

**FIRST
DRIVE**

Daihatsu Sirion



THERE'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 unfrenzied 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 for toddlers) ...	but tailgate soils in wet weather (single wiper 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 four doors ...	but no rear cabin illumination
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

Suspension – front	independent damper/struts, coil springs
– rear	torsion beam dead axle, coil springs; anti-roll bars and telescopic dampers all round
Steering	rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance; 8.8m turning circle (maker's figure)
Wheels	steel with "space-saver" spare; 145/80R13 tyres on Sirion; 165/65R14 on Sirion Plus
Brakes	ventilated discs front, drums rear with vacuum servo; electronic anti-lock control on Sirion Plus

