

# Fiat Punto

*Featured model: 1.2 16v ELX Speedgear*



## AT A GLANCE: SPEEDGEAR

*considering size, price and rivals*

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

## SPECIFICATION

**engine** 1242cc, 4-cylinder petrol: 80bhp at 5000rpm, 84 lb ft at 4000rpm; belt-driven double overhead camshafts, 16 valves

**transmission** continuously variable automatic with 6 stepped-ratio manual override facility; front-wheel drive; 34.1mph/1000rpm in 6th, 27.7 in 5th and auto mode D

**suspension** front: MacPherson coil spring/damper struts, anti-roll bar.

Rear: torsion beam axle with coil springs  
**steering** electric dual-level power assistance; 2.8 turns lock-to-lock; 10.8m diameter turning circle between kerbs (14.4m for one turn of the wheel)

**brakes** solid discs front, drums rear, with standard ABS now on ELX (not fitted to test car)

**wheels/tyres** 5½in steel with 165/70 R14T tyres (Dunlop SP10 on test car); space-saver temporary spare

## LIKES AND GRIPES

all warning lights in facia display washers wash before wipers wipe "see-you-home" headlamp facility passenger's airbag can be deactivated

indicators tick too quietly bad three-quarter rear blind spots seat handwheels stiff to operate no intermittent rear wiper facility

## THE PUNTO RANGE

**body** 5-door supermini hatchback  
**trim levels** Punto, ELX, HLX, Sporting and HGT  
**engines** petrol: 4cyl/1.2/60bhp, 4/1.2/80bhp, 4/1.8/130bhp, diesel: 4/1.9/60bhp, 4/1.9/80bhp  
**drive** front-wheel drive, 5- and 6-speed manual (CVT automatic with sequential manual override available on 1.2 16v ELX and Sporting)

**T**HE HUGE-SELLING PINT-SIZED Punto is now in unofficial "Mark 2" form, with more-chiselled lines replacing bulbous curves. In fact, everything from the inside out has been either tweaked, modded or redesigned. The *spirito di Punto* lives on, however, and no more so than underbonnet, where the smooth and feisty little 1.2-litre 16-valve engine punches well above its weight and is mated, in this case, to optional automatic transmission.

Called Speedgear, this features a constantly variable (CVT) system, but flick the selector lever to the left, and instantly six "gears" (seven in the Sporting) are at the driver's command, simply by nudging the lever fore and aft. Everything is done so beautifully smoothly, too.

The downside is that acceleration is blunted and, although there's an E (for economy) button that prevents high revving, fuel consumption suffers by some eight per cent overall. Out of E, the engine can also sound very busy when accelerating even modestly; in E, ultimate overtaking ability is curtailed, instead. When main-road motoring, however, the CVT's high top ratio gives unusually relaxed small-car cruising.

In spite of the minor shortcomings, Speedgear impressed us a lot – not least because of its reasonable £500 price tag, and an mpg penalty half that of rivals using a torque converter-type automatic.

We think pretty highly of the chassis, as well, which feels taut and all-of-a-piece, enabling the Punto to be punted along winding roads with verve and confidence. ABS brakes (not fitted to the test car) are now standard on the ELX, as is clever Dualdrive electric power steering with its two-level assistance (less on the open road, more for town parking and for drivers with a disability); it's as versatile as it is unique. We're less taken by the rather firm and often fidgety ride, however.

No complaints about the driving position, though, thanks to a height-adjustable steering wheel and seat (with lumbar adjustment), clear instruments – including a trip computer – and well-placed controls.

Although rear legroom is no longer class leading, it remains perfectly respectable by current standards. The back seats have comfortably long (albeit rather flat) cushions, foot space is excellent and headroom, especially for those up front, is generous.

