

# Mazda 323

Featuring 1.5LXi and 1.8SE



**I**T'S NO SECRET THAT FORD HAS A significant shareholding in Mazda and, indeed, the smallest 121 hatchback is a Dagenham-built clone of the Fiesta. Just to assert its independence, however, Mazda has recently introduced this entirely new 323, to compete full-frontal with the also-new, much-praised Ford Focus.

We sampled both models within a week of each other and realised that those people who say that all cars are much of a muchness these days, don't know what they're talking about! Certainly, the cars' external dimensions and interior layouts are similar, they both use the now-familiar hatchback body configuration and, of course, both employ front-wheel drive. However, it's here that any similarity ends.

The latest 323 has less avant-garde styling than its predecessor, which sacrificed interior space in its pursuit of eye-catching looks. The latest 1.8SE re-introduces the fore-and-aft sliding back seat that we've seen on the old 121 and more recently on the Citroën ZX; a good idea, too, because (as our table shows) you can apportion more or less rear passenger-to-luggage space, according to the need of the moment. Our 1.5LXi's measurements will

& reflect the rest of the range, favouring rear legroom, but with a slightly lower cushion than the SE's.

We're impressed by the 323's interior trim and fitments, however – you don't have to pay SE money to get quality. The front passenger's seat can be hinged forward to serve as a table-cum-worktop, and the back seat folds easily, in two halves, yet still retains a folding centre armrest; such manoeuvres reveal careful trimming even though it doesn't normally show.

The driving position, too, has all the right adjustments, with height resettings to both back and front of the cushion, adjustable wheel rake and a nicely placed left footrest; yet for all that, it's difficult to snuggle cosily into the seat. Gearshifting is workmanlike, if not super-slick and, apart from one or two obscure warning lamps (for heated rear screen, for instance), the displays present well and are quite accurate – indeed, the distance recorders read slightly short.

Not for the first time in a Mazda, however, the actual driving experience falls somewhat short of all this showroom promise. Don't get us wrong – both versions produce figures that are well up to scratch against the competition (although the 1.8's fuel thirst is a bit

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## PERFORMANCE – 1.5LXi

### Acceleration time in seconds

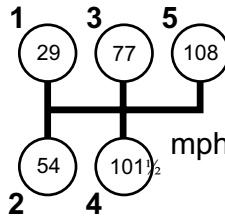
mph	30	40	50	60	70
<b>THROUGH THE GEARS</b>		2.2	4.5	8.0	12.0
<b>IN 5TH GEAR</b>		6.8	13.7	20.9	29.1
<b>IN 4TH GEAR</b>		5.1	10.2	15.8	21.4

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
<b>5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES</b>		13.6/10.4	14.1/10.7		
			13.7/10.2	15.4/11.2	

### Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
		6000*		6000*	5375

\* for best acceleration



## PERFORMANCE – 1.8SE

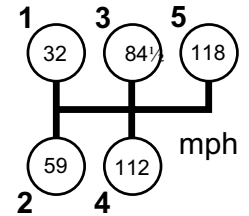
### Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
<b>THROUGH THE GEARS</b>		1.9	3.8	6.1	9.4
<b>IN 5TH GEAR</b>		5.5	11.1	17.2	23.6
<b>IN 4TH GEAR</b>		4.3	8.7	13.1	17.7

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
<b>5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES</b>		11.5/8.9	11.7/8.8		
			11.1/8.7	12.5/9.0	

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
		6250*		6250*	5550

\* for best acceleration



## FUEL CONSUMPTION – 1.5LXi

Type of use - with air conditioning off*	mpg
Urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	27
Suburban (27mph average/6.4miles from cold start)	34
Motorway (70mph cruising)	35
Cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	39½
Rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	46
<b>Typical mpg overall</b>	<b>38</b>

\*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2–4% in winter and 4–8% in summer

