



Hyundai Atoz



What's different?

A year and a bit after our first encounter we sample the same gearbox, but with no clutch. Some trim and equipment upgrading, too.

THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION surrounding all clutchless manual models is "Why bother?" However, such a response invariably comes either from experienced drivers who have forgotten the trauma of L plates (and have no limb or spinal problems) or even motorists who don't regularly experience town traffic queues. But there's also a less obvious reason for small-car application – the transmission retains its mechanical efficiency, leaving performance and fuel economy uncompromised, compared with the manual version. The Atoz is, in fact, available with a fully automatic three-speed gearbox (for a further £230) and our tests show that it's as user-friendly below 40mph as you could wish for. However, it sounds fraught thereafter, is 9mpg thirstier and, using kickdown, takes 3.5sec longer to cover

30-70mph. At 70mph, the engine is racing along at 4800rpm, compared with 4000rpm on this clutchless manual, which therefore feels much more suited to longer journey work.

This "halfway-house" system's biggest impediment is unfamiliarity – newcomers would be advised to strap their left leg out of the way at first to avoid stamping on the double-width brake pedal instead of the non-existent clutch. Otherwise, things couldn't be easier once you're on the move, although manoeuvring isn't as good as with the automatic, because the mechanism doesn't find it easy to slip the clutch – its resolve is to engage or disengage, so you tend to edge into a parking slot with a series of short hops. It never runs away with you or stalls, though, because the brake causes immediate disengagement.

On pullaway from rest, there's no delay as the accelerator is applied (at a T-junction for example), but too much will provoke wheel scrabble; being in the wrong gear triggers a helpful warning chime, but only as you press the pedal. Practice makes perfect, in fact, and the Atoz's little engine is wonderfully obliging about tackling low-speed pullaways.

It's nice to see minor improvements in production; several dealing directly with criticisms we made in our first test report (R9852) last year. The most significant is the adoption of a 50/50 split back seat (both cushion and backrest), which greatly enhances adaptability for carrying both a rear passenger and a lot of luggage. But there are other detailed changes, too : the interior roof lamp responds to additional rear door courtesy switches, the rear load sill is now covered in plastic and there's an air-con-on warning lamp provided on its control button.

It would be nice to have seat-height (or wheel-rake) adjustment – the driver sits rather low in relation to the wheel, with vast amounts of headroom. Also, a better quality radio and an intermittent rear wiper would be to the good. Generally, however, the Atoz Plus, in particular, is still unchallenged in terms of all the extras as standard, at a remarkably reasonable price.

VERDICT

Despite its odd-ball styling, the Atoz isn't at all quirky in the way it drives and shouldn't be overlooked by small hatchback buyers who need to be practical.

Technically Speaking

Doing away with the clutch pedal, but retaining the ordinary synchromesh gearbox and clutch makes sense now that fast-thinking microprocessors are available. The car makers can stick to a volume-produced synchromesh gearbox with its superior mechanical efficiency, which means unimpaired acceleration and mpg – vital in small cars with small engines. The hydraulics that actually do the donkey-work should prove reliable although, if abused, the clutch friction plates could have a hard time – but not as bad as manuals whose drivers “ride” the clutch pedal. It should also be cheap – if cars like this Atoz offered the system for



HOW THE ATOZ COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cyl/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)
HYUNDAI ATOZ 1.0 Plus†	4/999/55	4010	18.9	33.9/25.4	44½	28/18	99	101/62	3.0/9.6	350
Suzuki Wagon R 1.2 Auto	4/1171/69	3600	19.6	Auto	35	26/27	101	91/61	3.5/9.5	341
Daewoo Matiz SE	3/796/50	4300	21.8	45.6/29.0	44½	25½/27	105	101/66	3.2/9.3	350
Seat Arosa 1.4 Auto	4/1390/60	3530	17.2	Auto	36½	28½/18	105	93/62	2.9/10.1	354
Toyota Yaris 1.0 GS †	4/998/68	3850	14.8	32.5/23.3	47	26½/12	105	102/70	3.3/10.1	362
HYUNDAI ATOZ AUTO	4/999/55	4800	22.4/20.7*	Auto	35½	28/18	99	101/62	3.0/9.6	350
† clutchless manual			* kickdown/manual hold						(p) all power-assisted	