

Lancia Dedra 1.6ie



LANCIA'S LATEST MEDIUM-SIZED executive four-door saloon is very much a Fiat Tipo – or more accurately a Fiat Tempra – under the skin, sharing much of the basic floorpan, suspension and running-gear. Lancia is, of course, part of the mighty Fiat empire, so just as these two got together to produce their own versions of a larger executive model (the Thema and Croma respectively), this time they've put their heads together lower down the scale.

Although Fiat badly needed a replacement for the unloved Regata (the saloon version of the Strada), Lancia beat them to the showrooms with the Audi 80-sized Dedra, which is available only as a four-door saloon, but comes with a choice of 1.6-, 1.8- or 2-litre power units.

The cheapest 1.6 version, tested here, uses a 1581cc Fiat power unit, although its electronic single-point fuel injection helps it to develop slightly more power; the 1.8- and 2-litre models use Lancia's own twin-cam engines with multi-point fuel-injection and balancer shafts to minimise engine vibration.

Even the bigger-engined versions didn't feel very quick when we first drove them, so we weren't expecting too much from the 1.6. Even so, it feels far from sluggish and the smooth, eager power unit is really quite responsive and civilised in the mid range.

Fuel consumption, on the other hand, is rather disappointing; performance-oriented gearing doesn't do mpg any favours. It doesn't help cruising refinement either; none of the models we've driven is particularly quiet on the move, suffering from general road noise and mechanical hum, and wind whistles around the doors, too.

Taut, well-controlled handling and alert, nicely weighted power steering will suit keener drivers, but the downside of this is that the ride tends to be jolty over sharp ridges and bumps. While the brakes work fine in normal everyday use, they don't cope so well with panic stops or heavy use.

The spacious interior is comfortable and impressively trimmed, with excellent seats all round and quite generous room for those in the back. All models are well equipped, although 60/40 split back seats and an electric sunroof cost extra on the

Living with the Dedra . . .

cheapest versions. Extras such as automatic heating and automatic suspension control are available on dearer models.

A tall, slightly upright driving position gives the driver a commanding view to the front, but vision to both the side and rear isn't so good – one disadvantage of the roomy boot.

While the build quality doesn't match that of, say, a BMW or a Volvo, the Dedra still has a substantial, well-built feel to it, but stylish and up-market though the Lancia is, the Fiat version costs quite a bit less.

Although the name Dedra doesn't exactly help the model's case, it's a pleasant-to-drive, compact family saloon that should not only please the driver, but keep the rest of the family happy, too.

At the Wheel

Driving position

Although the placing of the pedals might not suit everyone, the Dedra's driver is treated to a commanding position, with the firm, well-shaped seats supplemented by a very effective lumbar-support adjuster and a clever, inclined-ramp seat-height adjuster. The steering wheel adjusts for tilt and the backrest-recline lever can be more 'finely tuned' than many of this type. Pity it's rather inaccessible with the door closed, though.

Controls and displays

Whereas Fiat has elected to fit digital instruments to dearer Tipos and Tempras, we're pleased to note that Lancia remains faithful to 'proper' round dials. However, the long, narrow 'wall-to-wall' strip means that the two main dials (speedo and rev counter) are quite small, although both proved reasonably accurate.

The helpfully illuminated column stalks (which neatly include rear foglamp and heated

rear window switches at their tips) are a straight lift from the Tipo and Tempra. There's a 'check-control' pictogram and a comprehensive array of warning lamps in the main display, and virtually everything is within easy sight and reach of the driver. We like the way the facia vents' volume-control thumb-wheels are illuminated after dark, but we could live without the hyperactive, gimmicky 'economy' gauge which spends most of its time trying to destroy its end-stops.

The gear lever, if not unbeaten for precision, slots around the ratios quite nicely and the clutch is reasonably light and well-cushioned. In this case, though, the clutch had a rather tired feeling and was occasionally sharp on initial take-up and prone to judder. On the 1.6 version, at least, there's not too much power to scuffle the front wheels during hasty T-junction take-offs, and the over-run fuel cut-off resumes again quite discreetly, so avoiding undue jerkiness in crawling traffic.

Vision

Thanks to the lofty driving position the forward view is fine. Elsewhere, however, prominent side and rear roof pillars, small plain-lensed mirrors, front and rear head restraints and a high boot-line curtail all-round vision. This spoils an over-the-shoulder glance when joining a motorway, for example, and reversing involves too much guesswork, particularly for shorter drivers.

On a more positive note, the headlamps provide a useful spread of light on main beam, but, as on the Tempra, we found the underbonnet beam trimmers really need a third (mid-way) setting. The heated rear window switch also demists the door-mirror glasses. All models come with front foglamps and rear sunblinds, and the single, centrally mounted three-jet screenwasher is a neat idea.

