

Nissan Primera

Featuring 2.0 Sport + CVT



SCORECARD

- Overtaking / pulling power ●●●●○
- Fuel economy ●●●●○
- Handling / steering ●●●●○
- Comfort / ease of control ●●●○
- Interior space / practicality ●●○○
- Accident / injury avoidance ●●●○
- Costs in service ●●●○
- Depreciation prospects ●●○○

IT MAY BE DUE TO TRENDY LOOKS OR SIMPLY clever advertising, but some cars develop a desirability disproportionate to their real merits, others languish with a reputation that's inferior to their abilities. Recent Nissans have certainly fitted into the latter category and if justice is done, this latest Primera will enjoy the recognition it deserves.

Nissans have always been more reliable than the big sellers, and this latest version also has fine steering and a compliant ride. It corners surprisingly well, too.

This two litre is a very lively yet refined performer, but some of this must be credited to its continuously variable automatic transmission. This CVT concept has been slow to gain acceptance, partly because of driveability problems on early versions and a feeling of unease conferred by the way it works. After a lifetime of assessing your rate of progress by an engine's rising note, it's hard to accept the (technically superior) notion of gearing that varies to suit a steady engine speed.

Now Nissan – and others – are providing (to the left of the selector gate) a Tiptronic-style manual stepped alternative – ours had six speeds. It does absolutely

nothing for acceleration, but it does no harm either because the stepped changes avoid causing passengers' heads to nod almost as well as the fully automatic mode.

The wide spread of gearing means really relaxed motorway progress, yet a small torque converter, used for initial take-off from rest, ensures snatch-free starts as well as providing reassuring "creep" on up-gradients, so beloved by auto-devotees. Our only objection is to the frenzy of revs when using the L position – Nissan should moderate this to 4000rpm, as Rover does on a trailing throttle.

Fuel economy is extremely good – most *manual* two litres use this much – and, apart from the limitations of its saloon bodywork, our car had good (if low) seating and generous equipment. Safety and security are particularly thorough and only a poor turning circle and over-the-shoulder vision compromise its day-to-day convenience.

Enjoying the sophistication of the power unit and chassis, we mused on the fact that this Primera is the latest product from a company that's just been swallowed by Renault. Perhaps making fine cars and making money don't inevitably go together.

HOW THE PRIMERA 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)
NISSAN PRIMERA 2.0 (CVT M6)	4/1998/140	2600	9.1	21.1/15.5	32½	24/14*	107	99/74	2.7/12.3	452
Alfa Romeo 156 2.0 (Selespeed)	4/1970/155	3290	9.3	23.2/16.1	28½	25/24*	106	95/76	2.2/11.4	443
Honda Accord 1.8 (manual)	4/1850/136	3380	10.2	26.2/18.9	32	26½/15*	109	100/73	3.1/11.1	459
Vauxhall Vectra 2.0 (manual)	4/1998/136	2850	9.9	27.9/19.8	36	24½/18*	111	101/73	3.0/10.9	450
Peugeot 406 2.0 (manual)	4/1998/135	3210	10.5	27.2/17.6	32½	26½/18	113	98/75	3.1/11.2	460
Ford Mondeo 2.0 (manual)	4/1998/130	2960	8.7	26.0/16.8	35	27½/18*	110	102/76	2.8/11.4	456

* with ABS

(p) all power assisted

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

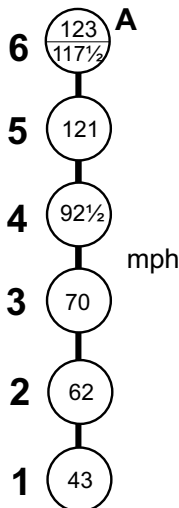
mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS	1.7/1.7	3.7/3.6	6.1/6.1	9.1/9.4	
IN 6TH GEAR	7.8	16.3	25.7	36.0	
IN 5TH GEAR	5.1	10.2	15.4	21.1	
IN 4TH GEAR	3.7	7.4	11.4	15.5	

