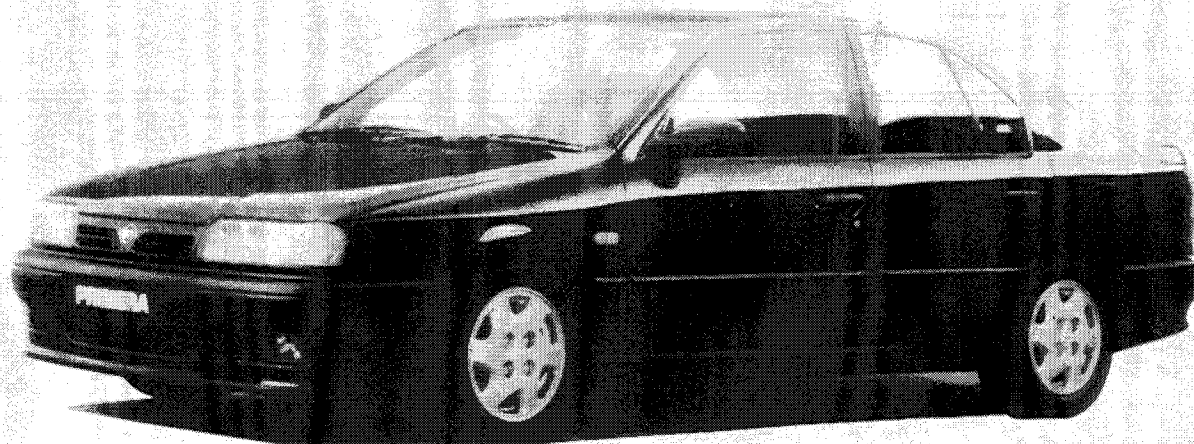


November 1992

Nissan Primera 2.0SGX



NISSAN HAS BEEN SUCCESSFULLY churning out the Cavalier-clone Primera from its Sunderland plant for a couple of years now. With such success, too, that more than 124,000 were built in Britain during 1991, with over 90 per cent of them exported to Europe and Japan – talk about taking coals to Newcastle!

Not surprisingly, the Primera has altered little since its introduction, though carburettor-fed, non-catalysed models have now all but given way to fuel-injected, cat-equipped versions. Meanwhile, a 2-litre 74bhp diesel has joined the engine line-up.

The Primera comes in three distinct body styles: classic four-door saloon, practical five-door hatchback and roomy, raised-roof estate car. Power units comprise three twin-cam, 16-valve petrol engines (a 1.6 and a pair of 2 litres) and the diesel. Four main trim-and-equipment levels (L, LX, SLX and SGX) round off the choice of permutations.

The 1.6-litre engine produces 90bhp in its latest, catalysed form, but the 95bhp non-cat unit will continue for a while in entry-level 1.6L versions. The 2-litre develops 114bhp (via single-point fuel

injection) for most versions, or nearly 150bhp (courtesy of multi-point injection) in the range-topping eGT models. A five-speed manual gearbox is standard, but four-speed automatic transmission is an option on 114bhp 2-litre versions.

Having sampled a 1.6-litre model soon after its announcement, we now turn our attention to the 2 litre in its lower state of tune, but with top-level SGX trim and the five-door hatchback body.

At the wheel

These days, 114bhp is a pretty modest output by 16-valve, 2-litre twin-cam standards, but the SGX feels reasonably sprightly on it, turning in a creditable 123mph top speed and clocking 30–70mph in under 10sec at the test track.

As the relatively lofty 4000rpm needed to reach peak torque suggests, the engine prefers a good few revs on the dial before it really gets into its stride. It's very tractable, if not quite so eager lower down, feeling agreeably less "peaky" than a good many multi-valve power units.

Power steering, light easy controls and a well-

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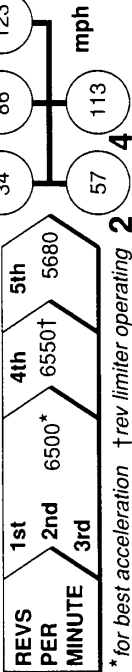
PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds				
STANDING START	0-30mph	0-60mph	1/4 mile	
	3.2	9.5	17.3	

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		1.7	3.7	6.3	9.6
IN 5TH GEAR		5.9	11.7	17.8	24.4
IN 4TH GEAR		4.1	8.3	12.4	16.9

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		12.1/8.5	11.9/8.3		12.7/8.6

