



Mazda Demio



What's new?

Detail revisions to Mazda's mini holdall. Extended model range plus choice of engines and transmissions.

IT SEEMS THAT NOT ENOUGH BUYERS WERE as impressed by the Mazda 121 (the rebadged Ford Fiesta) as we were – poor sales led to its demise earlier this year. This means that its place at the lower end of the Mazda range has been taken by the Demio, which has been on sale here for a couple of years and has just received a revamp.

It's still the same slightly oddball character, with mini-MPV looks but a conventional compact estate car layout and accommodation. Now, though, there's a new look front and rear and minor changes inside, together with more significant happenings underbonnet.

Previously, buyers had Hobson's choice when it came to engine size – there was a 1.3 manual model and that

was it. Now, it's possible to have a 1.5, which is also available with automatic transmission as a £700 option.

Because of the availability of this larger (74bhp) engine, the 1.3LXi and GXi models now have the lower-powered (62bhp) unit not hitherto offered in the UK. Although power is down by 10bhp compared with the earlier model, torque remains the same (though at lower revs) and it appears from Mazda's figures that acceleration is unaffected, with 0-60mph clocked in about 14sec and a top speed of 93mph. Nothing to get excited about, then, but while performance may be modest, this quiet, tractable engine is a smooth little sweetie that comes with the bonus of a light clutch and a slick, positive gearchange.

Swap to the 1.5GSi and you sense its extra urge immediately, as well as being aware of a more businesslike note from up front. It's not quite as refined as the 1.3, but it gives the Demio a livelier feel and is still pulling strongly at 5000-plus revs if you're in that sort of mood. Curiously, though, Mazda claims that it's only one second faster to 60mph (it feels quicker), but it can almost touch 100mph flat out.

Subtle changes to the damping give a slightly more settled feel to the suspension. Indeed, it provides an easy-going ride for most of the time, deteriorating only on broken B-roads, when there's a firm reaction to faults – particularly when the car is on the optional extra alloy wheels with low-profile tyres.

Well-controlled roll, good cornering grip and finger-light (though feel-less) steering make the Demio delightfully easy to handle. The brakes, too, require little pedal effort, managing to stay just this side of being *too* light.

Inside, the facia has been given a new two-tone look, with larger switches and clearer instruments which are on view through the wheel that can now be adjusted for height. Height adjusters to the front and rear of the seat cushion help to give an excellent driving position, and there's good all-round vision once the obstructive rear head restraints are removed. The LXi model still lacks interior door mirror adjusters, though.

Electric mirrors, tachometer, central locking and power windows are among the extra items on the GXi's standard spec sheet, while the GSi boasts an electric sunroof that seriously reduces rear passengers' headroom! Otherwise, those in the back are well catered for on the clever sliding seat that offers generous legroom and footspace, as well as rake adjustments for the 50/50 divided backrests.

We commented in our original Demio report on how sensible it is to be able to apportion rear space between passengers and luggage, but bemoaned the fact that seat folding was such a hassle. Sadly, nothing has changed. We like the end result of a generous load space (enough for two mountain bikes, ready for action, apparently), but not the sweat and swearing that goes into achieving it. Nevertheless, this ability to play musical chairs has clear advantages over most of the Mazda's rivals.

Driver and passenger airbags are fitted to all models, as is a deactivation system that senses when there's no front passenger or when a Mazda child seat is fitted. Security features include an improved immobiliser and, on the 1.3GXi upwards, an alarm.

VERDICT

It's a pity that Mazda missed the opportunity of this makeover to make the Demio's back seat folding more user-friendly, because otherwise it's a versatile little supermini estate whose appeal is now usefully widened by the choice of engines and transmissions.

Its performance and road manners remain no more than competent, but it's easy, if not exactly inspiring, to drive, and continues to offer usefully adaptable accommodation for passengers and paraphernalia at an affordable price.

LIKES AND GRIPES

Three rear seatbelts are standard	...	but centre one is only a lap strap
Pull-down handle now provided on tailgate	...	but mind your head on the catch!
Convenient, easy-to-reach switches	...	but tiny warning lights easily overlooked
More oddments spaces and cup holders	...	but plastic door pockets too slim
Easy sliding and reclining back seat	...	but its release trigger isn't central

FOR THE TECHNICAL

Specification as shown in R9901 except for:

ENGINE	1.3LXi GXi	1.5GSi
Type	transverse four in line, iron block and alloy head with five main bearings	
Size	71.0 x 83.6mm = 1323cc	78.0 x 78.4 = 1498cc
Power	62bhp at 5000rpm	74bhp at 5500rpm
Torque	76 lb ft at 3000rpm	76 lb ft at 2500rpm
Valves	belt-driven single overhead camshaft operating four valves per cylinder	
Fuel/ignition	electronic multi-point petrol injection with integrated programmed spark timing. Exhaust catalyser. 43-litre tank, no low-level warning light	
TRANSMISSION		
Type	five-speed manual (four-speed automatic optional on 1.5GSi)	