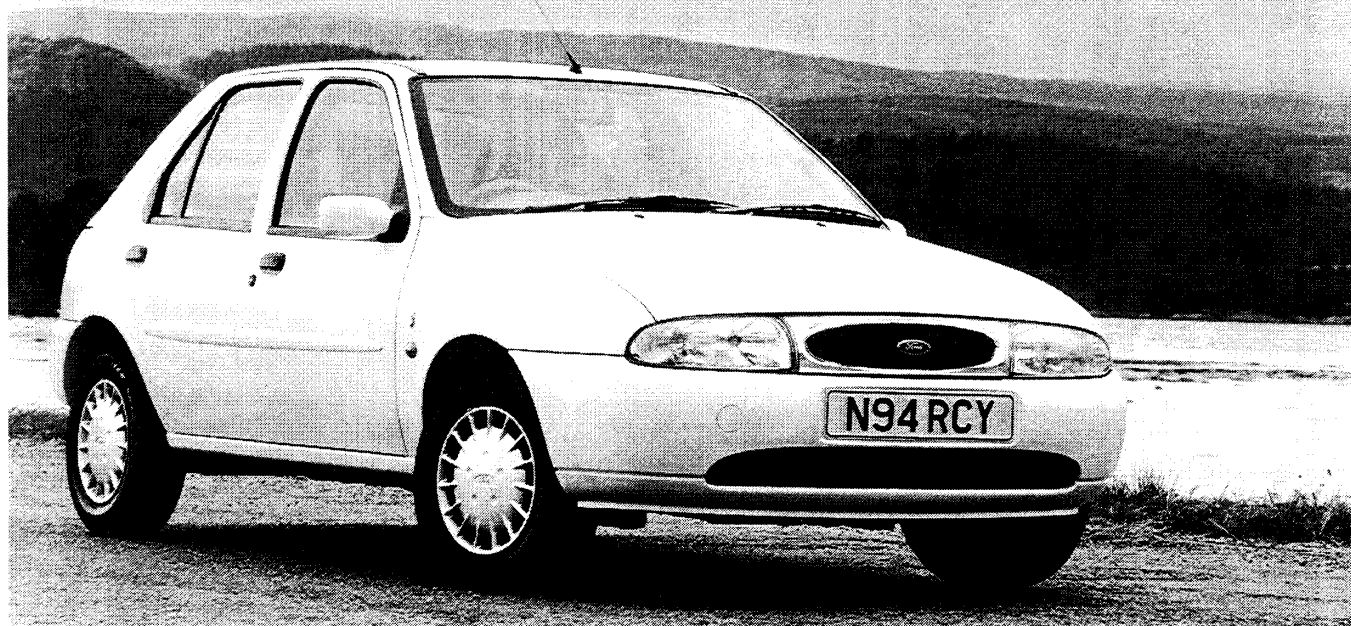


Ford Fiesta/Mazda 121

Featuring 1.25 and 1.4



THE FIRST THING TO GET STRAIGHT IS that the current Mazda 121 *is* a Fiesta – made at Dagenham on the same production line; only the marketing and minor equipment/styling details distinguish it.

Cheapest to buy?

At the time of writing, the Fiesta 1.25LX's list price is a bit lower than the 121 ZX equivalent, but when you add the extras to the Ford to match the 121's standard kit, it's the Mazda that comes out cheaper. As well as this equipment (with the optional central locking pack and power steering) the Fiesta also boasts a handset control for its locks and some interior courtesy lighting that the 121 lacks. On the other hand, the Mazda comes with a useful front seat map pocket, painted bumpers (look good but less practical), a fully sliding sunroof and wider-section tyres. It also has a three-year/60,000-mile warranty – but see our "Costs in Service" panel.

You can't buy a 1.4 Mazda at present, however, as this even more attractive power unit is a Ford

prerogative. Actually, both these engines were developed with the help of Yamaha – the politics of the modern motor industry are as complex as the products!

Whichever you decide on, they are one of the main reasons for choosing this small car in preference to its rivals. Of course, there's still the old 1.3/60bhp Endura engine, as well as the 1.8 diesel, at lower asking prices; paying the extra is well worth it, however. This is the best small car engine since the Metro's, launched in 1990. Neither is the most economical, but in terms of smoothness and quiet main road cruising, both run rings round the abstemious 1.4-litre Saxo/Peugeot 106, for example. The 1.4 Fiesta's extra overtaking ability when the car is given its head isn't matched by lower speed urge, however. Despite identical gearing, the smaller engine pulls just as well in the gears, as our tables show.

