

Fiat Panda 1000 Selecta (Auto)



What's new . . .

"Third generation" Pandas now include an automatic, but all versions have new front seats, revised suspension settings (to improve the ride) and better sound insulation.

AT THE WHEEL

— driver appeal?

There's more driver legroom now, but the front seats still don't have enough lumbar support (we used a piece of carpet as padding) and the stupid accelerator that's higher than the brake, compromises the situation still further. In fact, we noted several irritations that arise from ineptitude in the right-hand drive swap-over; others include the

bunched and obscured minor switches, a poor (single) wiper sweep, and the transmission selector markings on the wrong side. There are nasty screen reflections at night, the speedo is 10 per cent high (78 at a true 70mph) and the undecimalised distance recorder "massages" the truth by over 4 per cent, as well. In spite of all this, we managed to achieve a reasonably comfortable position, found left foot braking eased the pedal problem and went out motoring!

The ride is definitely improved and the noise levels are lower. With the automatic transmission to assist, this Panda's mechanical refinement is now very impressive, even up to the legal limit. This is a more relaxed motorway cruiser than most small cars, thanks to this new-found insularity and the 'box's long-striding cruising gait. At 40mph, you hear some transmission whine, but the only other noise from the 'box is a muted squawk from pull-away. Of course, the stepless gearing means much more activity when

accelerating resolutely, yet here again, it's not at all intrusive, once you realise that this is the way things are meant to be. The only time Selecta seems to put a cog wrong is when L is engaged at town speed. Unlike the Ford transmission, this one (which comes from Fuji Industries – Subaru to you) sounds and feels too abrupt and frenzied in the lower ratio. Oddly, this same downchange feels fine if you make it at 60mph – to call up engine braking into a roundabout, for example.

On balance, the Panda's pull-away, using its special electromagnetic clutch, is smoother and

arrangements – it's easier to climb into the back of this tall small car than into most three-doors. There's a surprising amount of room in the back seat for adults, but they don't like the cold, hard metal at hip level; actually folding the back seat is made hard work by the lurking seatbelts.

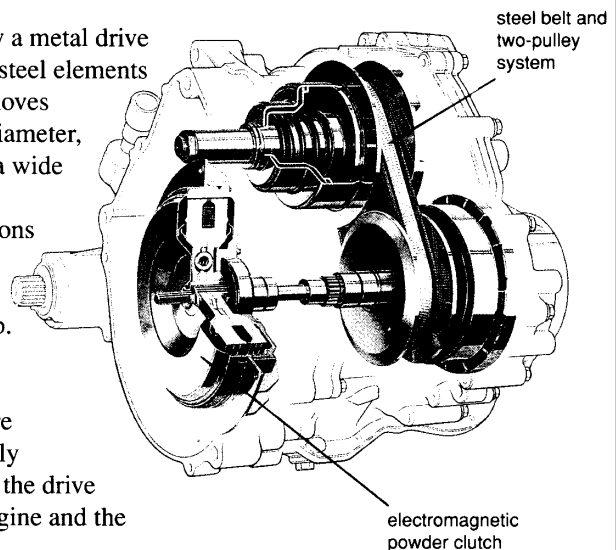
Mid-summer ventilation is very effective (even without the double sunroof option), thanks partly to the hinge-open rear side windows. The outboard facia vents are prolific but make a loud noise to prove it. The centre ones also have individual volume control but turn warm with the heater.

ECVT – HOW IT WORKS

CVT relies on split drive and driven pulleys connected by a metal drive "belt", which is formed from hundreds of wedge-shaped steel elements carried on two flexible steel bands. Half of each pulley moves axially, altering the pulley's groove width and effective diameter, so providing a continuous, stepless span of "gears" over a wide ratio range.

The Panda's ECVT differs from the similar transmissions available on the Ford Fiesta and Fiat Uno in employing microprocessor control of the "gearchanging" and in the use of an electromagnetic powder clutch for drive take-up.

Metal powder occupies the annular space between the outer (driving) and inner (driven) members of the clutch, which can rotate independently so long as the particles are unmagnetised. Electric current fed into a coil progressively magnetises the powder and causes it to harden, taking up the drive smoothly until there is a solid connection between the engine and the CVT input shaft.



superior to the Fiesta/Uno's, but we prefer the Ford's ratio response to accelerator pressure. On this Panda, it holds on to high gearing and needs full throttle to get it revving more freely (ie to achieve kickdown). Even then it never revs beyond 3800rpm in D, or 500rpm more in L, so it's no wonder that overtaking is a protracted business compared with the five-speed manual.

What it amounts to is that the engine never develops 45bhp on the road, because it's not allowed to. The obvious compensation, apart from giving the motor a long, unstressed life, is particularly impressive fuel economy. Indeed, we've never met an automatic that's so miserly.

The obscured manual choke, with no tell-tale, either, is at least progressively click-stopped in its movement, so you soon learn how to avoid stalling in the warm-up phase and also maintain a sensible fast ideal. The auto shift lever is positive, but you have to press the button and the brake quite a lot; there's a warning buzzer, too, to get you flustered.

SPACE AND COMFORT

– popular with passengers?

Older people are complimentary about the seat-folding

There's much to admire about the Panda's interior design – it has practical elegance written all over it – which its new-found ride comfort and noise suppression have allowed to emerge. It's also really easy to park and position this brick-shaped object – it's lovely for reversing.

LIVING WITH THE PANDA SELECTA

– how reassuring?

Extending the anti-rust-through warranty to eight years is an interesting move because unlike the Tipo, the Panda doesn't benefit from galvanizing. The paint's appearance was certainly not lustrous or chip-free on our test car, but seams and welds are now strip-sealed around the doors.

