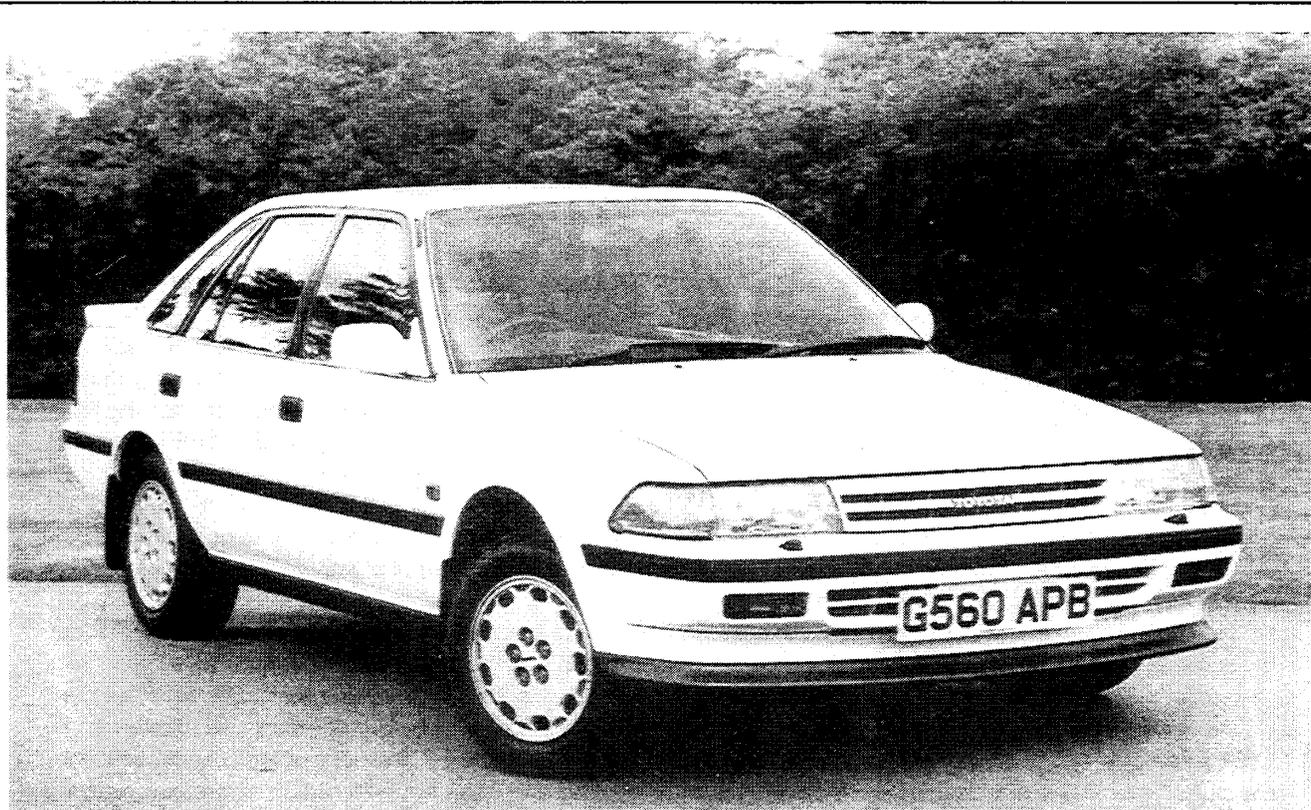


Toyota Carina 2.0GLi Executive Liftback



THE SIERRA-SIZED CARINA SLOTS IN between Toyota's top saloon, the Camry, and the lower-medium sector Corollas. These occupy the middle ground among a versatile range, which includes the supermini Starlet and racy Corolla GTi at one end, and chunky off-roaders, exotic mid-engined two-seaters, the butch Supra Turbo and, now, the futuristic-looking Previa people-carrier at the other.

The current Carina II shape dates from March 1988, but despite being Toyota's second best-selling car (after the Corolla), voluntary import restrictions, together with numerous model changes since its 1971 introduction, have combined to deny it both a strong identity and a significant presence on our roads.