Space & Comfort

Seating

The Dedra's roomy interior proves to be a cut above average in the lower-medium/medium class. Like its Tempra stablemate, the Dedra has a very comfortable back seat (although headroom isn't over-generous), with passenger-pampering items such as an overhead reading-cum-courtesy lamp, a large centre armrest, rear footwell ducts and a separate outlet higher up. While dearer versions have an asymmetrically split folding back seat as standard, the convenient 60/40 split on our test car is a £130 option on 1.6ie and 1.8ie versions.

Getting in and out

Entering the Dedra, front or back, is made very easy by doors that open almost at right angles, but the midway door-stop detents could be stronger. At night, each of the four doors operates its own courtesy lamp, and a timed, illuminated ignition lock helps the driver get the key in the slot.

Luggage and oddments stowage

The boot is roomier than outward appearances suggest, and its high-lifting lid opens well out of harm's way to reveal a spacious, flat-floored load area – although the wheelarches intrude quite a bit. A bumper-height sill eases loading, but there isn't over-much height under the rear shelf; this diminishes towards the back of the load space, too. Combined with a generous load length, this makes reaching the far corners hard work. We approve of the full-sized spare wheel, though, (the Tempra's is a 'space-saver') and like the way the rigid, reinforced floor covering neatly multi-folds out of the way for access to it.

PERFORMANCE

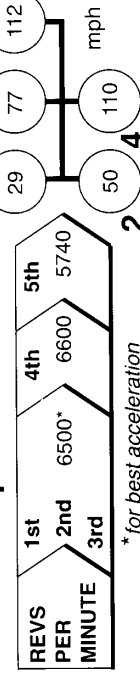
Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph	3.7	0-60mph	11.7	1/4 mile	18.3
-----------------------	---------	-----	---------	------	----------	------

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.0	4.7	8.1	12.3
IN 5TH GEAR		6.3	12.8	19.4	26.5
IN 4TH GEAR		4.9	9.8	14.8	20.2

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		13.5/10.4	12.8/9.8	13.1/9.9	13.7/10.4

Maximum speeds



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade for tests: 95 octane unleaded

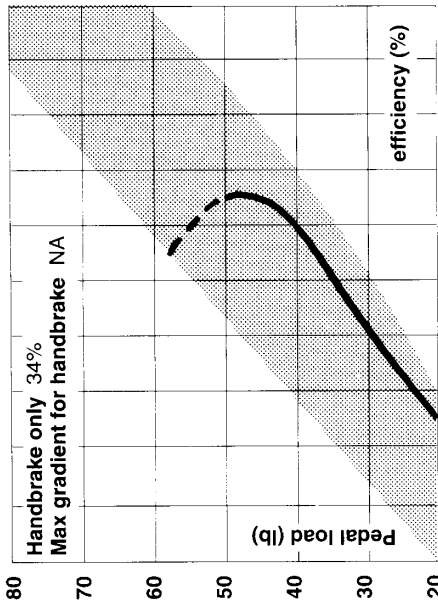
Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	30
Short journeys in the suburbs	28 1/2
Motorway - 70mph cruising	38
Brisk driving, mixed roads	34 1/2
Gentle driving - rural roads	39 1/2
Typical mpg overall	35
Realistic tank range*	53 litres/410 miles

*based on gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience

SAFETY

Brakes

How pedal loads affect braking



Braking efficiency shown as a percentage of gravity (ie 100% = 1.0g). 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.

Fade test

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

Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)

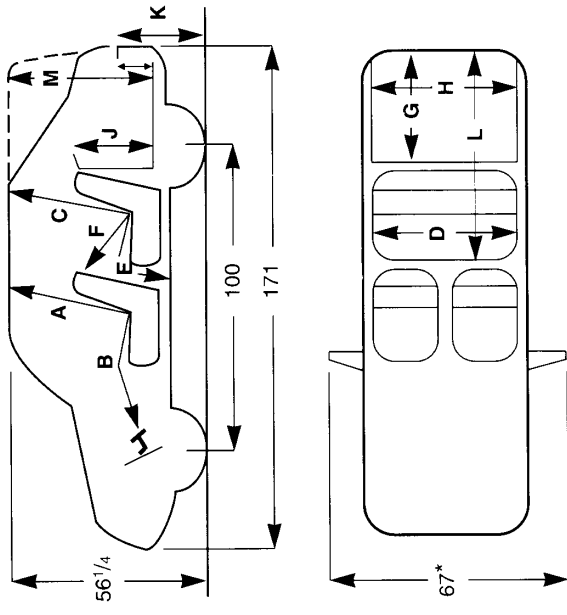
At start of test	45
After constant use	37
After severe use	65
After watersplash	NA
Number of stops to recover	NA

