

Daewoo Espero

Featuring 1.8CDi Saloon



DAEWOO HAS COME A LONG WAY IN 18 months. It may be big in world terms, but when the UK division was established in early 1994, hardly anyone here had heard of this Korean conglomerate.

The cars are unashamedly Vauxhall-Opel based. This Espero draws heavily on the Cavalier mechanically, although it's rather handsomely disguised in a Bertone-styled body. There's a sporty 1.5 twin overhead cam 90bhp version (the GLXi) and an even posher two-litre, but this 95bhp 1.8 single cam unit seems right for this rather large saloon and probably offers keenest value, with a lot of significant standard kit, such as an airbag, air conditioning and anti-lock brakes.

The idea at present is to attract buyers to this non-trendsetter by irresistibly keen pricing, straight dealing and an umbrella of service second to none. But how much of a sacrifice does it prove, in practice, to drive an Espero or be driven in one?

After an extended road test, covering 8000 miles, we can confirm that the ownership experience will

prove a pleasant surprise, not only to the cost-conscious, but to all passengers and most drivers – except the most ardent or discerning.

Performance is well up to scratch and although fuel consumption isn't in the Cavalier league, it's good enough to equal several current upper-medium contenders with carefully cultivated images of modernity.

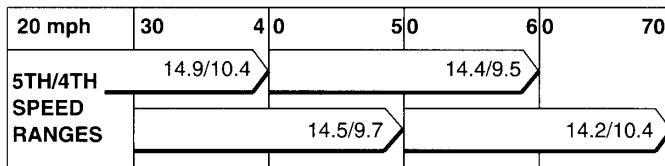
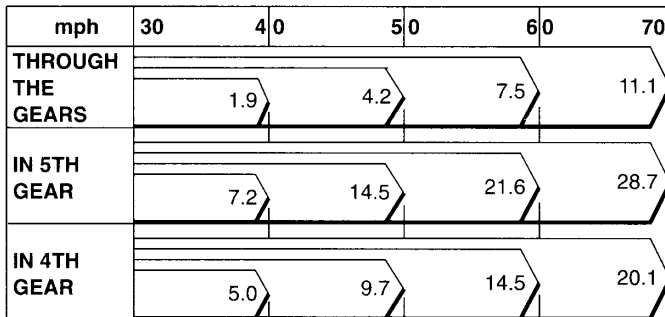
Similarly, ride comfort is undistinguished, rather than uncomfortable, thanks to excellent seat support and stretching-space all round; it's amazing how decent seating can make up for indifferent suspension. Handling emerges as better than you might expect; damping seems more assured than an early Cavalier's and pleasant power steering combines with sound Continental-brand radials to confer good grip and stability. Braking with standard ABS is truly outstanding in an emergency situation and it's only a little fade under duress that blots the system's copybook.

The Espero 1.8 is a quiet cruiser, thanks to sensibly high gearing; it does sound harried and coarse when

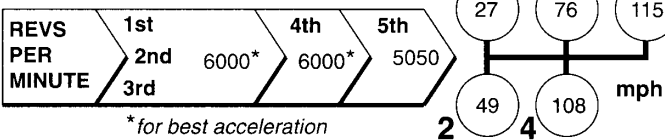
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PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds



Maximum speeds



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Worst/best mpg	29/40
Typical mpg overall	34½
Realistic tank range*	42 litres/320 miles
Oil consumption	negligible

*based on fuel gauge, warning lamp and filling station experience

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type transverse four cylinder; iron block and alloy head; 5 main bearings

Capacity 84.8mm x 79.5mm =1796cc

Power 95bhp at 5400rpm

Torque 107 lb ft at 2800rpm

Valves single overhead camshaft (belt driven) actuating two valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel/ignition electronic multi-point injection with integrated, fully programmed ignition. 50-litre tank with low-level warning lamp

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual with front-wheel drive

Mph per 1000rpm 22.8 in 5th, 18.1 in 4th

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by MacPherson damper/struts with coil springs.

