

Hyundai Matrix

Featured model: 1.6Gsi



IS THE MATRIX REALLY AN MPV? Hyundai thinks it is and there's no denying that its typically tall build and deceptively roomy interior give the same impression.

True, its split and fully reclining back seats don't actually remove, though they slide 20cm fore and aft independently, to adapt to load or legroom requirements; they can also be set up to form a temporary bed. Tip these seats forward and an expansive flat load floor, with 108cm of height, opens up, with more underfloor storage, as well. There are plenty of picnic trays and oddments spots all over the place, with even a rear centre armrest.

The Matrix offers more interior space and adaptability than any car this short – except Mitsubishi's Space Star and Fiat's (wider) Multipla. And short it is – which is why there's no question of a third row of seats. The benefits are absurdly easy parking manoeuvres and a tight turning circle.

The seats provide more than sheer space; they're comfortably supportive, too, with a commanding driving position. An ideally placed left footrest, good pedals and wheel positions, plus a seat cushion that can be height-adjusted at front and rear, guarantee a favourable showroom impression.

Out on the road, however, this doesn't translate into so much driver-appeal because of a clunky gearshift, an undistinguished ride on poorer surfaces and an engine that's more sound than fury.

We briefly sampled the 1.8, as well, which proved more lusty from low speed,

but more uncouth and vibrant in the mid-range.

The three-cylinder diesel does just as well in hill climbing because it characteristically produces more low-speed pull; it has a prominent if relaxed cruising gait, but when revved through the gears, falls behind this cheaper 1.6.

For its size, none of these power units offers impressive mpg figures in the official tests and, just like the Elantra, this 1.6 Matrix didn't even match those results in our independent AA tests. It has to be said, however, that all MPVs do worse than their hatchback counterparts, in both performance and economy.

Hyundai are developing an excellent reputation for reliability and we noted the quality of the interior fabric on floor and seats, the conscientious door seals (no wind noise) and the helpful DIY details in the handbook. You also get an alloy spare wheel – less hassle if there's a puncture.

VERDICT

Some people are great fun to be with, but you wouldn't want to rely on them too much. In motoring terms, the Matrix is the other sort. It's hardly exciting, but it's practical, dependable and more adaptable than most. And it doesn't need much room.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	★★★★○
Space/practicality	★★★★○
Controls/displays	★★★★○
Safety	★★★★○
Handling/steering	★★★★○
Comfort	★★★○○
Fuel economy	★★★○○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1599cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 102bhp at 5800rpm, 104 lb ft at 4500rpm; belt-driven double overhead camshafts, 16 valves

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 20.0 mph/1000rpm in 5th, 15.8 in 4th

suspension front: independent damper/struts, integral coil springs Rear: independent damper/coil spring struts,

lower transverse and trailing arms

steering hydraulic power assistance; 3.2 turns lock-to-lock; 10.65m diameter turning circle between kerbs (16.5m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear, with standard anti-skid control (ABS)

wheels/tyres 5½in alloy with 195/55R15V tyres (Kumho Powermax 769 on test car) full-size alloy spare

LIKES ...

rear wash and wipe arrangements
deep windows give superb all-round vision
all but two tell-tales grouped together
tailgate independently locked
full-size alloy spare wheel

and GRIPES

air con switches on when not wanted
NS keyhole won't work central locking
too many gongs and buzzers
no cassette player and radio fiddly
centre dials unhelpful for spec wearers

THE MATRIX RANGE

size and type supermini sized, MPV-style estate car

trim levels GSi, CDX

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.6 litre/102bhp, 4/1.8/121; diesel: 3/1.5/81

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; (4-speed stepped automatic available on petrol versions)

OVERTAKING ABILITY ★☆☆○○					
<i>Lacks the other two engines' low-speed responsiveness, but willing enough when revved through the gears; clunky, uninspiring gearchange</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear		
20-40mph	3.9	10.4	15.9		
30-50mph	4.8	9.8	14.3		
40-60mph	6.4	10.6	15.4		
50-70mph	8.3	11.7	18.2		
30-70mph	13.1	21.5	32.5		
max speed in each gear (*using 6250rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④	⑤
speed (mph)	28½	51	74½	101	104