## VERDICT

**It's a pity that the sophisticated Speedgear system takes the edge off both the Punto's performance and economy, because in most respects it's the highlight of this appealing little supermini. But whichever transmission you choose, Fiat's long-established knack of making small cars with character is certainly very apparent in this latest Punto.**

OVERTAKING ABILITY <span style="float:right">★☆☆○○</span>							
<i>Smooth, peppy little 1.2 engine tries hard, but Speedgear blunts performance, adding a couple of seconds to manual's 30-70mph time</i>							
acceleration <i>in seconds</i>	in D <i>5000-5500rpm</i>	in D Econ <i>to 4200rpm</i>	man hold <i>to 5500rpm</i>	in ④ <sup>th</sup>	in ⑤ <sup>th</sup>		
20-40mph	4.0	-	3.9	10.5	No		
30-50mph	5.2	5.7	5.2	12.6	17.2		
40-60mph	6.8	7.9	7.0	13.5	17.8		
50-70mph	9.0	11.2	9.2	14.1	22.5		
<b>30-70mph</b>	<b>14.2</b>	<b>16.9</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>26.7</b>	<b>39.7</b>		
max speed in each gear (*using D to 5000-5500rpm for best acceleration)							
gear	①*	②*	③*	④	⑤	⑥	D
speed (mph)	34	52	72	98	97	89	101

SAFETY <span style="float:right">★★★★○</span>	
<i>Impressive, thanks to good crash test results, plus many safety features: ABS, twin airbags, belt tensioners, anti-fire system</i>	
<b>braking</b>	<b>dry road stopping distance</b> <i>from 50mph (without ABS*)</i>
pedal feel ★☆☆○○	pedal load
in emergency ★☆☆○○	10kg 31½
handbrake ★☆☆○○	13½kg <b>26m best stop</b>
	+4kg ie17½kg 29½m
	*ABS is now standard on ELX but was not fitted to test car

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS	
front impact 69%	pedestrian rating ★☆☆○○
overall 81% ★☆☆○○	side impact 100%

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY <span style="float:right">★★★☆☆</span>			
<i>No longer class leader for space, but respectably roomy all round. Deep boot plus folding back seat to cope with big loads</i>			
<i>in centimetres (5-door hatchback)</i>		<i>inside (†no sunroof)</i>	
<b>outside</b>		front - legroom	90-111
length	384	- headroom	96-102†
width - inc mirrors	196	rear - typical leg/	96
- mirrors folded	171	kneeroom	68
height	148	- headroom	93
load sill (inside/outside)	23/69	- hiproom	129
<b>steering</b>		<b>load space (all seats in use)</b>	
turns lock-to-lock	2.8	(litres/cu ft)	300/10.6
turning circle	10.8	load length	59-119
easy to park/garage?	★★★☆☆	load width	100
		load height (to shelf)	51
		(to top of aperture)	83

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

**HANDLING AND STEERING** ★★★★○  
*Grippy, with trim and tidy handling but not quite in Fiesta class. Clever two-mode power steering makes light of parking*



**COMFORT** ★★★☆☆  
*Ride remains jostly on all but smoothest roads. Decent sized seats, good headroom, plenty of storage spaces. Air con standard*

**CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS** ★★★★○  
*Super-smooth versatile Speedgear for his'n'her harmony. Also clever detailing for headlamps, wipers and electric windows*



**FUEL ECONOMY** ★★☆☆○  
*Bad news: Speedgear increases fuel consumption by some 8 per cent  
 Good news: it could be twice that with an 'ordinary' automatic*

AA test results (mpg)		official figures (mpg)	
worst (hard/urban)	28	urban	33.6
best (gentle/rural)	48	extra urban	51.4
<b>overall mpg on test</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>combined</b>	<b>43.5</b>
realistic tank capacity	41 litres	CO <sub>2</sub> emissions	155g/km
typical range	345 miles	car tax band	B

HOW THE PUNTO 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 (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	overall length (cm)
<b>FIAT PUNTO SPEEDGEAR</b>	<b>4/1242/80</b>	<b>2500</b>	<b>14.2</b>	<b>39.7/26.7</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>26/13½</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>96/68</b>	<b>2.8/10.8</b>	<b>384</b>
Citroën Saxo 1.4	4/1360/75	3180	11.5	27.0/18.6	46½	29/27	105	91/66	3.7/10.7	372
Ford Fiesta 1.25	4/1242/75	3640	12.4	28.1/18.5	42	26/18*	105	93/67	2.8/10.1	383
Renault Clio 1.4 16v	4/1390/98	3490	11.2	27.5/18.0	42	29/20*	106	93/65	3.4/10.4	377
Rover 25 1.4	4/1396/103	3360	11.4	32.5/22.0	38	28/14	107	97/70	3.0/10.3	399
Skoda Fabia 1.4	4/1397/68	3310	15.3	31.8/21.5	40	24½/27*	108	100/72	2.8/10.2	396

† all rivals tested with manual transmission \* with ABS (p) all power assisted