Rear: torsion beam dead axle with coil springs. Anti-roll bars and telescopic dampers fitted all round

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion with 3.5 turns between locks. Turning circles average 10.4m between full locks, with 18.0m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5½in steel with 185/65R14H Continental Super Contact tyres

Brakes servo-assisted ventilated discs front, drums rear with electronic ABS standard

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

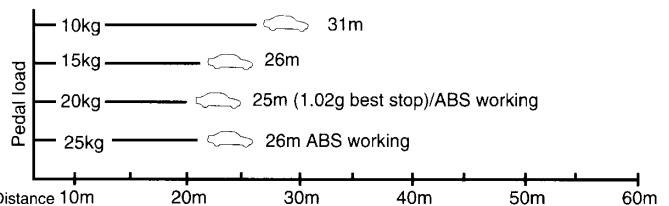
Assessed on their effectiveness and convenience (the more black blobs the better)

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

BRAKES

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

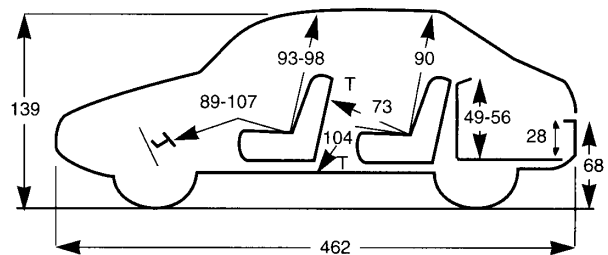
Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with standard ABS)
(A good-to-average best stop is about 28m at 20-30kg pedal load)



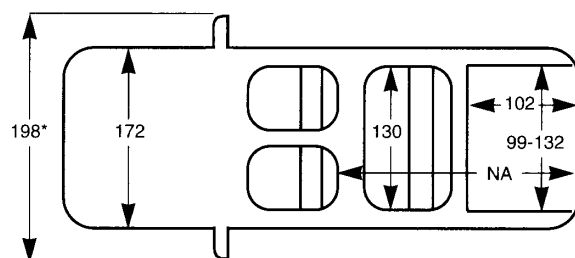
Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop: 9kg at start of test, 14kg at end of test. (Ideal brakes show no change)

DIMENSIONS

Centimetres



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



*mirrors don't fold

revved through the gears, however. Another malady is snatching initial accelerator response, as the pedal is re-applied.

Apart from this, our car never missed a beat, always starting and contending with a hot summer of traffic crawls without demur. After a modification, the gears proved OK, but creaky noises as the lever is moved is offputting – caused by the cheap hard plastic surrounding the gaiter.

This theme of a fundamentally sound, user-friendly design, marred only by detailed flaws, pervades the interior trim and fittings. The interior door latches and oddments mouldings, centre console finishing and sun visors are all naff, yet seat fabric, fascia moulding and door cappings are of good soft-feel quality that will wear well – even though their fit is questionable. The radio display is hard to see and it looks cheap, yet perseverance proves that it works reasonably, although there's too much bass tone for our liking.

The air conditioner and an electric sunroof are real pampering at the price, however; it all works very adequately. An economy button for the “fridge” would be a nice refinement for our “in-between” British weather, nevertheless, and we should like there to be more heat available in the rear passengers' footwells.

The boot is flat and generous in size, but the intruding and vulnerable rear lamp housings are a disaster waiting to happen and the absence of a folding back seat is a further limitation – there's no hatchback version of the Espero either. You get a ski-hatch as a consolation, which we used to convey a length of timber.

This fixed seat admittedly improves boot security in itself, but in the Espero's case, a handy electric interior boot release negates this security – it's very convenient, though. The same thing applies to the door locking – simple key-operated central locking is straightforward, but offers poor security – only the transponder type ignition key immobiliser is really thiefproof.

The injury prevention features of the interior aren't particularly impressive (no belt pretensioners, sharp bits under the fascia at shin level), but the driver's airbag is a real asset.

Build quality could be better. We experienced several faults and failures in our extended test and the car's underbody protection is a lick-and-a-promise affair. The vulnerable wiring for the ABS sensors in the wheel hubs typified the approach. However, in the first three years, it's not the owner who will be paying.

VERDICT

The Espero is rather like cash-and-carry groceries or flat-pack furniture from a warehouse store. It does the job well enough, but the feel-good factor lies in the fact that it's new and unsullied, yet more generously sized and equipped than anything else at the price.

At present, Daewoo quality and finish are only fair-to-middling, although we found this Espero's road manners to be better than its keen price and dated origins might have lead us to expect. For private buyers on a careful budget, it's the way it's sold, rather than the product itself, which makes such sound common sense. “Cut price without high risk”, just about sums it up.