That could all change before long, though, as the next-generation Carina is destined to be the first model to roll out from Toyota's brand new, multi-million pound European assembly plant, currently under construction at Burnaston, near Derby.

At present, however, the current Carina comes as a four-door saloon or a five-door Liftback (in XL or GL trim), or as a five-door XL estate, all powered by a 16-valve, 1.6-litre carburettored engine producing 94bhp.

Having previously sampled the 1.6-litre power unit, we chose the only 2-litre model on offer – the 2.0GLi Executive – which sports top-level trim and equipment

plus a 126bhp, fuel-injected, multi-valve engine. This comes only in five-door Liftback form.

Distinguished externally by its colour-matched rear spoiler, alloy wheels (wearing wider, low-profile tyres) and headlamp pressure washers, the GLi also adds electric windows all round, central locking, a leather-trimmed steering wheel and anti-lock brakes to the existing inventory. This already provides an electrically operated tilt-and-slide glass sunroof, power steering with tilt-adjustable wheel, and a four-speaker stereo radio/cassette player.

At the wheel

It's funny how different versions of the same model can leave you with such contrasting impressions. Thanks to some 30 per cent greater power and torque than for the 1.6 model, the 2.0GLi is, naturally, a swifter performer. Maximum speed is up from 108 to 122mph, while the time for the 30–70mph dash through the gears is slashed from 12.3 to 9.4sec, and it also manages to impart a good deal more appeal to the driver.

The impressive power unit obviously helps; it thrives on high revs, yet is also far from lacking in part-throttle, mid-range response. It's also uncannily tolerant of trundling along in traffic at under 1000rpm, apart from some slight jerkiness whenever the throttle is

re-applied or the overrun fuel cut-off is overridden.

Indeed, the GLi Executive has something of a Jekyll and Hyde character: well able to satisfy one's boy-racer instincts, but also commendably smooth, hushed and civilised whenever gentle progress is more appropriate.

On all but the smoothest of surfaces, the ride tends to be jiggly, but this apart, the Carina has a compliant and generally well-controlled gait. The levels of mechanical and wind noise are low, too, although these tend to accentuate a degree of road-rumble over coarser surfaces.

The driving position suits a wide variety of shapes and sizes, thanks to a tilt-adjustable steering wheel, height-adjustable (at the rear) cushion and adjustable lumbar support to fine-tune comfort at the wheel. The last two could usefully provide a shade more adjustment, however.

As you might expect of a Japanese car, all the controls work with well-oiled precision, complemented by large, clear (and more accurate than most) instruments in front of the driver.

Featherlight power steering gives the driver an easy time at the wheel and, with three turns between locks, it's nicely direct on the road. It provides little real 'feel' of the surface, however.

Aided by wider, squatter footwear, the GLi clings on fairly well in the dry, with the front-end running progressively wider if pushed to the limit. Wet roads call for rather more caution, though, to avoid wheelspinning starts at junctions, while lifting-off midway through a slippery bend can have the back end trying to overtake the front.

Wet or dry, the GLi's all-disc brakes are well up to their task. They have a progressive, well-weighted response and the benefit of a standard-fit anti-lock system, which provides optimum braking without the risk of lock-up, whatever the conditions.

Inside story

You won't find air-conditioning, a trip computer or any wood veneer in the GLi's cabin, but pretty much everything else you could wish for is there.

There's a useful selection of places to store cassette tapes, sunglasses and the like, and, although the door boxes are quite slim, there's a handy pull-out oddments tray under each front seat.

The heating and ventilation system doesn't stretch to automatic temperature regulation and its push-button distribution control dictates strictly either/or options. But, despite this, it copes with a wide range of needs and, unlike many systems, it can successfully provide a warm feet/cool face happy medium. There are no separate ducts to the rear footwells, however.

While it may not be the roomiest car in its class, the Carina still provides ample comfort and space for four to five adults, although kneeroom for those in the back could be a little more generous.

The back seat (and cushion) split in 60/40 fashion, with the upturned cushion forming a safety barrier against unruly loads; there's also a folding centre armrest. The seats themselves are trimmed in luxurious velour, although their dark colour gives the interior a

rather sombre air. They also show every little speck of dirt and are hard work to valet.