Injury padding isn't taken very seriously inside – there's a lot of hard, painted metal on view, the new seats have no backrest padding against rear passengers' knees and there are exposed electrics under the facia.

Parts prices are reasonable (though no cheaper than the Uno's), mechanical access quite straightforward for routine attentions, and the spare wheel and tool-stowing arrangements under the bonnet are nothing short of brilliant.

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration – in Drive/Low (seconds)

STANDING START	0-30mph 5.4/5.4	0-60mph 20.5/19.3	1/4 mile 21.9/21.7
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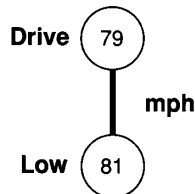
mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS	3.3/3.1 7.8/7.4 15.1/13.9 28.5/25.6				

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
SPEED RANGES USING KICKDOWN	6.2/5.8 12.3/11.1 8.3/7.7 21.2/18.5				

Maximum speeds

using accelerator kickdown

REVS PER MINUTE	Low 4000-4500	Drive 3250-3800
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FUEL CONSUMPTION

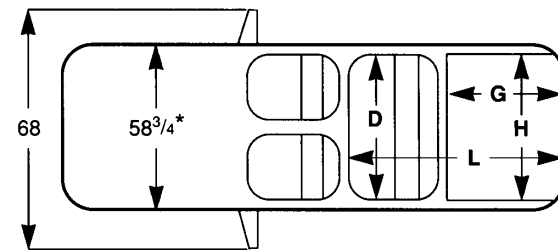
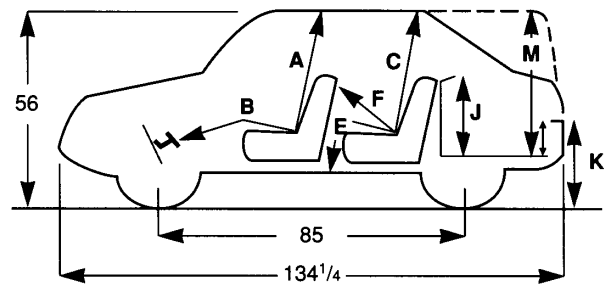
Fuel grade for tests: unleaded Premium/95 octane

Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	35
Short journeys in the suburbs	39
Motorway – 68mph cruising (85% of max speed)	43
Brisk driving, mixed roads	46
Gentle driving – rural roads	54
Typical mpg overall	45
Realistic tank range*	34 litres/335 miles

* based on gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience

MEASUREMENTS

Dimensions (inches)



* with mirrors folded

Inside (inches)

A Front headroom	37 ¹ / ₂	G Load length	18 ¹ / ₂
B Front legroom (min - max)	32-39	H Load floor width (min - max)	39 ¹ / ₂ -50 ¹ / ₂
C Rear headroom	34 ¹ / ₂	J Load height	18 ¹ / ₄
D Back seat width	39-48 ¹ / ₂	K Sill height (inner/outer)	6/25 ¹ / ₂
E Typical rear * legroom	36	L Load length	39
F Typical rear * kneeroom	25 ¹ / ₂	M Load height (to tailgate hinge)	33 ¹ / ₂

* "Typical" represents the mean measurement behind the driver's seat set at 39in legroom and the passenger's seat set at 41in

HOW IT COMPARES

	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Max speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom – front (in)	Typical leg/kneeroom – rear (in)	Steering turns/circle (ft)	Overall length (in)
Fiat Panda 1000 Selecta	999/45	81	25.6	45	92/55	39	36/25 ¹ / ₂	3.2/32	134 ¹ / ₄
Subaru Justy 1.2GL (Automatic)	1189/67	88	17.8	38	92/60	41 ³ / ₄	36/25 ¹ / ₄	4.4/30	145 ¹ / ₂
Renault Clio 1.4RT (Automatic)	1390/77	100	15.0	37 ¹ / ₂	88/45	39 ¹ / ₂	36 ³ / ₄ /25	3.4/33 ³ / ₄ (p)	146
Skoda Favorit Forum Plus (Manual)	1289/59	91	16.0	37 ¹ / ₂	97/45	42	40/27 ³ / ₄	3.7/33 ¹ / ₂	150 ¹ / ₄
Mazda 121 1.3i GLX (Automatic)	1324/72	90	16.2	35	98/27	41 ¹ / ₄	39 ³ / ₄ /28	3.8/31 ¹ / ₂	149 ¹ / ₂
Fiat Panda 1000CLX (Manual)	999/45	86	18.6	44	92/55	37 ¹ / ₄	35 ¹ / ₂ /26 ¹ / ₂	3.2/32	134 ¹ / ₄

(p) power-assisted

VERDICT

The latest changes to the Panda are all to the good, but they still fall short of the optimum. Unresolved irritations and oversights in control spoil what is otherwise a surprisingly enjoyable and relaxed drive. Still, it's a much better car than the original

Panda (which can still be experienced in the Seat Marbella, incidentally) and the addition of the stepless auto transmission is a significant bit of good news to people who prefer, or must find, a cheap automatic.

As far as fuel costs are concerned, no other automatic is cheaper to run, at present.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Same as for 1000CLX (see R8714) except for:

TRANSMISSION	Continuously variable automatic – steel element pusher belt and pulleys, controlled by pressurised hydraulics. Electronically controlled electromagnetic clutch unit. Ratio range within gearbox: low 3.40:1, high 0.67:1
Final drive	4.35:1, to front wheels
Mph per 1000rpm	ranges from 4.1 to 20.7 (theoretical)
Rpm at 70mph	3425 (observed) when cruising on level

