

# Nissan Micra

Featured model: 1.4SE 5-door



Photographs show 1.4 Sport+ manual version

T'S BEEN AROUND FOR EIGHT YEARS now, so it's not surprising that this Micra is showing its age. It never was a tearaway – indeed, the original came over as chummy rather than exhilarating.

Attempts have been made to infuse a bit more dynamism into the Micra — not altogether convincingly. The Sport versions' "contemporary" styling can't disguise the middle-aged design wrinkles, while tauter suspension with lower-profile tyres, have admittedly sharpened the handling and stability, but at the cost of a more fidgety ride. Those wider tyres have also enlarged the turning circles and added steering weight.

Engine power has edged up from 54 to 60bhp on the one-litre version, and the 1.3 is now a 1.35litre/82bhp unit – feeling a shade more raucous when accelerating, but in automatic guise, feeling very unstressed when cruising, yet lively with it.

In fact, the continuously variable transmission is the one facet that puts the Micra ahead of the competition, with recent revisions emphasising its superiority. Admittedly, it lacks the stepped manual control that has recently come into vogue (as on the Primera), but we didn't miss it because the "Sport" and "Low" alternatives, plus normal D, cover every condition one is likely to encounter.

The new small torque converter gives seamless step-off and manoeuvring response, plus "creep" on hills – a characteristic missed by some auto devotees before. Most importantly, this CVT's mechanical efficiency runs rings

around "conventional" small autos – most of which use 15 per cent more fuel, for example. Even so, ours had a thirst on it for the first mile or so, first thing.

Space efficiency inside lags behind later designs and the rear cushion no longer tilts when required, for cargo-carrying. Up front, things are better, although all CVTs should have a tachometer, (so that you can see what's going on) and the driving position has a dearth of adjustments even on the dearer versions. The displays are clear and the gear selector moves beautifully nowadays, with ideal pedals, too.

This Micra has maintained the name's long-standing reputation for reliability and the automatic seems to have proved reliable, as well; there's consolation in avoiding up-to-the-minute trendiness. Parts are more expensive than for a Fiesta or Corsa, but you're likely to need fewer of them.

## VERDICT

Apart from reliability, this test car's auto 'box is its most significant attribute. Without it, the Micra is now looking rather dated, with undistinguished if competent road manners and accommodation. It's also quite expensive in SE guise – the version that strikes us as the best compromise and the automatic costs twice that of a Punto CVT.

Nevertheless, it's a safe bet that you'll like it more, the longer you keep it. Its virtues are low-key but endearing – and enduring.

#### **AT A GLANCE**

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability
Space/practicality
Controls/displays
Safety
Handling/steering
Comfort

Fuel economy OOOOO

#### **SPECIFICATION**

engine 1348cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 82bhp at 6000rpm, 80 lb ft at 2800rpm; chain-driven twin overhead camshaft, 16 valves

transmission continuously variable automatic, front wheel drive; 2640rpm at 70mph cruising = 26.5 mph per 1000rpm suspension front: independent damper/struts with integral coil springs.

Rear: five-link independent with coil springs and a Panhard rod steering hydraulic power assistance, 2.8 turns lock-to-lock; 10.6m diameter

one turn of the wheel)
brakes ventilated discs front, drums
rear, with optional anti-skid control,
electronic brake distribution and
brake-assist package on test car
wheels/tyres 5½ in steel with 165/60R14
tyres (Dunlop on test car); full-size spare

turning circle between kerbs (14.7m for

## LIKES AND GRIPES

three beeps when it's time to refuel centre vents stay cool with heater on CVT automatically "changes down" for hill descents

speedo reads 75 at a true 70mph no sill protectors for boot or doors fiddly radio – find the on/off switch! rear speakers mounted on load cover

## THE MICRA RANGE

**body** 3 and 5 door supermini hatchback **trim levels** S; SE; SE+ or Sport and Sport+

**engines** petrol: 4 cylinder/1.0 litre/60bhp; 4/1.35/82, diesel: none

**drive** front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; (CVT-type automatic available on non-Sport versions)