## FUEL CONSUMPTION – 1.8SE

Fuel grade – unleaded Premium, 95 octane	
Type of use – air conditioning off*	mpg
In the city – heavy traffic	23
In the country – quiet driving	44
<b>Typical mpg overall</b>	<b>33</b>
Realistic tank range	47 litres/340 miles

\*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2–4% in winter and 4–8% in summer

## SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

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

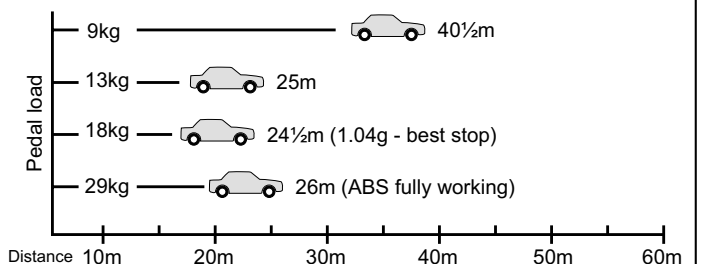
<b>Seatbelts</b>	front ●●●○	rear ●●●○	<b>Door locking</b>	●●●○
			central locking?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
			remote control?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Head restraints</b>	front ●●●○	rear ●●●○	auto window closure?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
			deadlocks?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Interior</b>	safety padding ●●●○		<b>Luggage</b>	secure from interior/hidden from view ●●○○○
	driver's airbag? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
	other airbags? (GXi up) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<b>Alarm</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	side impact protection ●●●○		engine immobilised?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Fuel anti-spillage</b>	●●●○			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> standard on test car	<input type="checkbox"/> factory fitted option	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not available		

**Euro NCAP crash test results - not available**

## BRAKES – 1.8SE

Pedal feel ●●●○	Behaviour in an emergency ●●●○	Handbrake ●●○○
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Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with standard ABS)  
A good-to-average best stop with ABS is about 16m at 15-20kg pedal load)



Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop: 10kg at start of test, 9kg at end of test (Ideal brakes show no change)

disappointing), and compared with your old Ford Escort, you'll not be complaining. However, the 323's lower speed tremors from under-bonnet, the fidgety ride over less than billiard-table main roads and an associated tendency to nibble and dither directionally as it proceeds in an ostensibly straight line, fall short of even the 121, let alone the likes of Focus.

We know that ride and handling is a tricky area of assessment, of course, and we hasten to add that the 323 is safe and surefooted around bends and roundabouts. Its brakes are fine, with ABS on all except the 1.3 version, and no-one is going to complain about the standard equipment list, when related to the price – the 1.5 LX in particular, looks excellent value.

Air conditioning (the simpler sort) is standard and generous warmth to front and rear footwells, combined with cooler airflow to faces or windscreen, can be achieved – though not to both at the same time, unfortunately. The central locking includes a simple-to-use handset which is so powerful that you must take care not to operate it inadvertently.

We complained about low-speed engine tremors (below 1500rpm) especially on the 1.8; both engines prove reasonably unobtrusive on the motorway, however, (despite the use of short-striding gearing) and they tickover beautifully. There's a bit too much road noise at times, but no rattles.

Indeed, this new 323 exudes care and quality of build, with attention to detail that's typical of Mazda. The model has proved exceptionally reliable in the past and we see no reason to doubt that this newcomer will maintain this reputation. The good news, too, is that parts prices will be lower. They need to be; you couldn't afford to have trouble on the old version.

## VERDICT

Once again, the advisability of choosing this latest 323, rather than the competition, will rest with your priorities.

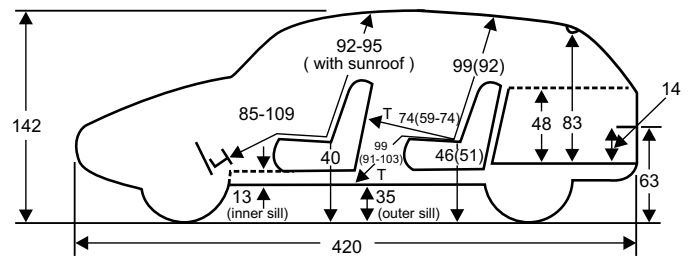
The 1.5LXi looks the best bet, despite the 1.8SE's so-practical back seat adjustments. At a sensible price you get reasonable mpg, lively overtaking (if you let the engine rev) and it's generously endowed with motoring life's modern luxuries, that are not likely to give much bother in service, either.