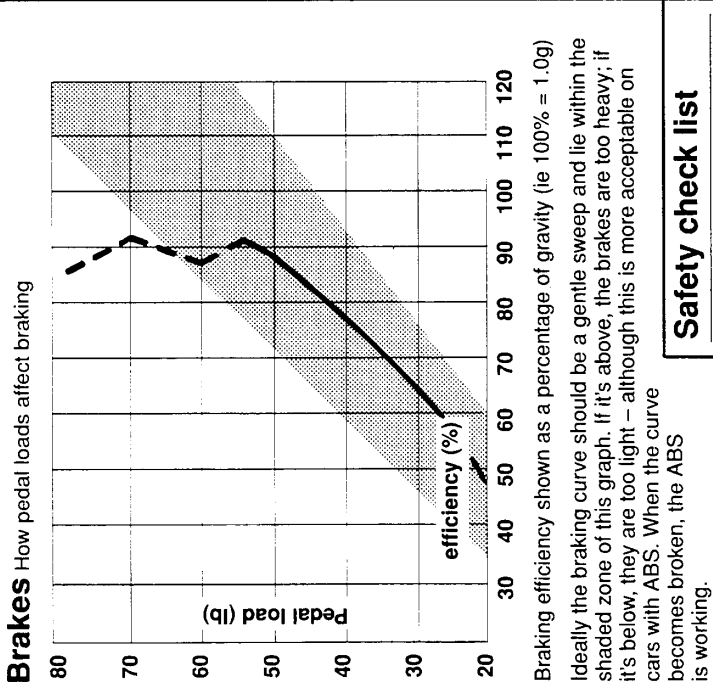
Maximum speeds



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade for tests: unleaded Premium, 95 octane	
Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	27 1/2
Short journeys in the suburbs	26 1/2
Motorway – 70mph cruising	35 1/2
Brisk driving, mixed roads	32 1/2
Gentle driving, rural roads	37
Typical mpg overall	33
Realistic tank range*	52 litres/380 miles
* based on fuel gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience	

SAFETY

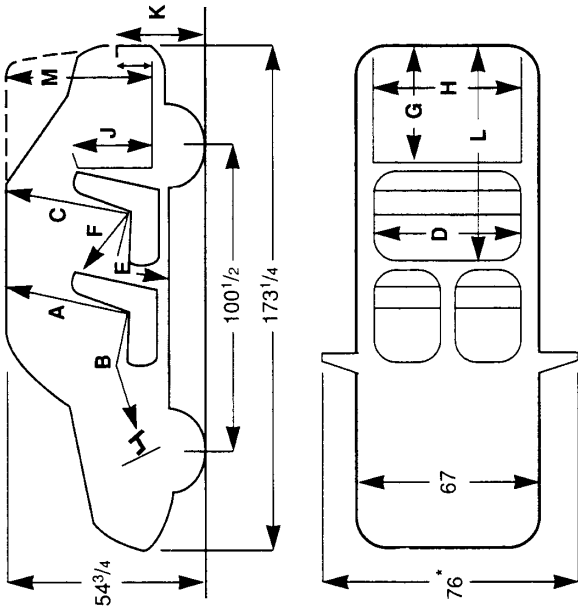


Safety check list	
Steering	☒ true 'feel' of the road?
Brakes	☒ powerful? ☒ sensible effort? ☒ fade resistant?
Seatbelts	☒ front – effective? ☒ convenient? ☒ rears – effective? ☒ convenient?
Head restraints	☒ front – effective? ☒ rear – effective?
Interior	☒ thoroughly padded?
Fuel	☒ shielded filler? ☒ protected tank?

50-0mph best stop	97 1/2% / 86ft
Handbrake only	35%
Fade test	
How hard use affects braking (Ideal brakes show no change)	
Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)	
At start of test	28
After constant use	32
After severe use	33

MEASUREMENTS

Dimensions (inches)



* 67 with mirrors folded

Inside		Kerb weight in lb (full of fuel)
A Front headroom (with sunroof)	36-37 3/4	2745
B Front legroom (min - max)	33 1/4-42	38 1/2
C Rear headroom	36 1/4	38 1/2-51
D Back seat width (between armrests)	51	19 1/2
E Typical rear legroom	38 3/4	6 1/2/25
F Typical rear kneeroom	29	64
M Load height (to tailgate hinge)		–

* "Typical" represents the mean measurement behind the driver's seat set at 39in legroom and the passenger's seat set at 41in

presented, though unadventurous, cabin make the Primera eminently easy to get along with, but our test car's gearchange didn't possess the fluid, knife-through-butter precision we now expect from Japanese cars. It felt a trifle notchy, with overkeen spring-biasing marring the dog-leg change up into fifth gear.

