

Alfa Romeo 147

Featured model: 2.0 Twin Spark Lusso 5-door



THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING special about an Alfa, and the rounded, retro-look 147 is no exception.

Cloaking a brace of three-door (plus recently added five-door) hatchbacks beneath its highly individual, cute coupé looks, it's Fiat Group's contender in the prestige hatchback sector, epitomised by the likes of the Audi A3 and BMW's 3-Series Compact.

With the distinctive "inverted-T" intakes on its nose, evocative of Alfas from a bygone era, the 147 draws its power from a pair of 16-valve, Twin Spark power units (so named for having twice the usual tally of spark plugs for each cylinder) – a 120bhp 1.6-litre unit or this 150bhp two-litre, complete with "drive-by-wire" throttle, variable valve timing and induction geometry, plus a pair of counter-spinning balancer shafts.

And what a beauty it is, too. Blessed with an ample herd of horses under the bonnet, it lifts the 147's game well above mere Focus and Astra territory. It does like to be revved, and is a shade less sweet than its 1.6 stablemate at the other end of the scale. However, this is anything but a hardship, thanks to its immediate (yet progressive) throttle action, great gearshift and, not least of all, the lovely noises it makes – even when spun to the dizzy 6750rpm required for peak acceleration. *Bellissimo!*

It's a fine driving position, too, with not a vestige of the ape-like (long arm/short leg) driving positions we suffered in Alfas of old.

There's a ratcheting seat-height setting lever and "pitch-and-plunge" wheel adjustment to fine-tune your favourite spot at the wheel.

Befitting its pedigree, the 147 rides in a sportingly solid, yet impressively compliant and largely fidget-free manner, aided by Alfa's now-traditional super-quick (but not over-sensitive) steering. For some reason, though, this seems a shade less rewarding than we recall of the 156's similar set-up.

Despite its stylish, coupé-like looks, even the three-door is a "proper" four- to five-seater (albeit a little "cosier" in the back than up front), but the five-door's wide-opening, cunningly concealed rear doors make getting there significantly easier.

Load space isn't over-generous, with a lofty sill to lug weighty items over, but the boot area is nicely trimmed (with neat touches such as a practical, wipe-down surface on the flip-side of the floor/spare-wheel cover), while the 60/40-split rear backrests and cushions fold to yield a flat, extended load deck when required.

VERDICT

Sporty and seductive (like so many from this stable) the distinctive 147 appeals to the heart as much as the head. Even in two-litre form, it's not especially swift, thrifty or spacious, and the crash-safety shortfall is disappointing. It improves on the enhanced build quality begun with the 156, yet remains every inch an Alfa. And you either know what that means or you don't care!

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	★★★★○
Space/practicality	★★★★○
Controls/displays	★★★★○
Safety	○○○○○
Handling/steering	★★★★○
Comfort	★★★★○
Fuel economy	★★★○○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1970cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 150bhp at 6300rpm, 134 lb ft at 3800rpm; belt-driven twin overhead camshafts, 16 valves, variable valve timing

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 20.2mph/1000rpm in 5th, 16.0 in 4th (same on 2.0 Selespeed)

suspension front: independent double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar.

Rear: independent, integral coil spring/damper struts, lateral/longitudinal links, anti-roll bar

steering hydraulic power assistance; 2.3 turns lock-to-lock; 11.3m diameter turning circle between kerbs (12.6m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear with standard anti-lock and brake force distribution controls

wheels/tyres 6½in alloy with 205/55ZR16 tyres (Goodyear Eagle F1 on test car); space-saver spare

LIKES ...

alloy (front) + where are they? (rear) external door handles
prestigious fit-and-feel throughout
dual-zone heating/diffuse face-level air

and GRIPES

smallish boot/high sill to load over key/remote-only opening of tailgate
cabin a bit sombre in dark colours
third headrest/3-pt seatbelt costs extra

THE 147 RANGE

size and type lower-medium (premium-priced) three- and five-door hatchback
trim levels Turismo, Lusso

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.6 litre/120bhp, 4/2.0/150; diesel: none

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; (5-speed sequential manual shift with auto mode and wheel-mounted shift buttons on 2.0 Selespeed)