Like the Metro, the Fiesta/121 offers an automatic option that, with long-legged gearing, makes higher speed cruising even more relaxed. The Ford continuously variable transmission achieves its smoothness by damping down the revs and accelerator response, however, so acceleration suffers markedly. The manual cars' gearshifts are very precise and although the 1.4's clutch is a shade weightier than the

Continued on page 3

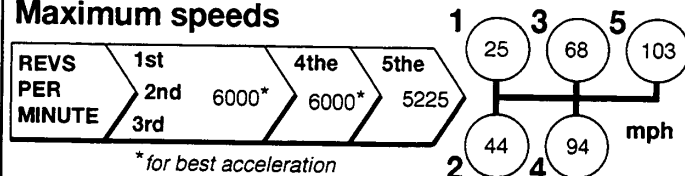
PERFORMANCE – 1.25 Versions

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		1.9	4.6	7.8	12.4
IN 5TH GEAR		6.5	13.0	20.2	28.1
IN 4TH GEAR		4.3	8.9	13.5	18.5

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		13.2/9.0		13.7/9.2	
			13.0/8.9		15.1/9.6

Maximum speeds



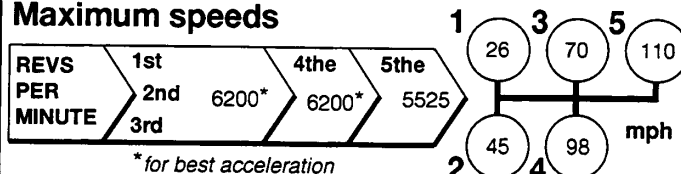
PERFORMANCE – 1.4Si/Ghia Version

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		1.8	4.3	7.3	11.1
IN 5TH GEAR		6.6	13.1	20.4	28.6
IN 4TH GEAR		4.4	9.0	13.9	18.7

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		13.5/9.0		13.8/9.5	
			13.1/9.0		15.5/9.7

Maximum speeds



FUEL CONSUMPTION – 1.25 Versions

Fuel grade for tests: unleaded Premium, 95 octane

Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	32
Short journeys in the suburbs	36½
Motorway – 70mph cruising	43
Brisk driving, mixed roads	42½
Gentle driving, rural roads	50
Typical mpg overall	42
Realistic tank range*	33 litres/300 miles

*based on fuel gauge, warning lamp and filling station experience

FUEL CONSUMPTION – 1.4 Version

Fuel grade for tests: unleaded Premium, 95 octane

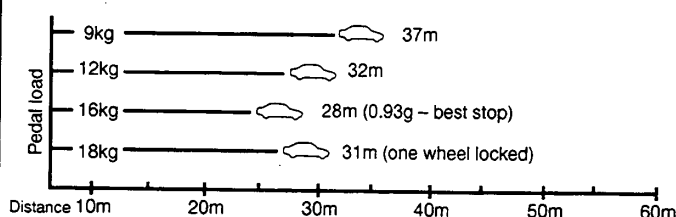
Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	30½
Short journeys in the suburbs	34½
Motorway – 70mph cruising	40
Brisk driving, mixed roads	42
Gentle driving, rural roads	50
Typical mpg overall	41
Realistic tank range*	33 litres/295 miles

*based on fuel gauge, warning lamp and filling station experience

BRAKES – 1.25 WITHOUT ABS

Pedal feel ●●○○○ Behaviour in an emergency ●●○○○ Handbrake ●●●○○

Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (no ABS)
(A good-to-average best stop is about 28m at 20-30kg pedal load)

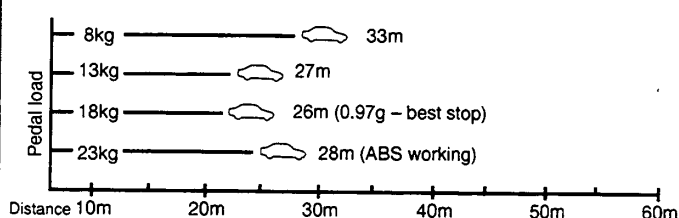


Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:
9kg at start of test, 14½kg at end of test. (Ideal brakes show no change)

BRAKES – 1.25 WITH ABS

Pedal feel ●●●○○ Behaviour in an emergency ●●○○○ Handbrake ●●●○○

Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with ABS)
(A good-to-average best stop is about 28m at 20-30kg pedal load)



Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:
8kg at start of test, 11kg at end of test. (Ideal brakes show no change)

