



Daewoo Lanos



SINCE APRIL 1995, DAEWOO HAS OFFERED UK buyers keen pricing, generous customer benefits and an umbrella of service second to none for its Nexia and Espero models. But there were those who didn't fancy owning a warmed over Mk2 Vauxhall Astra or Cavalier – albeit disguised in a sleeker, Bertone-styled body. If you're one of them, there's good news in the shape of two all-new models, Lanos and the larger Nubira, designed in Britain and built in South Korea. A third, upmarket newcomer, the Leganza, is waiting in the wings.

Lanos, in three, four and five-door forms and with three levels of trim, shares the Nexia's wheelbase but is slightly shorter in overall length. It gives Daewoo coverage in both the smaller car and lower-medium segments with rivals such as Astra, Rover 200 and Seat Ibiza. It's more ZX/306/Escort sized as a hatchback and a saloon, though. There's a choice of two engines, which although described as "all new" are, in fact, based on existing General Motors' motors, but have been extensively reworked and developed by UK specialist Ricardo.

The first is the eight-valve, single-cam, 1.4 E-Tec that produces 74bhp and powers (if that's the right

word) the S and SE versions. It's a smooth and quiet cruiser, thanks to a tallish top gear that results in a modest 3000 or so revs at 70mph, but this does no favours to acceleration, which even through the gears is distinctly leisurely. Daewoo quotes 0–60mph in 14.8sec which is a good deal more lethargic than the 1.5 Nexia's 12.2sec response, so it's a good thing that the gearchange for the new Daewoo-designed gearbox is slick and easy – you need to call on it quite a lot. That old complaint of driveline shunt on opening and closing the throttle lives on, we noticed – it's something we grumbled about on the previous models.

This also applies to some extent to the 1.6, but this twin-cam 16-valver develops a much healthier 105bhp, and with lower overall gearing as well, performance is substantially improved, clipping 3½sec off the 1.4's 0–60mph time. It also gives sprightlier fourth-gear response and a claimed top speed of 113mph. Variable inlet tracts provide a generous spread of torque, but may be the cause of a slight hiccup in the flow of power that we detected from time to time – rather like a misfire. While generally smooth-revving, this bigger engine becomes less refined above about 4000rpm (just beyond our

legal limit), but no-one could complain about its tractability; it's remarkably affable when asked to pull from low revs in a high gear.

Although the suspension isn't as calmly absorbent as a Fiesta's, the Lanos rides well. It gets caught out by the odd pothole or sunken manhole cover, but in general it feels much more adept at coping with bumpier surfaces than the Nexia, which could become harsh and agitated.

Tyre noise is prominent on coarse surfaces, but the 185/60 Bridgestone Potenza on the SX confer a surefooted grip, and the medium-weight steering (power assisted on all models) is easy to manage, if lacking in informative feedback. It doesn't feel as alert as most rack and pinion systems, either. Not so the brake pedal, though, which has a good firm feel and works a reassuringly powerful system incorporating ABS on SE and SX models (it's optional on the S).

Despite there being no adjustments for front seat height or lumbar support, the driving position feels right for average sized drivers, thanks to handwheel adjustment for the backrest, a sensible pedal arrangement and adjustable-height steering (except on the S, which also lacks a tachometer). Small warning lights in the switches are easily overlooked, but clear instruments and good all-round vision make life easy for the driver. There's nothing really pleasingly tactile about the switchgear or the unyielding plasticky fascia, though.

Even the entry level version is generous equipped, with standard features such as twin airbags, central locking, an alarm and immobiliser, and an RDS

radio/cassette. SX additions include air conditioning, powered front windows and electronically operated sunroof, passenger's door mirror and radio aerial.

You have to be agile to get to and from the back seat in the three-door models because the front seats don't slide as their backrests are tipped forward. Once aboard, however, passengers enjoy a high and spacious seat with generous headroom and ample footspace; headroom all round is good, too. The Lanos may look like a Rover 200 from outside, but it's usefully roomier inside – offering a little more legroom than the Nexia, in fact.

All versions, including the saloon, have 60/40 split-folding backrests that fold down on to the fixed cushion to increase the size and versatility of the load area; there's a high sill to negotiate, though. A full sized spare wheel lies under the boot floor.

VERDICT

It's hard to fault the Lanos on pricing, the SE costs less than the entry-level Nexia, and when taking the comprehensive specifications into account, it looks excellent value throughout the range. There's also the appeal of Daewoo's incomparable after-sales commitment to give buyers added incentive.

Disappointingly, though, for a new model the uninspired Lanos offers no technical *tours de force* and, indeed, we couldn't detect a single factor that establishes it as a trendsetter, the possessor of any new attainment that surpasses rather than merely keeps abreast of the well-established competition.

As in the past, it's the way it's sold rather than the car itself that makes this Daewoo special.

BRIEF SPECIFICATION

	1.4	1.6
Body style	3 and 5 door	3, 4 and 5 door
Trim level	S, SE	SX
Engine	4 cylinder, 1349cc single OHC, 8 valves 74bhp at 5400rpm	4 cylinder, 1598cc twin OHC, 16 valves 105bhp at 6000rpm
Transmission	five-speed manual, front-wheel drive (four-speed automatic optional on 1.6) 22.3mph per 1000rpm	
Suspension – front	independent by MacPherson coil spring/damper struts and anti-roll bar torsion beam axle with coil springs and anti-roll bar	
– rear		
Steering	rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance	
Wheels	5.0J x 13 steel	5.5J x 14 steel (alloy optional)
Tyres	155/80R13	185/60R14
Brakes	solid discs front, drums rear ABS on SE	ventilated discs front, drums rear ABS standard
Length x width	3 and 5 door: 407 x 168cm	4 door: 424 x 168cm