Even with the back seats in place, the Carina boasts a generous boot, with a flat load floor, minimal wheelarch intrusion and a reasonably low sill. The tailgate sports the expected remote-control release trigger (there's one for the fuel flap, as well) alongside the driver's seat, and the seatback and tailgate releases can be isolated from the rest of the car, to protect the boot contents from unwarranted attention.

Living with the GLi

Being quicker than 1.6 models, the 2.0GLi is almost bound to be thirstier, too. Even so, it's not too far behind, and our 35¹/₂mpg overall figure means that the car has an impressive blend of performance and economy. Among our selected rivals, however, the Cavalier SRi is faster and just as frugal.

The Carina has a generous tank capacity, allowing nearly 400 miles between refills, but trickling the last five litres or so into the tank is a time-consuming affair and, as before, we found the low fuel-level lamp rather too eager to flash its warning.

Under the bonnet, it all looks rather crowded and daunting for the 'front garden' mechanic, although the items that need regular attention are all reasonably accessible.

Thanks to a common reservoir there's only one windscreen washer bottle to fill and, in addition to a low fluid-level warning lamp, the rear washer, helpfully, runs out before the front one. However, the headlamp pressure washers operate irrespective of whether the lights are switched on or not; consequently they can make heavy demands on the reservoir – thirsty isn't the word!

Toyota's reliability record is the envy of most motor makers – our test car was certainly well screwed together. In addition to a three-year paint defect warranty and the usual six-year cover against perforation, the three-year/60,000-mile mechanical warranty is, if not unbeaten, certainly more generous than most.

VERDICT

'More reassuring than exciting, with a considerate but lacklustre way of going about things', was our view of the 1.6 Carina.

It costs rather more, admittedly, but the 2.0GLi has a much-improved game, with enhanced performance, still-reasonable fuel economy and better equipment. It's generally more able and willing to involve the driver in proceedings, too.

This Carina possesses one of Toyota's better multi-valve engines – it's lively and spirited when you want it to be, yet it's far from flat-footed and is eminently forgiving lower down.

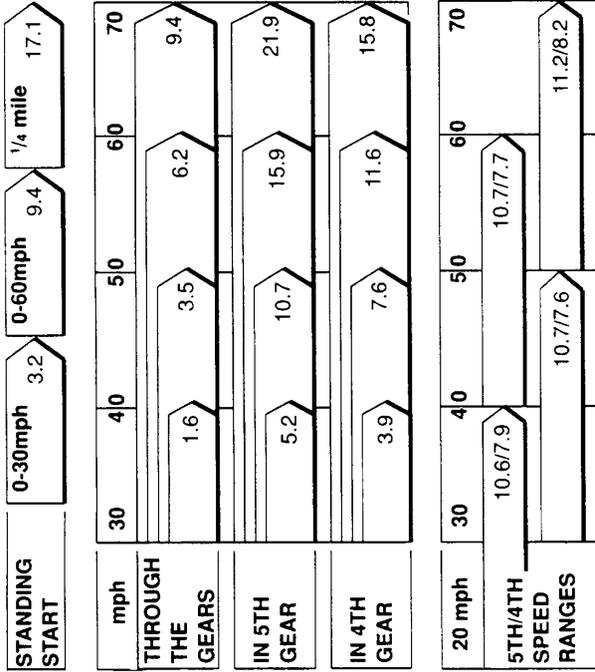
As we said earlier, it's funny what a few more cubic centimetres and some extra 'goodies' can do for a car, and yet in this form the Carina is an altogether more rewarding and enjoyable car.

We await the arrival of its British-built successor with interest.

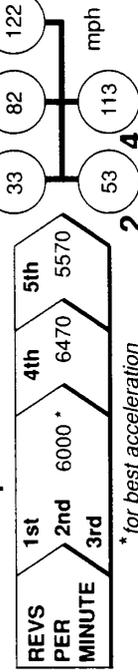
PERFORMANCE

Acceleration

time in seconds



Maximum speeds



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade for tests: 95 octane unleaded

