

Fiat Seicento

Featured model: 1.1 SX



S EICENTO IS MUCH EASIER TO say than Cinquecento – so that's a good start!

They are closely related beneath the skin, but the current model is softer, more ovoid. However, since its 1998 launch, the Seicento's price has fallen but its spec and warranty have improved.

The S and SX (cheaper) versions now share the Sporting version's FIRE engine (with 15bhp more); sensibly, however, raised gearing for this pair has produced better fuel economy, as well as perkier performance and a more relaxed main road drive. This SX is now well suited to fraught-free, longer trips, especially for two, when there's loads of luggage space behind.

Cleverly, the thinly upholstered front seats offer surprisingly good support for older spines and although cabin width is more "chummy" than some, the driving position is generally acceptable to all except the lanky.

So, it's good for longer stints now, yet the Seicento's city-car credentials remain intact. You do have to use the lower gears more to keep it sweet and responsive, but it still pulls cleanly from the low twenties in fourth and the adoption of electric power steering as standard makes manoeuvring as easy as it can be; this flat-backed hatchback is under 335cm long and possesses a class-leading turning circle; only a Daihatsu Cuore's can match it.

Three (large) doors makes rear entry more athletic than with some rivals that have a taller stance. The front seats tilt

well out of the way, however, and the SX has proper split/fold back seats, with a flat extended load deck, to make the best use of the limited space behind.

Pity the standard of trim isn't better back there because the front cabin is neatly finished, with generous (if unlined) oddments spots. Heating and ventilating arrangements are effective, too, so long as you don't want both at the same time; there's a buffet-free tilting sunroof to prevent stuffiness, however, and the rear quarter windows work well in conjunction with it.

There's no doubt that this SX constitutes best value in the Seicento line-up, with several useful additions over the basic S for under £300 extra.

VERDICT

While the latest Seicento falls short in terms of trim quality and sheer space, it makes amends by offering a bargain-basement initial price that's backed up by group one insurance, rock-bottom road tax and diesel-like fuel economy.

Despite its higher-g geared, more-sedate progress, it remains nippy, agile and therefore fun to drive, unlike some of its semi-MPV style rivals. Nimble around town, it's also surprisingly civilised for longer-journey use, especially for two. It proves that you don't need a big car or a fat wallet to enjoy your motoring.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	☆☆☆☆○
Space/practicality	☆☆☆☆○
Controls/displays	☆☆☆☆○
Safety	☆☆☆☆○
Handling/steering	☆☆☆☆○
Comfort	☆☆☆☆○
Fuel economy	☆☆☆☆○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1108cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 54bhp at 5000rpm, 65 lb ft at 2750rpm; belt-driven single overhead camshaft, 8 valves

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 22.2 mph/1000rpm in 5th, 17.5 in 4th

suspension front: independent damper/struts, integral coil springs.

Rear: independent trailing arms, coil springs (sub-frame mounted)

steering electric power assistance; 3.2 turns lock-to-lock; 9.0m diameter turning circle between kerbs (14.1m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes solid discs front drums rear, with optional extra anti-skid control (ABS)

wheels/tyres 5in steel with 155/65R13T tyres; "space saver" temporary spare

LIKES ...

front seats tilt well clear
sunroof with removable sunshade
useful, large oddments bins on fascia
unmissable "gobstopper" minor switches

and GRIPES

excess paint – inside/on bumpers, sills
doors shut with an unconvincing clang
door mirrors too small and convex
hub caps too easy to scuff

THE SEICENTO RANGE

size and type mini/city (budget priced)
three-door hatch

trim levels S, SX, Sporting

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.1 litre/54bhp (Sporting has shorter gearing)

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; (no automatic available)

OVERTAKING ABILITY				★★★★	
<i>Raised gearing (longer-stride) still permits swifter acceleration than with previous S/SX – Sporting will be even quicker but fussier at speed. Clean gearshift action and powerful clutch</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear		
20-40mph	4.3	11.4	15.9		
30-50mph	6.0	11.2	16.0		
40-60mph	8.2	12.8	17.5		
50-70mph	11.0	14.3	21.0		
30-70mph	17.0	25.5	37.0		
max speed in each gear (*using 5500rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④	⑤
speed (mph)	24	43½	70	95	93

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★☆☆			
<i>Cramped behind unless front occupants are short, but all seats well proportioned and supportive. Rear shows lots of painted metal, but excellent load area for two or three. A cinch to park</i>			
<i>in centimetres (3-door hatch)</i>		inside	(† with sunroof)
outside		front	- legroom 83-103
length	334		- headroom 93†
width - inc mirrors	176	rear	- typical leg/ 88/
- mirrors folded	155		kneeroom 61
height (no roof bars)	142		- headroom 90
load sill height	21/71		- hiproom 121
<i>(inside/outside)</i>		load space (all seats in use)	
steering		(litres/cu ft)	207/7.3
turns lock-to-lock	3.2	load length	41-98
turning circle (metres)	9.0	full length to fascia	No
easy to park/garage?		load width	103-122
★★★★★		load height (to shelf/ to top of aperture)	46/ 83

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★☆☆	
<i>Rudimentary instruments, but cramped pedals better for knowing and minor controls in clear view – though not radio. Wipers less frantic now, but there's an unswept band against driver's screen pillar</i>	
	

HOW THE SEICENTO 1.1 SX 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 from 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/(p) circle (m)	overall length (cm)
FIAT SEICENTO 1.1 SX		4/1108/54	3150	17.0	37.0/25.5	49½	30/25	103	82/61	3.2/9.0	334
Daewoo Matiz		3/796/50	4300	21.8	45.0/29.0	44½	25½/27	105	101/66	3.2/9.3	350
Hyundai Amica		4/999/55	3740	17.6	35.0/26.5	46	29/17	99	101/62	3.0/9.6	350
Toyota Yaris 1.0		4/998/68	3850	14.8	32.5/23.3	47	26½/12	105	102/70	3.3/10.1	362
Ford Ka		4/1299/60	3490	17.3	31.0/21.4	42	28/22	105	92/64	2.8/10.1	362
VW Lupo 1.0		4/999/50	4100	18.5	29.6/22.3	43	26½/18	104	92/65	2.9/9.9	353
(p) all power assisted											

SAFETY ★★☆☆	
<i>Improved brake feel/progression, but NCAP crash results un reassuring. Central locking operates on both front doors; but separate interior tailgate release</i>	
braking	★★★★
pedal feel	★★★★
in emergency	★★☆☆
handbrake	★★★★
dry road stopping distance <i>from 50mph (without ABS)</i>	
pedal load	distance
10kg	37m
25kg	30m best stop
+4kg ie 29kg	33m skidding

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS - September 2000			
front impact	13%	side impact	56%
overall	35%	pedestrian rating	NA

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

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★☆☆	
<i>Really enjoyable to hustle. Electric steering better than most, with ideal weighting and response, though true road feel has been lost</i>	
	

COMFORT ★★☆☆	
<i>At its best at speed on main roads – cruises without effort, with tyre rumble predominant. Jostles but doesn't jolt on secondary surfaces. Good heater, good ventilation – but not at the same time</i>	

FUEL ECONOMY		★★★★○	
<i>A bigger, more powerful engine and class-leading mpg – a winning formula. Fiddly (locking) petrol cap, but easy filler – low level lamp, too</i>			
AA test results (mpg)		official figures (mpg)	
worst (hard/urban)	38	urban	34.0
best (gentle/rural)	56	extra urban	60.1
overall mpg on test	49½	combined	47.1
realistic tank capacity	31 litres	CO ₂ emissions	143g/km
typical range	335 miles	car tax band	A