OVERTAKING ABILITY				★★★★○	
<i>Gutsy 2-litre provides smooth, sweet-sounding urge throughout its rev range, with instant, progressive throttle action. Closely stacked sports gearing provides strong support – in short, every inch an Alfa!</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	③ rd gear	④ th gear	⑤ th gear	
20-40mph	2.9	5.4	8.1	11.8	
30-50mph	3.4	5.0	7.5	10.7	
40-60mph	4.0	5.0	7.1	10.6	
50-70mph	5.1	5.5	7.1	10.4	
30-70mph	8.5	10.5	14.6	21.1	
max speed in each gear (*using 6750rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	35	56	82	108	127

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★★★★				
<i>Stylish, uncluttered look with 5-door's concealed rear doors, which open wide, aiding easy rear access, and feature Alfa's hallmark "hidden" handles. Back seat roomier and airier than outside looks suggest</i>				
<i>in centimetres (5-door hatch)</i>		inside († without sunroof)		
outside		front - legroom	85-109	
length	417	- headroom	96-101†	
width - inc mirrors	190	rear - typical leg/	96/	
- mirrors folded	175	kneeroom	72	
height (no roof bars)	142	- headroom	92	
load sill height	24/78	- hiproom	129	
(inside/outside)		load space (all seats in use)		
steering		(litres/cu ft)	250/8.8	
turns lock-to-lock	2.3	load length	57-124*	
turning circle (metres)	11.3	full length to fascia	No	
easy to park/garage?		load width	89-121	
★★★★		load height (to shelf/	47/	
*with 60/40-split rear seats folded		to top of aperture)	76	

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★★★★				
<i>Stylish, sports-themed cabin brings a fine driving position, reach-and rake-adjusting wheel, fluid "in-touch" controls and dual-zone heating controls, plus that all-important sense of occasion</i>				
				

HOW THE ALFA 147 COMPARES										
	engine cyl/cap/power (no/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes† – best stop from 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
ALFA ROMEO 147 2.0 T/SPARK	4/1998/150	3470	8.5	21.1/14.6	29½	25/26	109	96/72	2.3/11.3	417
Ford Puma 1.7 [3dr]	4/1679/123	3565	8.6	18.9/13.2	37	24½/32	109	95/67	2.8/10.3	398
Peugeot 206 GTi [3dr]	4/1997/137	3430	7.2	16.7/12.4	35	25/20	108	94/66	3.1/10.8	384
Renault Megane Coupé 2.0 16v	4/1998/140	3270	8.2	19.6/14.1	36	25½/42	108	88/59	3.1/10.4	397
Toyota Celica 1.8 VVT-i (140ps)	4/1794/140	3130°	8.1	18.0/14.1	35	25/14	113	81/66	2.9/10.6	434
Vauxhall Astra 2.2 Coupé [3dr]	4/2198/145	3220	8.0	17.8/13.5	32½	24½/12	109	95/73	2.9/10.5	427
° in 6th gear					† all with ABS					

SAFETY ★★★★★				
<i>Sextet of front, side and high-level "curtain" airbags on all models augurs well, but 147 performed poorly in NCAP front impact test. Head restraint and 3-point seatbelt for centre rear seat cost extra, too</i>				
braking		dry road stopping distance		
pedal feel	★★★★	from 50mph (with standard ABS)		
in emergency	★★★★	pedal load	distance	
handbrake	★★★★	unhurried 10kg	35m	
		sudden 26kg	25m best stop	
		+4kg ie 30kg	27m ABS on	

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS 1.6 3dr tested Nov 01			
front impact	18%	side impact	100%
overall	62% ★★☆☆	pedestrian rating	★★☆☆

SECURITY FEATURES			
central locking	✓	alarm	✓
remote control	✓	immobiliser	✓
auto window closure	✗	luggage security	★★★★
deadlocks	✗		
✓ standard	0 factory option	✗ not available	

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★★★★				
<i>Do you need to ask if an Alfa handles? Not half it does, but now-traditional super-quick steering less involving than 156's</i>				
				

COMFORT ★★★★★				
<i>Firm but not too fretful ride serves as constant reminder of sporting pedigree, yet 147 still delivers a relaxed and rewarding drive</i>				

FUEL ECONOMY ★★★★★				
<i>Thirstier than your average family runabout, but still reasonably temperate with the unleaded, considering dynamic delights on offer. Trip computer on all models, while good-sized tank affords a fairly generous range</i>				
AA test results (mpg)		official figures (mpg)		
worst (hard/urban)	20	urban	23.3	
best (gentle/rural)	39	extra urban	40.4	
overall mpg on test	29½	combined	31.7	
realistic tank capacity	56 litres	CO ₂ emissions	211g/km	
typical range	360 miles	car tax band	D	