (not nominal tank capacity)	30 litres/310 miles

**with air conditioning switched on, consumption increased by percentages shown in brackets*

FOR THE TECHNICAL

ENGINE

Type transverse three in line with iron block and alloy head; four main bearings

Size 72 x 81mm = 989cc

Power 54bhp at 5200rpm

Torque 65 lb ft at 3600rpm

Valves belt-driven twin overhead camshafts actuating four valves per cylinder via scissors gear

Fuel/ignition electronic multi-point petrol injection integrated with programmed, direct-ignition (no distributor or plug leads). Exhaust catalyser and 40-litre tank – no low-level lamp

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual, front-wheel drive (four-speed auto optional)

Mph per 1000rpm 19.1 in 5th, 15.7 in 4th (Auto: 20.8)

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent damper/struts with coil springs. Rear: torsion beam dead axle with coil springs. Anti-roll bars and telescopic dampers all round

Steering rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance; 3.6 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 9.3m between kerbs, with 16.2m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5J steel with 165/65R14S tyres (145/80R13S on standard model). Both have "space saver" temporary spare

Brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear with vacuum servo. Electronic, four-channel anti-lock control with "Brake assist" also on Sirion Plus only

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

Assessed on their effectiveness and convenience (the more black blobs the better)

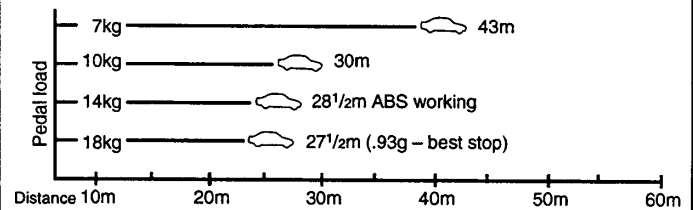
Seatbelts	front ●●●○○	rear ●●○○○	Door locking	●●●○○
			central locking?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Head restraints	front ●●○○○	rear <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	remote control?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
			auto window closure?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Interior	safety padding ●●●○○		deadlocks?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	driver's airbag? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Luggage	
	other airbags? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		secure from interior/hidden	●●○○○
	side impact protection ●●●○○		from view	●●○○○
Fuel anti-spillage	●●●○○		Alarm	
			engine immobilised?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

standard on test car factory fitted option not available

BRAKES

Pedal feel ●●●○○ Behaviour in an emergency ●●●○○ Handbrake ●●○○○

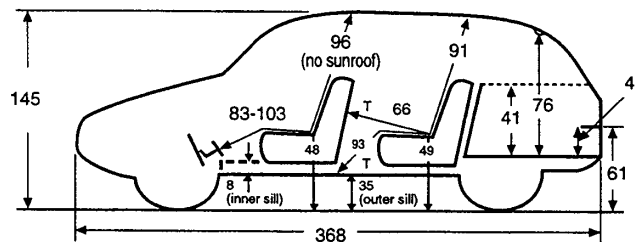
Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with standard ABS)
(A good-to-average best stop is about 26m at 15-20kg pedal load)



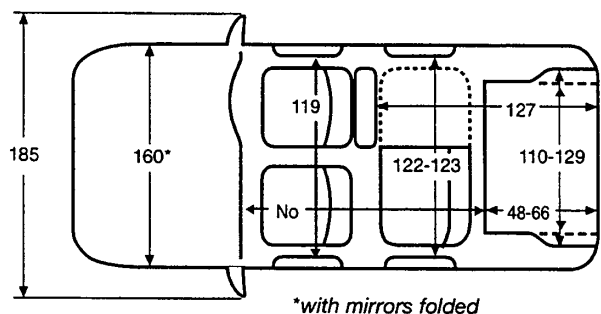
Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:
8kg at start of test, 8kg at end of test. (Ideal brakes show no change)

MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres Five-door hatchback



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants



*with mirrors folded

controls are poorly placed – we left the heated rear window on, unnoticed all day, for example, and the rear wiper lacks an intermittent setting on its awkwardly positioned switch. The fuel gauge infuriatingly reads empty when there's supposed to be 10 litres left, but the other main displays are neat and quite accurate.