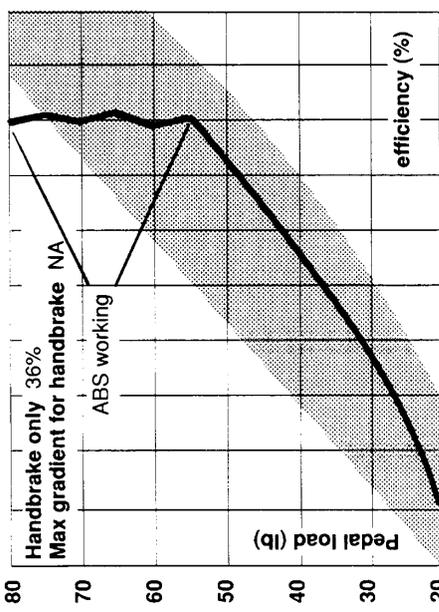
Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	28 1/2
Short journeys in the suburbs	29 1/2
Motorway - 70mph cruising	37
Brisk driving, mixed roads	36 1/2
Gentle driving - rural roads	39 1/2
Typical mpg overall	35 1/2
Realistic tank range*	49 litres/380 miles

* based on gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience

SAFETY

Brakes

How pedal loads affect braking



Ideally the braking curve should fall within the shaded zone of this graph. If it's above, the brakes are too heavy; if it's below, they are too light. When the curve becomes broken, the wheels are skidding.

Safety check list

Steering	true 'feel' of the road?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Brakes	powerful?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	sensible effort?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	fade resistant?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Seatbelts	front - effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	rears - effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Head restraints	convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	front - effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Interior	rear - effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	thoroughly padded?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Fuel	shielded filler?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	protected tank?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Fade test

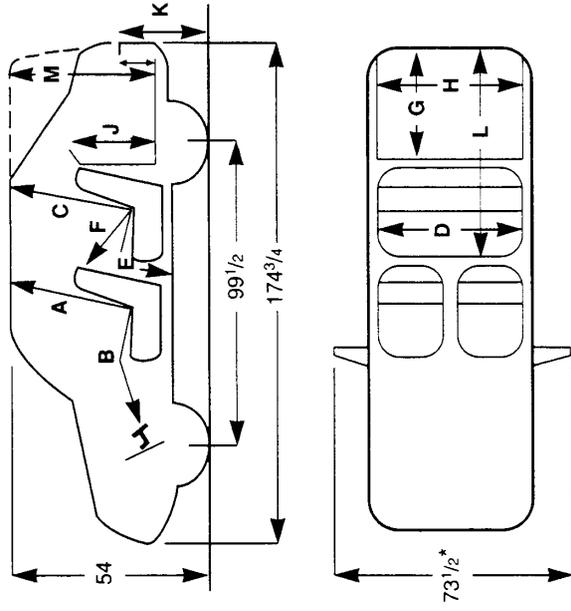
How hard use or water affects braking. (Ideal brakes show no change.)

Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)

40	At start of test
28	After constant use
33	After severe use
NA	After watersplash
NA	Number of stops to recover

MEASUREMENTS

Dimensions (inches)



* mirrors don't fold

Inside (inches)

A Front headroom	37 1/2-38 1/2	G Load length	41 3/4
B Front legroom (min - max)	33-42	H Load floor width (min - max)	38 1/4-51 1/2
C Rear headroom	35 1/2	J Load height	18
D Back seat width (between armrests)	52 3/4	K Sill height (inner/outer)	8 3/4/26 3/4
E Typical rear legroom	39 1/2	L Load length	67
F Typical rear knee room	29 1/4	M Load height (to tailgate hinge)	30 3/4

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

tighten its line with no difficulty if you put on a bit more lock halfway round – of course, our test car's £350 alloy wheels with wider tyres may be significant here.

The brakes are less reassuring, however. The initial pedal response and servo assistance are just about ideal, but the 'feel' of the pedal action is slightly disconcerting and the susceptibility to fade under repeated use puts pedal effort most definitely on the wrong side of acceptable. We also found that the ABS option gave a worrying loss of handbrake efficiency; in this case, rear discs are used in place of drums. The lever is better positioned than on the Tipo, however.

Injury prevention

Our only complaint inside is that, in a side impact, one's head could make injurious, painful contact with the shoulder adjuster for the front seatbelts. The belts (and head restraints all round on the SX), prove effective and convenient – except for the inevitable impediment to vision that the restraints impose.