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"/>
	convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Head restraints	front - effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	rear - effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Interior	thoroughly padded?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Fuel	shielded filler?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	protected tank?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

MEASUREMENTS

Dimensions (inches)



* with mirrors folded

Kerb weight in lb (full of fuel)

A Front headroom	35 1/2-36 1/2	G Load length	36 1/2
B Front legroom (min - max)	35-42	H Load floor width (min - max)	42-54
C Rear headroom	35 1/2	J Load height	19 1/2
D Back seat width (between armrests)	51 1/2	K Sill height (inner/outer)	5/24 1/4
E Typical rear * legroom	41	L Load length	61
F Typical rear * kneeroom	30 3/4	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

There aren't too many spaces for nicknacks in the cabin, and the glovebox is smaller than its lid-size suggests – it won't even accommodate the car's handbook wallet. Front door bins and the small, narrow slot beneath the (Grundig) radio/cassette player, are both distinctly meagre in capacity, too. However, the flip-down centre armrest attached to the driver's seat (which interferes with access to the handbrake, incidentally) and centre console-mounted switches for the front foglamps and electric mirrors, tend to preclude any additional stowage space here.

Heating and ventilation

Standard on the top-line 2.0SE, and available as part of a £600 'Convenience Pack' on the 1.8SE and 2.0ie, is an all-singing, all-dancing, multiple-pushbutton and lamps, automatic heating system – you dial-in the desired temperature and setting, then simply leave it to get on with things. The 1.6 and models without this convenience, use the increasingly common

three-dial arrangement, with four facia vents up front, plus the aforementioned footwell ducts and vent in the back. Overall, the system copes reasonably well with most requirements, although with the heater in use, cool air to the face can be elusive. The distribution options could be more flexible, too, and the knobs themselves lack crisp, BMW-style sensitivity.

Interior trim and equipment

The two cheaper models wear smart, durable looking and easy-to-clean tweed upholstery (very Fiat-ish, but none the worse for that), while dearer versions come with suede-like Alcantara trim – make a nice pair of shoes! Although the electrically operated glass sunroof, 60/40 split back seat and metallic paint on our test car all cost extra, the cheapest Dedra is still well equipped, with power steering, central locking and electric (front) windows, seatback map pockets, front foglamps and alloy wheels all standard (in addition to items already mentioned). There's also a

none too convincing looking rosewood-veneered facia panel.

Safety

Accident avoidance

Sensibly geared power steering that retains a reasonable degree of weight, but not much feel, helps to make the Dedra fun to drive and agile on the road. Ultimately, the front-end simply runs wide, with nothing more harmful than a prompt tightening of the line in response to 'chickening out' and backing off the throttle at the limit.

The brakes are less reassuring. The 1.6 (fitted with drums at the rear, whereas 1.8- and 2-litre models are all-disc) has a nicely weighted and progressive, if slightly wooden-feeling, response up to a point. The trouble is that they then suffer from premature front wheel lock-up beyond that, which is tricky to control and results in mediocre all-out stops. Their fade resistance under hard use leaves a lot to be desired, too. ABS (standard on the top spec

Continued on page 5



Dearer versions have this suede-like Alcantara trim

2 litre) is a £900 option on all other models. It's a two-channel system on the 1.6 and 1.8, four-channel on the 2 litre; this also includes rear discs on the 1.6.

Injury prevention

Nothing to cause too much worry here, although the hard plastic T-handles for the back seat cushion releases need to be fully clipped home before you sit on them! Up front, the inboard seatbelt latches are attached to the seat frame, there are five-step, height-adjustable pillar mounts, and the rear belts stow neatly into recesses in the backrest. Padded, height-adjustable head restraints are standard, front and rear, with more or less sufficient adjustment to suit the headroom available. Although the back ones don't exactly help the driver's rearward view when reversing, they're easily lowered (or removed altogether) when not in use.

Security

Central locking conveniently looks after the doors and boot lid, but not the fuel-filler flap – there's a separate locking cap behind it. However, while the boot's push-button release locks automatically with the central locking system, it can (less helpfully) be unlocked again only by using the 'all-locks' key or a switch in the lockable glovebox. This means that the boot can be kept secure for garage service visits, for example. And in case you thought access through the split-folding rear seat has been overlooked, the backrest release levers can be individually key-locked.