We like the extra quarter windows at the back, which help when reversing and go down well with young rear passengers, too. Rear legroom is rather restricted, although the seat is reasonably shaped. Seatbelt tags aren't easy to find, but they don't confuse the seat folding because the cushion is fixed – only the 50/50 split backrests hinge forward, so the extended load floor isn't flat and creates a risk if heavy objects slide forward. Other load deck disappointments include the painted tailgate that's easily scratched, the absence of a boot lamp and an easily rucked floor mat with a space-saver wheel beneath, despite ample room underneath for a deeper wheel well.

Outside, too, the Sirion's survivability as a town car is compromised by a predilection for chrome, yet there's no nudge protection for the painted bumpers or door sills; the rear load sill is nominal, however, and is plastic protected.

Power steering is standard on the Sirion, with a tight turning circle, too. The clever, self-folding door mirrors emphasise this car's ability to squeeze through tight spaces, but in terms of overall length, it's comparable to Ford's Ka rather than Seat's Arosa or especially Fiat's Seicento. Unlike any of these, it's a five-door-only design, of course.

It bowls along well on main roads, even though there's a moderate amount of both wind and tyre noise, but it's poorer secondary surfaces that get the Sirion in a fluster. It isn't harsh, but it constantly fidgets and frets. It corners neatly with no hidden vices, but again, it lacks Ka's and Seicento's dynamic panache in the hands of a keener, more exacting driver.

The brakes on the Sirion Plus feature ABS, as well as "Brake-assist" – a mechanism that's designed to reduce pedal pressure for emergency stops, while retaining more progression in less urgent situations. We found it impossible to detect any difference; the

system just feels somewhat over-servoed, but with the ABS preventing resultant wheel lock and loss of control.

Side-impact injury prevention is enhanced by the use of side airbags on Sirion Plus, yet even the basic car has the driver and passenger front 'bags as standard, as well as pretensioning, height-adjustable seatbelts. By comparison, the rear passengers don't appear to be as well protected.

Our car's security was enhanced by a Daihatsu alarm that also operates the central locking via handset. The snag was that if we used it to lock the car, then came back and opened anything by key, the alarm went off. The normal central locking works on the driver's side only. An (inconvenient-to-work) Pioneer radio/cassette has a removable front panel and the fuel filler has an interior release.

VERDICT

Destined to make a big impact in a showroom or on brochure inspection, the Sirion's generous list of features can disappoint in service. Likewise, breathtaking mpg figures would justify the use of a small three-cylinder engine, but in our Sirion Plus it couldn't deliver. The availability of an automatic at no extra cost seems an important asset for any city car contender, however, and in such use, the comfortable driving position, nimble steering and clever self-folding mirrors are valuable assets.

With a bigger, four-cylinder engine (from the Charade?) and some refining of the ergonomic details, the Sirion would be even more convincing.



HOW THE SIRION COMPARES	Engine cyl/cap/power (cc/bhp)	Revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (m/kg)	Maximum legroom – front (cm)	Typical leg/kneerom – rear (cm)	Steering turns/ circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
DAIHATSU SIRION PLUS	3/989/54	3660	19.6	41.1/27.8	47	27½/18*	103	93/66	3.6/9.3(p)	368
Seat Arosa 1.4 (3 door only)	4/1390/60	3180	13.7	25.5/18.0	45	28½/18	105	93/62	2.9/10.1(p)	354
Vauxhall Corsa 1.0 12v	3/973/55	3820	19.4	38.5/26.6	50	27/16	104	99/67	4.1/9.8	373
Peugeot 106 1.1	4/1124/60	3790	14.1	29.6/20.8	46½	29/27	106	89/64	4.1/9.7	368
Hyundai Atoz	4/999/55	4000	18.9	33.9/25.4	44½	28/18	99	101/62	3.0/9.6(p)	350
Ford Ka (base version)	4/1299/60	3050	16.1	38.0/25.0	47	28/22	105	92/67	4.2/9.9	373
									* with ABS	(p) power-assisted