Security

Of course, the trouble with having folding back seats on a saloon is that, with tilt levers on view inside, there's less security for boot contents; it's a straight trade-off between thiefproofing and convenient adaptability. You can override the central locking and keep the boot lid locked all the time, however, and there's a second key that can be used in hotels and garages that won't open it, either – which seems a bit pointless in the circumstances.

The petrol cap has to be locked separately – it's not covered by the central locking system.

Money Matters

Value for money

We think the Tempra is attractive because the standard cars are very well specified – even radio/cassette players are now back on the list for the Tipo and Tempra. The SX tested here is cheaper than most rivals with a similar inventory, and the interior trim manages to instil an aura of higher quality than the worthy but unimaginatively styled Tipo.

Servicing and warranty

Underbonnet access is very good and everything looks neat and smart – so it's a pity that the engine isn't better guarded from road spray. The standard 12-months' (unlimited-mileage) mechanical warranty is augmented by a six-year anti-perforation cover, which doesn't cost the owner anything, provided annual checks are carried out by a Fiat dealer at the same time as a major (2½ hour) service. There's also a three-year surface paint warranty, introduced with the launch of the Tempra, plus of course, a year's AA membership and breakdown cover.

Fuel economy

By today's standards, 35mpg is strictly mediocre, as a perusal of our rivals comparison table will confirm. But then, Fiat's choice of low gearing makes this mediocrity almost inevitable. In the

compromise between reasonable acceleration and respectable economy, Fiat has come down on the side of performance. Still, a generous tank and a reliable low-level lamp notch up a more than respectable range between forecourt visits. Filling is easy to nearly brim full.

Durability

Build quality

It's under this heading that we feel most ambivalent towards the Tempra. The good news is that its body design and specification, with extensive use of galvanizing, are most promising for an extended, rust-resistant life – something that has thwarted the success of too many Fiats in the past. (It's interesting to note that a spin-off benefit is that the Tempra is not afflicted by the sickly-sweet smell of rustproofing wax, either.) The exterior coachwork does include paint on the bumper shields (not very serviceable), but is sensibly free of brightwork, and even the rear wings are easy to replace without welding.

The bad news is that yet again we experienced too many 'gremlins' in our test car's 1000 miles with us. As on other recent Fiat tests, we found ourselves relieved that we didn't have to persevere and try (in this instance) to eradicate rattles, a tachometer malfunction, noisy brakes, a jamming heater slide and a brake lamp that spent some days working, others not. On one trip a serious misfire also developed, but after 25 miles it departed as mysteriously as it arrived.

HOW IT COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Max speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel overall (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom – front (in)	Typical leg/kneeroom – rear (in)	Steering turns/circle (ft)	Overall length (in)
Fiat Tempra 1.6SX	1581/86	110	13.7	24.7/19.2	35	90/60	41½	40/28¾	3/35½(p)	171½
Vauxhall Cavalier 1.6GL (saloon)	1598/82	105	12.6	31.4/21.1	40	102/50	42	39/29	4.1/34¼	174½
Rover Montego 1.6SLX	1598/86	104	13.7	38.0/23.4	33½	92/38	42	40½/28½	4.2/35½	176
Toyota Carina 1.6GL (5-door)	1587/94	108	12.3	25.3/19.7	38½	92/35	42	38½/27	3.2/35½(p)	175
Peugeot 405 1.6GR	1580/92	110	11.9	27.0/18.7	36½	99/55	42¼	39/30½	3.1/34½(p)	173½
Renault 21 1.7GTS (saloon)	1721/92	114	11.8	30.2/20.0	34½	NA	41½	39½/29	3.2/34½(p)	178¼