Money Matters

Fuel economy

Unlike the carburettor-fed Temptra, the Dedra 1.6ie uses Weber single-point *iniezione elettronica*, squeezing another 4bhp from the 1581cc power unit, although its almost identical maximum torque doesn't peak until 500rpm later. In theory, this should confer some advantage on the Dedra, but it weighs-in some 300 lb heavier and despite slightly higher (though still 'short') gearing, both cars give an unremarkable 35mpg overall. The Dedra is 2mph faster and nearly 1½sec quicker in flat-out acceleration, but the lighter Fiat's lower gearing gives it better in-gear acceleration – albeit by a fairly small margin. The fair-sized fuel tank fills easily almost to the brim, and the fuel gauge (marked in gallons!) and low-level warning lamp allow about 400 miles between fill-ups.

Servicing and warranty

Under the weighty bonnet, access to routine items presents few problems, with translucent reservoirs to aid level checks. Normally, servicing needs are covered by just one garage visit annually. There's one-year/unlimited-mileage mechanical cover, plus Lancia's six-year anti-rust warranty that includes free annual inspections, provided these are performed at service visits. Lancia's Gold Service aftercare provides a year's free AA membership, including Relay (with the option of travelling with the car) and Homestart, 48-hour car hire, an overnight hotel or up to £100 towards

onward transport costs – should the worst come to the worst.

Value for money

Lancia's version of this car costs around £1200 more than the equivalent Fiat, it has to be said, with relatively minor performance and equipment differences to separate them. Farther up the range, Lancia has twin-cam engines and more 'goodies' (such as Automatic Suspension Control) to offer, but the gap to the dearest Fiat becomes wider still. Among our selected rivals, the Cavalier undercuts the Dedra by about £200, while the fairly basic Audi and BMW cost some £650 more.

Durability

Build quality

Lancia hasn't enjoyed the best of reputations here in the past, of course, but is now working hard to reverse that. It carried out extensive durability testing before launching the car, and all exposed panels are galvanised. Overall, the Dedra creates a favourable impression, with an air of quality inside; the doors shut with a satisfying 'clunk', and the fit and finish are reasonably good. Some facia creaks and rattles and a few flimsy fittings tend to spoil the effect, however.

Although we've had our fair share of problems with Fiat electrics in the past, the Dedra behaved well for the test period with nothing worse than an occasional false alarm from the check-control panel – better than a recent Temptra achieved! Ultimately, however, only time will tell.

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)
Lancia Dedra 1.6ie	1581/90	112	12.3	26.5/20.2	35	86/50	42	41/30¾	3.1/35 (p)	171
Audi 80 1.8	1781/90	111	13.8	35.2/25.2	38	111/50*	43¼	40¼/28¾	3.1/34½ (p)	173
BMW 316i (2 door)	1596/102	112	11.3	28.0/19.1	35	94/33	42½	38¼/26½	4/32½ (p)	170¼
Fiat Temptra 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 (4 door)	1598/82	103	12.6	31.4/21.1	40	102/50	42	38¾/28¾	4/34¼	174½
Volvo 440GLi (5 door)	1721/109	112	10.8	25.2/19.3	33	90/40	43	38½/27½	3/33½ (p)	169¾

*ABS fitted

(p) = power assisted

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 aluminium alloy head; 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 9.2:1

Valve gear single belt-driven overhead camshaft actuating 2 valves per cylinder via shim-adjusted bucket tappets

Fuel system Weber 'Centrajel' single-point fuel injection; 60-litre (13.2-gallon) tank, with low-level warning lamp. Fuel required: 95 octane minimum, leaded or unleaded

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

Maximum power (DIN-net) 90bhp at 5800rpm

Maximum torque (DIN-net) 95 lb ft at 3500rpm

TRANSMISSION

Clutch 7.5in diaphragm spring, dry plate; hydraulically operated.

Pedal load/travel: 27 lb/5¹/₂in

Gearbox 5-speed (all synchromesh) and reverse. Ratios: first 3.91, second 2.27, third 1.47, fourth 1.04, fifth 0.89 and reverse 3.91:1

Mph per 1000rpm 19.51 in top, 16.66 in 4th

Rpm at 70mph 3590 in top gear

CHASSIS

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

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion with 3.1 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 35ft between kerbs, with 52¹/₄ft for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5¹/₂J alloy (standard) with 185/60R14 82H tyres (Michelin MXV on test car)

Brakes 9.4in plain discs front, 7.1in drums rear with vacuum servo. Electronic ABS (option) available on all models except 2.0ie SE (standard). Two-channel system on 1.6ie and 1.8ie, four-channel on 2.0ie (includes rear discs on 1.6ie)