It's a well-sorted, if somewhat ordinary-performing, family hatchback. However, if you love your driving, look elsewhere.

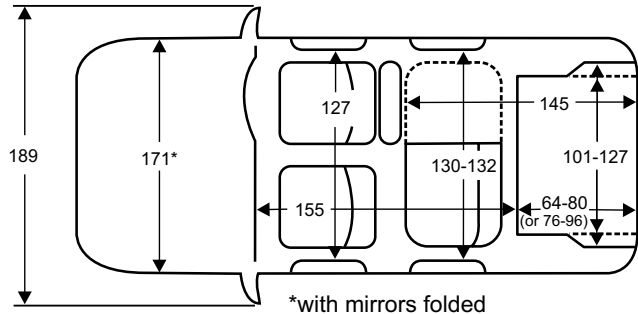
## MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres

Five-door (1.8SE in brackets, where different)



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



\*with mirrors folded

## FOR THE TECHNICAL – 1.5 (1.8 in brackets where different)

### ENGINE

**Type** transverse four in line, with iron block and alloy head; five main bearings.

**Size** 78 x 78.4mm = 1498cc (83 x 85 = 1840cc)

**Power** 88bhp at 5500rpm (114/6000)

**Torque** 97 lb ft at 4000rpm (118/4000)

**Valves** belt-driven twin overhead camshafts actuating four valves per cylinder

**Fuel/ignition** multi-point electronic petrol injection with integrated spark timing via twin coils and distributor. Three-way catalyser and 55-litre fuel tank, with low-level warning lamp

### TRANSMISSION

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

**Mph per 1000rpm** 20.0 in 5th; 16.9 in 4th (21.2/17.9)

### CHASSIS

**Suspension** front: independent MacPherson struts with integral coil springs. Rear: independent struts with coil springs and twin trapezoidal links. Telescopic dampers and anti-roll bars all round

**Steering** rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance. 2.7 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 11.2m between kerbs, with 14.9m circle for one turn of the wheel

**Wheels** 5½in steel with 185/65R14T tyres (6in alloy with 195/55 R15V on SE only). "Space-saver" temporary spare

**Brakes** ventilated discs front, drums rear (solid discs on 1.8) with vacuum servo and electronic anti-skid control standard

## HOW THE 323 1.5 COMPARES

	Engine 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/kneeroom - rear (cm)	Steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
MAZDA 323 1.5	1498/88	3500	12.0	29.1/21.4	38	24½/18*	109	99/74	2.7/11.2	420
Vauxhall Astra 1.6 16v	1598/100	3440	11.2	23.6/16.3	41½	26/21	108	99/75	3.1/10.4	411
VW Golf 1.6	1595/100	3540	10.8	23.3/17.3	35	27½/18*	111	95/71	3.1/10.4	415
Toyota Corolla 1.6	1587/109	3480	10.1	23.8/18.5	38	26/20*	106	93/68	3.2/10.5	427
Renault Megane 1.6	1596/90	3290	11.5	25.5/19.0	42	25/23	107	100/71	3.5/10.7	413

\* with ABS

(p) all power-assisted

## LIKES AND GRIPES



Sills plastic protected and stay unsoiled ... but there's a 15cm tailgate sill

Five head restraints ... but rear centre blocks driver's view

Intermittent continuous rear wiper ... but front intermittent wipe not variable



SE's higher back seat eases entry and egress ... but reduces rear headroom

Illuminated ignition keyhole : door cubbies too shallow

Centre armrests at front and rear :