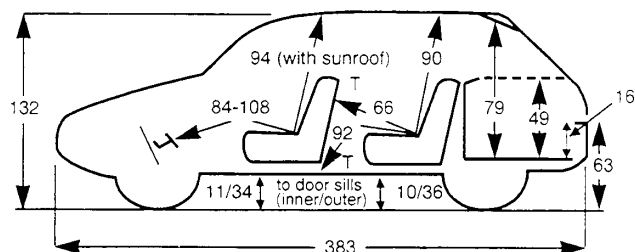
SAFETY AND SECURITY – MAZDA

Assessed on their effectiveness and convenience
(the more black blobs the better)

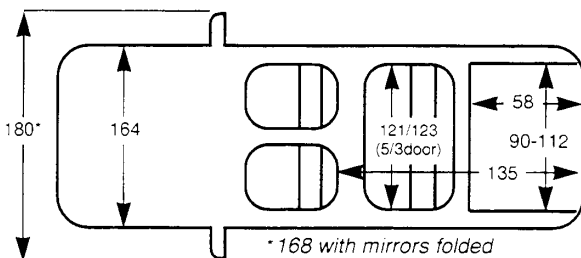
Seatbelts		Door locking		●●●●○	
front	●●●●○	rear	●●●●○	central locking?	☒
Head restraints				remote control?	☒
front	●●●●○	rear	☒	auto window closure?	☒
Interior				deadlocks?	☒
safety padding	●●●●○	Luggage			
driver's airbag?	☒	secure from interior/hidden			
other airbags?	☒ (1)	from view		●●●●○	
side impact protection	●●●●○	Alarm		●●●●○	
Fuel anti-spillage		engine immobilised?		☒	
●●●●○					
☒ standard on test car	☐ factory fitted option	☒ not available			

MEASUREMENTS – all versions

Centimetres



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants



FOR THE TECHNICAL – 1.25 versions (1.4 in brackets)

ENGINE

Type transverse four cylinder; all alloy with five main bearings

Size 71.9 x 76.5mm = 1242cc
(76.0 x 76.5mm = 1388cc)

Power 75bhp at 5200rpm
(90bhp at 5600rpm)

Torque 83 lb ft at 4000rpm
(92 lb ft at 4500rpm)

Valves belt driven twin overhead camshafts actuating four valves per cylinder via bucket tappets (shim adjusters)

Fuel/ignition electronic multi-point injection with fully integrated spark timing. Exhaust catalyser and 42-litre fuel tank – no low-level warning lamp on any version except Fiesta Ghia

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual, front-wheel drive (CVT auto optional)

Mph per 1000rpm (5th/4th)
19.3/15.3 on Fiesta 1.25, 19.7/15.7 on 121 (19.9/15.8 on 1.4)

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent damper/struts with integral coil springs and L-shaped lower arms. Rear: torsion beam dead axle with coil spring struts. Anti-roll bars and telescopic dampers front and rear

Steering unassisted rack and pinion with 4.5 turns between full locks standard on Fiesta LX and Si – power assistance optional extra but standard on Ghia and Mazda 121 – 2.85 turns between locks. Turning circles average 10.1m between kerbs, with 14.2m circle for one turn of the wheel with PAS

Wheels 5J steel with 155/70R13T tyres on Fiesta 1.25 – 165/70R13T on 121. (5½J steel with 185/55R14H on 1.4)

Brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear with vacuum servo. Electronic ABS optional extra

1.25's, both are noticeably smooth and shunt-free in traffic snarls.

The current car's suspension is the other major Fiesta improvement. It now offers a reasonably supple (yet "in touch") ride with delightfully alert and poised cornering. These comments assume that the Fiesta is fitted with its fast reacting power steering option – effortless parking and alacrity of cornering response are dual benefits, and we particularly like the way things feel on the Mazda's 165/70 tyres – the 1.4's 55-Series radials are quiet and give good road feel when cornering, but slightly increase steering effort and ride harshness. This is OK for an Si buyer, but others seeking ease and comfort (in the Ghia) could be disappointed.

The driving position presents a poser for shorter drivers, because by opting for the electric seat height adjuster, they lose more than they gain, as the standard cushion tilt adjuster is lost. Without it, we found thigh support too insistent, when the seat is set high enough to see over the fixed wheel.

In other respects, the seat is a vast improvement over the old Fiesta's. Rear quarter vision is less than ideal, however, and around the fascia, we noted the absence of a dial rheostat, interior beam trimmers (it's a screwdriver job) and a low-level warning lamp: because the gauge is pessimistic, tank range is unnecessarily curtailed as a result.