(p) = power-assisted

HOW IT COMPARES

	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Max speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel overall (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom – front (in)	Typical leg/kneerom – rear (in)	Steering † turns/circle (ft)	Overall length (in)
Toyota Carina 2.0GLi Liftback	1998/126	122	9.4	21.9/15.8	35½	101/55*	42	39½/29¼	3.0/36	174¾
Fiat Croma 2.0ie Super (5-door)	1995/117	121	10.8	30.6/22.6	34½	97/45*	41½	39½/29¾	3.3/36	177
Peugeot 405 1.9GTX (4-door)	1905/125	119	10.1	25.0/16.9	34½	104/27*	42½	38¾/30½	3.1/34½	173½
Saab 9000 2.0i (5-door)	1985/130	118	10.2	26.0/18.0	32	106/45	42	41½/30½	3.3/37	182
Vauxhall Cavalier 2.0SRi (5 door)	1998/128	127	8.7	21.3/14.7	35½	93/32	42	38¾/28¾	3.5/34½	171¼

* with ABS

† all power-assisted

*Carina Hatchback in Limited Edition form***TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION****ENGINE**

Type and size front-mounted, transverse 4 in line; water-cooled. 86.0mm bore x 86.0mm stroke = 1998cc. Iron block and aluminium alloy head; 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 9.8:1

Valve gear twin overhead camshafts (belt-driven inlet; exhaust skew-gear driven from inlet) actuating 4 valves per cylinder via shim-adjusted bucket tappets

Fuel system Toyota/Nippon Denso electronic multi-point fuel injection. 60-litre (13¼-gallon) tank, with low-level warning lamp. Fuel required: 95 octane minimum, leaded or unleaded

Ignition system digital electronic, integrated with fuel injection via combined distributor and coil

Maximum power (DIN-net) 126bhp at 5600rpm

Maximum torque(DIN-net) 132 lb ft at 4400rpm

TRANSMISSION

Clutch 8.8in dry plate, diaphragm spring; hydraulically operated. Pedal load/travel: 26 lb/5in

Gearbox 5-speed (all synchromesh) and reverse (4-speed automatic optionally available). Ratios: first 3.28, second 2.04, third 1.32, fourth 1.03, fifth 0.82 and reverse 3.15:1

Final drive 3.74:1 to front wheels

Mph per 1000rpm 21.9 in top, 17.5 in 4th

Rpm at 70mph 3200 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent, MacPherson damper/struts, lower wishbones, coil springs and anti-roll bar. Rear: independent, coil spring/damper struts, twin transverse links, trailing arms and anti-roll bar. Dampers: telescopic all round

Steering power assisted rack and pinion with 3 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 36ft between kerbs, with 53½ft for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 6JJ alloy (standard on Executive) with 185/65R14 85H tyres (Dunlop SP Sport D8 on test car)

Brakes 9.9in ventilated discs front, 10.6in plain discs rear with vacuum servo. Toyota/ Nippon Denso ABS standard on Executive

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, transverse 4 in line; water-cooled. 86.4mm bore x 67.4mm stroke = 1581cc. Iron block and alloy head; 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 9.2 : 1

Valve gear belt-driven single overhead camshaft actuating two valves per cylinder via bucket tappets (shim adjusters)

Fuel system one Weber twin-throat carburettor (with manual choke) fed by mechanical pump from 65-litre (14¹/₄-gallon) tank, with low-level warning lamp. Fuel required: unleaded or leaded, 95 octane minimum

Ignition system Digiplex 2 fully-mapped electronic, with HT distributor only

Maximum power (DIN-net) 86bhp at 5800rpm

Maximum torque (DIN-net) 96 lb ft at 2900rpm

TRANSMISSION

Clutch diaphragm-spring; dry plate; cable-operated. Pedal load/travel: 25 lb/5¹/₄in

Gearbox 5-speed (all synchromesh) and reverse. Ratios: first 3.91, second 2.68, third 1.54, fourth 1.16, top 0.97 and reverse 3.91:1

Final drive 3.56:1 to front wheels

Mph per 1000rpm 19.0 in top; 15.9 in 4th

Rpm at 70mph 3675 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent, MacPherson damper/struts with integral coil springs, lower wishbones and an anti-roll bar. Rear: dead beam axle with trailing arms, coil springs and an anti-roll bar. Dampers: telescopic all round

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion with 3 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 35¹/₂ft between kerbs, with 53¹/₄ft for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5B steel with 165/70R13T tyres standard; 5¹/₂J alloy with 165/65R14T tyres (Michelin MXV) on test car

Brakes 9¹/₂ in plain discs front, 7in drums rear, with vacuum servo