Apart from a hint of torque steer that can surface when tramping on in the lower gears, there's not much to criticise in the way the Primera rides and handles. However, the arguably unnecessary fitment of V-rated tyres significantly compromises small-bump absorption, particularly over the all-too-common knobbly bits one encounters around town. It leaves the feeling that the accomplished, Peugeot-like ride we've experienced on lower powered Primeras is spoilt on dearer models by over-specifying the tyres.

There's a wide range of adjustments to make the driver comfortable at the wheel, with tilt-adjustable steering, three-stage lumbar support and individual height adjusters at each end of the seat cushion. This not only allows overall height control, but independently tweaking the adjusters allows thigh support to be fine-tuned, too – a useful feature we'd like to see more often.

In theory, altering the height of the cushion with respect to the backrest should allow lumbar thrust to be positioned at different points up the spine. But although ample thrust is available on the firmer settings, you may find that you can't get the support as high up your back as you would like.

The 2 litre's all-disc brakes provide reassuring, nicely weighted and fade-free stopping power, with good progression over a wide range of pedal loads – sufficiently so to make the SGX and eGT models' standard anti-lock system almost redundant.

Inside story

The Primera's sombre interior could be more inviting, but all-round passenger space is reasonably generous, although the seats don't prove as comfortable in practice as a cursory examination suggests. For example, the rear seat backrest is rather too acutely angled to maximise headroom, and there's no centre armrest even on top-level versions. The individual, height-adjustable head restraints provided in the back of dearer versions don't lift high enough properly to benefit taller passengers, either.

There's not much wrong with the Primera's luggage space or seat-folding arrangements, however. The Estate's tailgate (controlled by the central locking system) opens to reveal a large, flat and illuminated load area within, with a conveniently low, bumper-height sill to load over. On the saloon and five-door, access to the boot is either by key or by flipping the combined tailgate/fuel flap release trigger alongside the driver's seat.

Oddments stowage spaces aren't particularly roomy, but at least there are plenty of them. There's a usefully flat area to rest the tea-cups on the fascia top

(provision of a non-slip rubber mat would make it even more useful, though), along with cassette storage and a small trinkets tray in front of the gear lever, a lidded armrest-cum-storage box in the centre console, and a pair of long, slim pockets on the front doors. The lockable glovebox is illuminated.

Living with the Primera

As well as feeling reasonably lively, the Primera proved fairly economical. Overall, it returned about 33mpg in our closely controlled test schedule – not up to the 35 or so that the class-leaders achieve, but certainly a good average now that catalysers have become the norm. This compares with the 36½mpg we averaged on the 1.6 model without a cat.

The Primera's generous tank capacity, aided by a reliable gauge and a low-level warning lamp, gives a range of almost 400 miles at our typical overall consumption. It's easy to fill, too – give or take the last litre or so.

In SGX form the Primera looks quite pricey, but it feels and indeed is very well screwed together and comes with a generous list of equipment, including tilt-adjustable power steering, central locking, electric sunroof, windows and mirrors, and anti-lock brakes. Alloy wheels and additional driving lamps integrated with the headlamps are there, too, along with a security-coded RDS radio/cassette unit. This plays through four speakers, with its "diversity" tuning selecting the optimum signal via either an element within the heated rear window or the electric aerial.

Galvanised steel is used for all vulnerable external areas and there's a generous warranty which includes six years' anti-rust and three years' mechanical parts cover. The anti-rust warranty requires annual inspections later on, but these are free if the car is serviced by a dealer.

Things look busy and complicated under the bonnet, but the routine level checks or perhaps some basic DIY work, shouldn't prove onerous. Servicing isn't too demanding, calling for attention at 12-month or 9000-mile intervals, whichever occurs first. The 2-litre SGX generally attracts a group 12 insurance rating under the ABI's new 20-group system – a group or two higher than for the equivalent 1.6 model.

VERDICT

The Primera's major local content means that it's just as British, if not more so, than established fleet favourites like the Sierra, Cavalier and Peugeot 405. What's more, whether the car is Japanese or British, the Nissan badge means that superb build quality and excellent long-term reliability are all but guaranteed.