The heavily scooped out fascia moulding greatly assists the front passenger's entry and exit, and front legroom is generous. Not so behind, however – the luggage space is similar to the old Fiesta's, but rear legroom is actually worse and getting there on the three-door version is problematic, too – especially if you're carrying something at the time. Once installed, youngsters and small adults find the actual seat shaping quite reasonable, however.

The heater's biggest snag is that it's resorted to a delayed-response temperature adjuster – Skoda has recently abandoned this "set-and-wait" device. Otherwise, we appreciated its warmth to the rear footwells, cooler air from the screen vents at the same time, the pollen filter and a recirculation button. Best of all is the Mazda, with all this and a sunroof that tilts and slides as well. Thus equipped, the air-conditioning seems less desirable, though we found it worked well.



Fiesta security is among the best there is. Our only real grouse is that without central locking, it's a real struggle to reach the five-door's interior locking levers, or see if they're locked. Once inside, there's no problem in gaining access to the boot area, yet the tailgate isn't released by the central locking. The 121 has a separate electric boot release (a Fiesta option that comes with central locking), but this doesn't work until you switch the ignition off.

Our safety criticisms include less consideration for rear occupants (no head restraints or seatbelt height adjusters, for example) no front seat backrest padding or protection from long loads sliding into them in heavy braking – the rear cushion is fixed.

Emergency braking is achieved in a respectable distance, but our results could have been even better on the non-ABS car – it revealed a tendency to lock one front wheel before the other. The ABS-equipped car could be improved on by a skilful driver – the best systems can't be beaten, in our experience.

VERDICT

Our 1.4Si test car came with a generous supply of optional extras and would have cost over £14,000 retail; hardly a cheap small car! However, when you go out and drive it, even the 1.25 version goes, sounds and handles in a fashion that makes any journey (even a long one) a real driving pleasure. It's not so appealing for those behind; it's a disappointment that the Fiesta's dynamic advantages over the Corsa and Punto aren't accompanied by better interior space – its biggest snag as the sole family car.

The ordinary mpg figures will be offset by favourable depreciation and low maintenance costs – previous 121 owners, especially, will notice the difference. As for those trading in their old Fiesta, they will be amazed when they slip behind the wheel; Ford's dull but dependable small tin box has been transformed into the small car that's delightful to drive.

COSTS IN SERVICE

Mazda's parts prices have definitely been on the high side until now – our carefully selected "basket of spares" costs just over £2,000 for the previous 121. Adopting the same prices as its Fiesta counterpart results in a 40 per cent reduction for the current 121; spares prices don't come any cheaper than Ford's. However, the warranty differences (12 months/unlimited mileage on the Ford – three years or 60,000

miles on the Mazda) need unpicking a bit. The Mazda's indemnity (in the service book) purports to make the warranty dependent on dealer servicing; the importer assures us, however, that this would apply only if the component failure had been caused by the lack of correct maintenance – which is fair enough. If you want the same warranty protection on the Fiesta, it will cost an extra £330.

Likes . . . and gripes

A powerful radio that's so easy to use . . . but no cassette storage
 Rear glass doesn't easily soil . . . but no intermittent wiper setting
 Easy fuel filling . . . but gauge pessimistic and cap stiff
 Restricted door pockets . . . but they're handy to use as door pulls
 Tacho and mileage records accurate . . . but speedo is 10 per cent fast

HOW THEY COMPARE

	Engine cap/power (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/ circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
FORD FIESTA 1.25/MAZDA 121	1242/75	3640†	12.4	28.1/18.5	42	28/16	108	92/66	4.5†/10.1	383
Citroen Saxo 1.4*	1360/75	3180	11.5	27.0/18.6	46½/2	29/27	105	91/65	3.7/10.7	372
Fiat Punto 1.2	1242/75	3650	13.7	33.6/23.1	42	29/16	105	102/71	4.4/10.2	376
Rover 114	1396/75	3520	11.9	23.6/17.5	42	28/26	104	93/61	3.7/9.8	357
VW Polo 1.4	1390/60	3180	14.5	29.9/20.4	42	28/23	107	95/67	3.8/10.1	372
Daihatsu Charade 1.3	1296/84	3225	11.6	37.6/25.4	40	30½/19	105	97/61	3.2/9.6 (p)	378
* Peugeot 106 similar	† 3550 rpm on 121								† 2.8 on 121	(p) power steering