Good features . . . and gripes

Headlamp beam trimmer provided . . . but it's vague in practice
 Lots of boot room . . . but aperture is restricted
 Fuel flap covered by central locking . . . but handbook still confuses
 Powerful air conditioner at front . . . but poor flow to rear footwells
 Key locking is easy . . . but there's no central locking on passenger's side

HOW IT 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/kneerom – rear (cm)	Steering turns/ circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
Daewoo Espero 1.8CDi	1796/95	3070	11.1	28.7/20.1	34½	25/18	107	104/73	3.5/10.4	462
Toyota Carina 1.8GLi (4 door)	1762/103	3030	10.9	27.5/17.9	42½	28/12*	109	108/76	3.2/10.8	453
Mazda 626 1.8i GLX (5 door)	1840/105	2850	10.8	31.7/21.4	35½	28/17*	106	98/69	3.1/11.0	469
Hyundai Lantra 1.6GLS	1596/112	3700	10.6	27.0/19.1	32½	30/14	109	96/67	3.0/10.5	436
Vauxhall Cavalier 1.8i LS (4 door)	1796/90	2875	12.3	31.9/21.7	37	26/29	108	100/74	3.4/10.4	443

* with ABS

LIVING WITH THE ESPERO

The service log – faults and failures

On delivery – 163 miles:

Sidelamp plastic trim adrift. Air conditioning not working – leak from compressor. Brake pipes not in guide clips at firewall/bulkhead. Vibration from offside front when accelerating hard. Tyres 4psi low. No bulb in ashtray. Gears hard into top – new linkage bush fitted.

By 1400 miles:

Radio interference when panel lights dimmed – faulty rheostat. Intermittent wiper not working – poor earth contact. Windscreen crack appeared overnight when parked – replaced. Prolonged clicking from central locking relay. Wipers sometimes park high. Perpetual creak from gearlever traced to its surround. Door seals creak on frames in dry weather – lubricating with rubber spray alleviates the problem.

RANDOM COMMENTS

- Distance and speed recorders under-read – illegally. This is the first car we've tested that reads 95mph when it's really doing 100! Similarly, mpg is 1mpg better than you think.
- The handbook didn't say that the sunroof had been wired through the rear side windows' inhibitor switch – some cars have got soaked, apparently. Talking of which, rain water drips on to the seats when a door is opened.
- The front grille panel surround is painted metal, prone to stone-chipping – the Sierra's was plastic 13 years ago.
- The tell-tales for the heated window, lights and handbrake are too dim. The last has resulted in cooked rear drums because it's easy to leave the handbrake half on. A mod involves filing off the first notch of the ratchet – cunning!
- The fuel gauge is very pessimistic – it pays to keep going until the lamp is on to stay. One refuelling from empty revealed a true capacity of 48.8 litres.

SELLING AND SERVICING

A new approach

Daewoo is breaking away from the familiar dealer-distribution system and intends to sell direct, using self-owned showrooms employing salaried staff who won't use pressure-selling techniques; neither does the company expect to haggle. The advertised price is the on-the-road price, complete with a year's road tax, a full tank of petrol and three years/60,000 miles of cost-free maintenance, repairs and replacements – just as if you had the car on contract hire. Apart from tyres, fuel and insurance, everything else, including AA membership and even a free courtesy car, comes as a matter of course. This contract-to-service must be worth over £1000 to most prospective owners covering an average mileage; more if you cover 20,000 miles a year.

In fact, Vauxhall currently offers a similar servicing/maintenance contract called Mastercover – for three years/60,000 miles. The cost for a Cavalier 1.8 is £1640.

The level of standard equipment is high; uprating rivals like the Cavalier and Mondeo to match an Espero's standard features could add sizeable sums, which you're hardly likely to retrieve when the car is resold. It's amazing how many supermarket bills you could pay with the cost of items like driver's seat height adjustment and metallic paint. But their biggest hidden extras are bound up in the delivery and servicing package – typically £600 – with the Espero you pay it all upfront. This guarantees no nasty surprises – for three years, at least, with the option of a further warranty extension to five years/100,000 miles, for a £350 single payment. Don't forget this covers items such as clutches and brake pads, but you have to meet routine servicing bills in the last two years, for labour and consumables.