#### **OVERTAKING ABILITY**

Lively, versatile transmission – once one is accustomed to its way of doing things. Lack of sequential gear control not missed

acceleration times (seconds) – *using kickdown in D, S or L (5000-6000rpm)					
Speed ranges		Cumulative			
20-40mph	3.6	30-40mph	1.9		
30-50mph	4.4	30-50mph	4.4		
40-60mph	7.7	30-60mph	7.7		
50-70mph	12.1	30-70mph	12.1		
maximum speed: 102½mph – 6000rpm (continuously variable gearing)					

<sup>\*</sup>only part-throttle gearing and rpm varies between D, S and L

## SPACE AND PRACTICALITY

**00**000

Poor rear kneeroom behind driver and indifferent back seat support – OK up front, though. Fixed rear cushion, but split/folding backrest. Hard rear armrests

in centimetres (5-door hatch)		inside († w		vith sunroof)		
outside		front	- legroom	82-100		
length	375		- headroom	94†		
width - inc mirrors	182	rear	- typical leg/	92/		
- mirrors folded	160		kneeroom	67		
height (no roof bars)	144		- headroom	93		
load sill height	15/		- hiproom	117-126		
(inside/outside) 66		load space (all seats in use)				
steering		(litres	:/cu ft)	235/8.3		
turns lock-to-lock 2.8		load length		53-119		
turning circle (metres)	10.6	full length to facia		218		
easy to park/garage?		load v	width	91-118		
		load h	42-44/			
		to top	of aperture)	81		

## **CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS**

00000

Easy selector action for CVT and well spaced pedals and footrest. No intermittent rear wipe and headlamp beam adjuster too coarse. Supportive front seats but limited adjustment



#### SAFFTY

Not as reassuring in a crash as later rivals, but excellent brakes with optional ABS plus brake-assist – at £350, well worth it

#### braking

pedal feel in emergency handbrake

## dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with optional ABS)

 pedal load
 distance

 10kg
 28+

 18kg
 25½ best stop

 +4kg ie 22kg
 26m

## **EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS** (tested - 1996 model)

front impact	fair	side impact	poor
overall		side impact	NA

#### **SECURITY FEATURES**

central locking ✓ alarm 0
remote control ✓ immobiliser ✓
auto window closure deadlocks × luggage security

√ standard 0 factory option ★ not available

#### HANDLING AND STEERING

00000

Stable – especially impressive in crosswinds; meaty steering makes parking a bit heavy going. Rolls less than early cars



#### COMFORT

00000

Ride too agitated on rough roads nowadays. Pleasant air con with no misting up when off; optional sunroof works well, too. Reasonably quiet

#### **FUEL ECONOMY**

A good result for a small auto, but would be even better but for excessive thirst from a cold start – blights very short journey use. Excellent tank range

## type of use (air conditioning off) AA test (mpg)

urban (17mph average/heavy traffic) 30 suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start) 34½ motorway (70mph cruising) 39 cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start) 43 rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start) 48½

## typical mpg overall 41

realistic tank capacity/range 39 litres/350 miles official mpg (urban/extra urban/combined) 33.2/54.3/44.1 CO<sub>2</sub> emissions 155g/km car tax band B

HOW THE MICRA AUTO COMPARES	engine cap/power (cyl/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes - best stop from 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
NISSAN MICRA 1.4CVT	4/1348/82	2640	12.1	41	25½/18*	100	92/67	2.8/10.6	375
Fiat Punto 1.2 Speedgear	4/1242/80	2500	14.2	38	26/13½	111	96/88	2.8/10.8	384
Renault Clio 1.4†	4/1390/98	3490	11.2	42	29/20*	106	93/65	3.4/10.4	377
Daihatsu Cuore Auto	3/989/54	4800	18.7	40	25½/13	103	94/67	3.7/9.0 <sup>m</sup>	341
Seat Arosa Auto <sup>⊙</sup>	4/1390/60	3530	17.2	36½	28½/18	105	93/62	2.9/10.1	354
† manual ⊙ 1998 model					*with ABS			m manual	steering