



Nissan Primera Estate



THE PRIMERA ESTATE DOESN'T look like anything to write home about. Perhaps its undistinguished looks or its unremarkable load space dimensions are responsible. Yet when you start driving it, you begin to realise how good are its road manners, unsullied by the estate car body work; how it's the sort of car that can adapt to a wide range of practical requirements, yet still appeal to the enthusiastic, "involved" driver.

The estate car is 6cm longer than the saloon and hatchback, but offers otherwise identical accommodation up front. The back seat is very comfortable and supports in all the right places. Its cushions are set 5cm higher than the front ones, so less agile rear passengers find it easier to get in and out and have a good view forward.

This Primera's seat cushions (like Ford's) don't hinge forward – the 60/40 split backrests tilt and the resultant load space needs more use of the lashing eyes provided, as there's nothing between sliding cargo and the front seatbacks. Load length benefits, however, with long items (like a roll of carpet) capable of being stowed right through to the fascia.

Our measurements indicate a very shallow load height beneath the (removable) roller-blind behind the seats. In fact, there's a clever reversible floor panel that sports a practical washable trough 10cm deep, when it's turned upside down – ideal for muddy boots, for example, and it saves the carpet. Of course a lot of people will remove the

roller-blind load cover entirely and benefit from the sill-free entry, as well.

Another advantage of a flat-backed estate car is that it's easier to reverse, because you can see where the rear extremities are. We could detect no body rattles or deterioration in the ride and handling qualities, compared with the saloon we sampled in our previous test.

The Primera is probably one of the most underrated contenders in the upper-medium sector. There are irritations, as our Likes and Gripes panel points out, but with an enviable reputation for reliability, it deserves more serious consideration. The driving position and major controls work well unless you're very tall, the two-litre engine and CVT automatic gearbox work beautifully in tandem and you can expect respectable mpg figures. It also stops well.



VERDICT

The estate car bodywork is like the Primera in general – nothing dramatic but extremely competent as a load carrier. This Nissan's abilities are one of motoring's best-kept secrets.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Controls/displays	★★★★○
Handling/steering	★★★★○
Comfort	★★★○○
Space/practicality	★★★★○

VITAL STATISTICS (cm)

length x width (folded mirrors)	458x172
front	
- legroom	85-107
- headroom (with sunroof)	93-95
rear	
- typical legroom	99
- typical kneeroom	71
- headroom	97
- hiproom	128
load space (all seats in use)	
(litres/cu ft) [+56/2 in trough]	395/14
load length (seats up/folded)	98/171
load width	95-130
load sill height (inside/outside)	0/61
boot/load aperture height	37+10/80

THE PRIMERA ESTATE RANGE

type and size upper medium (mid-priced) estate car

trim levels S, SE, SE+, Sport, Sport+

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.8 litre/114bhp, 4/2.0/140; diesel: 4/2.0/90

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (continuously variable automatic with sequential mode – 2.0 petrol only)

notable features new 1.8 16v petrol engine for 2001, brake-assist with ABS standard, anti-hijack tailgate locking on the move, full climate control even on S version

LIKES ...

good air tiering from feet/face vents
keen price for lower-level models
alarm on most versions
a superior automatic option

and GRIPES

headrests complicate back seat folding
A/C works when you don't want it to
inaccurate speedo and trip computer
driver gets more heat than passenger
full-size steel spare with alloy wheels
alarmist low-level fuel warning