For us, however, the 2-litre SGX doesn't present the Primera's most compelling case, because its comparatively high price (full complement of equipment notwithstanding) and disappointing low-speed ride undermine the car's worthy overall

merit. A few goodies apart, there's just as much car for a fair bit less money in lower-trimmed 2-litre versions.

In some ways the Primera's discreet, polished proficiency almost counts against it, leaving the keener driver wishing there was just a little more character or excitement on offer. With the Cavalier and Peugeot 405 both recently refettled, and

Ford's front-wheel drive Mondeo just around the corner, there's no shortage of highly accomplished rivals gunning for it in the all important medium sector.

That said, there's no question that the Primera is an extremely competent all-rounder, with broad and abundant appeal for both company and private buyers alike.

HOW IT COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Max speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom – front (in)	Typical leg/kneerom – rear (in)	Steering turns/circle (ft)	Overall length (in)
Nissan Primera 2.0SGX (5 door) (c)	1998/114	123	9.6	24.4/16.9	33	91/55*	42	38 ³ / ₄ /29	3.1/36 ³ / ₄ (p)	173 ¹ / ₄
Audi 80 2.0E (4 door) (c)	1984/115	118	11.5	23.0/17.2	32 ¹ / ₂	99/80*	43 ¹ / ₄	40/29	3.2/36 (p)	176 ¹ / ₂
Ford Sierra 2.0GLS EFI (5 door)	1998/125	117	9.7	21.0/15.2	32 ¹ / ₂	105/30*	42	39/31	2.8/35 (p)	174
Peugeot 405 2.0SRi (4 door)	1905/125	119	10.1	25.0/16.9	34 ¹ / ₂	104/27*	42 ¹ / ₄	38 ³ / ₄ /30 ¹ / ₂	3.1/34 ¹ / ₂ (p)	173 ¹ / ₂
Subaru Legacy 2.0GL 4WD (4 door) (c)	1994/123	116	10.7	25.9/18.0	28	87/50	42	40 ¹ / ₂ /30 ³ / ₄	3.4/34 ¹ / ₄ (p)	179
Vauxhall Cavalier 2.0SRi (5 door)	1998/115	123	8.9	25.5/17.4	37 ¹ / ₂	93/32	42	38 ³ / ₄ /28 ³ / ₄	3.5/34 ¹ / ₂ (p)	171
Volkswagen Passat 2.0GL (4 door) (c)	1984/115	121	10.7	24.3/17.7	35	95/37	43	43/32	3.3/33 (p)	180
(c) with catalyser						* with ABS			(p) with power steering	

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, transverse 4 in line; water-cooled. 86mm bore x 86mm stroke = 1998cc. Aluminium alloy block and head; 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 9.5:1

Valve gear twin chain-driven overhead camshafts actuating four valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel system Nissan/Hitachi electronic single-point fuel injection, three-way regulated catalyser with lambda sensor. 60-litre (13.2-gallon) tank, with low-fuel warning lamp. Fuel required: unleaded only, 95 octane minimum

Ignition system fully programmed electronic integral with injection, via coil and distributor

Maximum power 114bhp at 6000rpm

Maximum torque 122 lb ft at 4000rpm

TRANSMISSION

Clutch 8.5in dry plate, diaphragm spring; cable operated. Pedal load/travel: 24 lb/6in

Gearbox 5-speed (all synchromesh) and reverse.

Ratios: first 3.06, second 1.83, third 1.21, fourth 0.93, fifth 0.73 and reverse 3.15:1

Final drive 4.18:1, to front wheels

Mph per 1000rpm 21.7 in top, 17.2 in 4th (22.1/17.5 on 2.0LX/SLX)

Rpm at 70mph 3230 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by multi-link, coil spring/damper struts and an anti-roll bar.

Rear: independent by coil spring/damper struts, transverse parallel links, trailing link and an anti-roll bar. Dampers: telescopic all round

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion with 3.1 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 36³/₄ft between kerbs, with 54ft circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 6J x 14 alloy (standard on SGX and eGT) with 195/60R14 85V tyres (Michelin MXV2 on test car). (5.5J x 14 steel with 185/65R14 tyres on 2.0LX and SLX)

Brakes 10.1in ventilated discs front, 10.2in solid discs rear, with vacuum servo. Bosch three-channel anti-lock system standard on 2.0SGX and eGT