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★☆☆★○			
<i>No one believes it's as short as a Rover 25, excellent interior space, with smallest load deck enhanced by sliding back seat – not as seat-adaptable as some MPVs, though</i>			
<i>in centimetres (5-door MPV)</i>	inside	<i>(† without sunroof)</i>	
outside	front - legroom	87-107	
length	- headroom	†100-103	
width - <i>inc mirrors</i>	rear - typical leg/	105/80	
- <i>mirrors folded</i>	kneeroom	(*91/63)	
height (<i>incl roof bars</i>)	- headroom	98	
load sill height	- hiproom	132	
<i>(inside/outside)</i>	load space (<i>all seats in use</i>)	<i>(litres/cu ft)</i> 375/13.2 (*490/17.2)	
steering	load length	64 (*83)-109	
turns lock-to-lock	full length to fascia	236	
turning circle (<i>metres</i>)	load width	99	
easy to park/garage?	load height (<i>to shelf/</i>	60/	
★☆☆★○	<i>to top of aperture)</i>	99	
(* back seats set forwards)			

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★☆☆○○
White-on-black would improve view of the (central) displays – grouped warning lights a good idea, though. Seats support well with generous driver adjustment – compensates for poor ride comfort



HOW THE MATRIX COMPARES	engine cyl/cap/power (no/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes – best stop from 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering - turns/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
HYUNDAI MATRIX 1.6	4/1599/102	3500	13.1	32.5/21.5	33	27½/13	107	105/80	3.2/10.65	403
Fiat Multipla 1.6	4/1581/103	3780	12.7	29.2/20.6	30	27½/20	106	114/83	2.8/11.1	399
Mitsubishi Space Star 1.8	4/1834/121	3150	10.6	27.1/20.4	38	27½/18	109	103/75	3.1/10.0	403
Citroën Multispace 1.6	4/1587/110	3240	11.5	32.7/23.3	37½	31/27*	107	102/77	3.2/11.3	411
Vauxhall Zafira 1.6	4/1598/100	3630	13.1	27.0/18.6	35½	24½/18	103	102/75	3.2/11.0	432
Renault Scenic 1.6	4/1598/110	3460	12.0	28.2/19.3	34½	26/40	108	102/76	3.5/10.6	417

*without ABS

SAFETY ★☆☆○○									
<i>Servo intrudes too much, so standard ABS needed to avoid "over-braking". Good handbrake. This version's security not very thorough and central locking works only from driver's keyhole</i>									
braking	dry road stopping distance <i>from 50mph (with standard ABS)</i>								
pedal feel ★☆☆○○	<table border="1"> <tr> <th>pedal load</th> <th>distance</th> </tr> <tr> <td>unhurried 10kg</td> <td>29m</td> </tr> <tr> <td>sudden 13kg</td> <td>27½m <i>best stop</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td>+4kg ie 17kg</td> <td>28½m</td> </tr> </table>	pedal load	distance	unhurried 10kg	29m	sudden 13kg	27½m <i>best stop</i>	+4kg ie 17kg	28½m
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unhurried 10kg	29m								
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+4kg ie 17kg	28½m								
in emergency ★☆☆○○									
handbrake ★☆☆○○									

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS
 Matrix not yet tested

SECURITY FEATURES		
central locking ✓	alarm (1.8 only) ✗	
remote control (1.8 only) ✗	immobiliser ✓	
auto window closure ✗	luggage security ★☆☆○○	
deadlocks ✗		
✓ <i>standard</i>	0 <i>factory option</i>	✗ <i>not available</i>

HANDLING AND STEERING ★☆☆○○
Steering lacks feel but is nevertheless nicely weighted and roll on corners well curtailed. Competent bend swinger



COMFORT ★☆☆○○
Unsettled by secondary road surfaces to an unwelcome degree, some road roar, too. Low wind noise, but engine growl intrudes past 60mph. Effective heating all round, with standard air con

FUEL ECONOMY ★☆☆○○
Despite limited performance, this 1.6 is disappointingly thirsty, especially when pressed a bit. Good tank range, however, with a sensibly timed low-level lamp and easy filling

type of use (<i>air conditioning off</i>)	AA test (mpg)
urban (<i>17mph average/heavy traffic</i>)	22½
suburban (<i>27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start</i>)	28½
motorway (<i>70mph cruising</i>)	31½
cross-country (<i>brisk driving/20 miles from cold start</i>)	34½
rural (<i>gentle driving/20 miles from cold start</i>)	40
typical mpg overall	33½
realistic tank capacity/range	49 litres/360 miles
official mpg (<i>urban/extra urban/combined</i>)	27.4/42.8/35.3
CO ₂ emissions 191g/km	car tax band D