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
SPEED RANGES	No/10.4/7.8	17.9/10.3/7.7			
-6th/5th/4th (manual hold)	16.3/10.2/7.4	19.7/10.9/8.1			

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1-4th	5th	6th	Auto (D+L)
	6250	6275	4600	5600

Observed rpm on level track at 70mph = 2600 in D/2800 in 6th/5570 in L

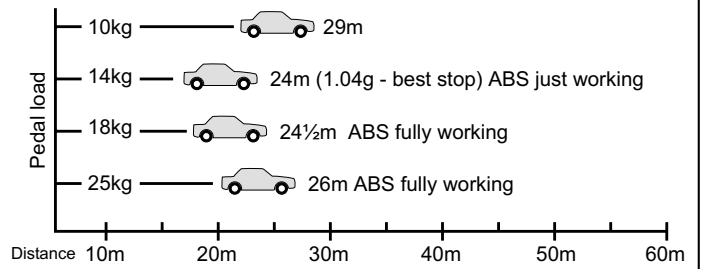


A = auto position

BRAKES

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

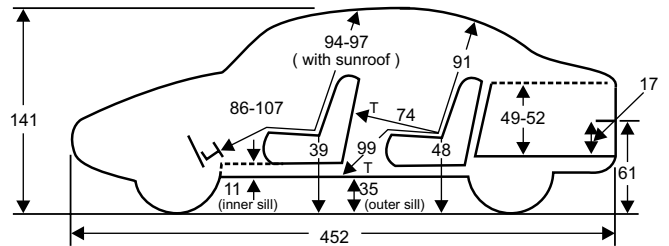
Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with standard ABS)
(A good-to-average best stop is about 26m at 15-20kg pedal load)



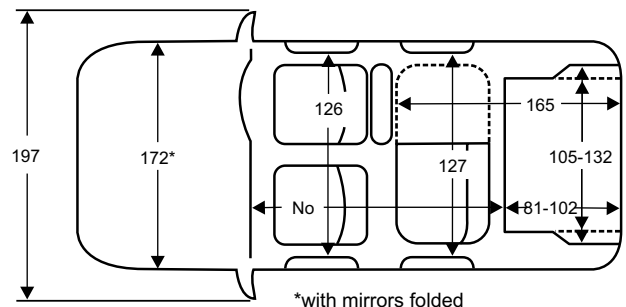
Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:
8kg at start of test, 7½kg at end of test (Ideal brakes show no change)

MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres



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



TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Like the Wankel rotary engine, CVT has always been a superior technical concept, but the devil has been in the detail. Unlike the Wankel, however, the technicians have persevered and the vital steel-element (pusher) belt has been improved to handle more powerful engines, hydraulic pump losses are being reduced and (most important) take-off and coming to rest have been made snatch-free on the newest versions.

The result is a 'box that's as user-friendly as a stepped automatic gearbox, but without the significant performance and economy disadvantages. Indeed, the belt and twin-coned shafts it drives, seamlessly vary the gearing to keep the engine running at peak efficiency and with jerk-free smoothness. It's clearly got a bright future, not least because it will help to reduce pollution and enhance engine life, not to mention making driving easier in congested traffic.

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Type of use - with air conditioning off*	mpg
Urban (17mph) average/heavy traffic)	22
Suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	24
Motorway (70mph cruising)	34
Cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	34
Rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	37½
Typical mpg overall	32½
Realistic tank range (<i>not</i> nominal tank capacity) 51 litres/350 miles	

*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2–4% in winter and 4–8% in summer

LIKES AND GRIPES

Gas struts support boot lid	...	but water gets past gutters in rain
Generous wiper sweep	...	but no shield from sun above mirror
Hip-hugging, sporty looking front seats	...	but very low-down for less able passengers
Rear backrest tilts in two parts	...	but fixed cushion and restricted aperture through to boot
Radio-cassette-CD very versatile and of good sound	...	but "computer-speak" handbook instructions can confuse the clueless
Ideal steering weight and response on the move	...	but poor turning circle
Brakes light and powerful	...	but too much pressure erodes emergency stopping distance

