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Daihatsu Sirion



HERE'S BEEN A RASH OF SMALL NICHE products from this low-profile Japanese car maker over the last couple of years, from Cuore to Terios, with Move and Grand Move for good measure. Yet none of these was intended to attract big numbers, whereas Sirion is much more mainstream. The only confusing aspect is that its external size (if not its power unit) puts it very close to the now long-running Charade.

Of course, there are also smaller "city car" contenders entering the small-car scene at the present time – the Sirion's three-cylinder/54bhp engine would suit them admirably. The first question prospective owners have to address, therefore, concerns Sirion's ability to deliver sufficient get-up-and-go.

Around town or when winding along rural lanes, it fits the bill admirably. On the motorway, too, a three-pot engine feels remarkably unfrenzised as it maintains speed (it's firing 25 per cent less often, remember), although naturally it takes its time in getting up to 70mph.

It's in give-and-take traffic, with overtaking in the frame, that Sirion is struggling, particularly when well laden or (if you opt for it) with its automatic gearbox.

This four-speed auto, with a torque converter but no "lock-up" in top, is certainly easy to get along with, so long as you're not in a rush; but expect its added convenience to put a dent in the fuel economy figures, which on the manual, should stretch towards 50mpg overall. Neither can you drive this three-cylinder

engine without experiencing some vibes feeding into the cabin – generally, however, it's more intrusive by feel than by sound, particularly away from rest or when accelerating determinedly.

The driving position is blessed with straight-ahead pedals, with a wider brake pad on the automatic, but still no left footrest. The front seats offer reasonable spinal support, leg and headroom are adequate, but thigh support is a bit lacking and neither seat nor steering wheel is adjustable for height.

Rear passenger space isn't at all bad, either, and boot volume, four-up, is similarly good class-average. Having no load sill is a bonus, but we wish that the inside of the tailgate was finished in something more durable than paint – the rest of the load deck is nicely trimmed, although the floor mat is insecure and rucks up.

Power steering is standard on the Sirion, with a tight turning circle, too. The clever, self-folding door mirrors emphasise this car's ability to squeeze through tight spaces, but in terms of overall length, it's comparable to Ford's Ka rather than Seat's Arosa or especially Fiat's Seicento. Unlike any of these, it's a five-door-only design, of course.

It bowls along well on main roads, even though there's a moderate amount of both wind and tyre noise, but it's poorer secondary surfaces that get the Sirion in a fluster. It isn't harsh, but it constantly fidgets and frets. It corners neatly with no hidden vices, but again, it lacks Ka's and Seicento's

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Likes ... and gripes

Rear cushion can be removed entirely . . . but it's not easy to rethread seatbelt tags

Regularly shaped cargo deck . . . but space-saver spare beneath

Face-level vents will deliver cooler air than footwells . . . but you can't have screen and facia vents

working together

Small rear quarter windows improve view (especially ... but tailgate soils in wet weather (single wiper

for toddlers) speed only)

Neat stalks and dials ... but minor switches obscure

Electric mirrors also fold by themselves ... but rear foglamps and reverse lamp locations

haphazard

Boot lamp and front interior lamp operated by all ... but no rear cabin illumination

four doors

Plastic-covered load sill doesn't protrude ... but door sills just painted metal

FACTS AND FIGURES

BODY

Style five-door hatchback Trim levels

Sirion and Sirion Plus

ENGINE

Type and size transverse 3 in line, water-cooled; 989cc

Power 54bhp at 5200rpm **Torque** 65 lb ft at 3600rpm

Valves four per cylinder, with twin overhead camshafts

Fuel/ignition multi-point petrol injection and programmed spark timing via coil and

distributor

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual (or four-speed automatic with torque converter);

front-wheel drive

Mph per 1000rpm 19.0 in 5th; 15.6 in 4th - manual

20.7 in top (theoretical) - automatic

CHASSIS

independent damper/struts, coil springs Suspension - front

> torsion beam dead axle, coil springs; anti-roll bars and telescopic - rear

dampers all round

rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance; 8.8m turning circle Steering

(maker's figure)

Wheels steel with "space-saver" spare; 145/80R13 tyres on Sirion; 165/65R14

on Sirion Plus

ventilated discs front, drums rear with vacuum servo; electronic **Brakes**

anti-lock control on Sirion Plus

ultimate panache in the hands of a keener, more exacting driver.

Sirion, even in its cheaper form, offers standard airbags, a split rear backrest (but with a non-hinging one-piece cushion), electric mirrors and, of course, those five doors; at its price, it seems a reasonable deal in exchange for its dynamic limitations.

Because there are no mechanical differences underbonnet, we're less convinced by the £1400-costlier Sirion Plus. However, you may be so wedded to ABS, side airbags and air conditioning, that it seems worth the extra, even though at this price, the modestly powered Daihatsu is up against stiffer opposition, including its own 85bhp Charade.

Both models have detailed omissions and irritations, as our "likes and gripes" table highlights. The switches and warning lights for heated rear window and tailgate wipe are hard to spot, and after using the screenwashers, you have to move the stalk

two steps to wipe the spray away. Without air-con, the absence of a sunroof is significant, too.

Outside, the use of old-fashioned chrome on the flanks and grille may prove a mixed blessing – proper anti-nudge door strips would be more practical on a shopping/town car.

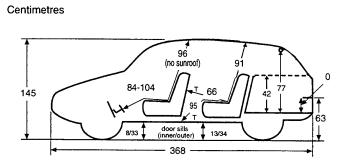
VERDICT

Sirion fulfils a specific need as a reasonably commodious five-door four-seater car for town-and-around use. It's likely to be frugal in manual guise, it's nimble and easy to park, but feels less convincing out on the open road. It will need a beefier four-cylinder engine (from the Charade?) to fulfil that brief; in the hands of a keener driver its road manners seem rather bland.

It's functional rather than fun, and bolting on features to the Sirion Plus does nothing to dispel that impression.



MEASUREMENTS



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

