

FIRST
DRIVE

Proton Impian

Featured model: 1.6 Saloon



COULD THIS BE YOUR DREAM come true? Kuala Lumpur-based Proton hopes so by naming it Impian. Available initially only as a four-door saloon that's virtually the same length as a Vectra, the Malaysian newcomer faces stiff opposition in the highly competitive upper-medium sector.

It enters the Proton range above the Wira in both size and aspiration and, being created entirely in its home country, ends Proton's mainly-Mitsubishi policy. Well, almost...

The Impian is, in fact, powered by a 102bhp Mitsubishi 1.6-litre petrol engine that, while not particularly refined – it's boomy beyond 4000rpm, for instance – is brisk enough if you rev it to scamper the Imp to sixty in about 12sec, with the slick gearchange helping things along nicely. Proton reckons the car will average about 42mpg; if so, it will be class-leading in fuel economy.

Thanks to Lotus's input to its chassis development, the Impian steers with easy precision, handles competently and securely (with the aid of both traction control and anti-lock brakes) and, apart from some firm response to broken surfaces, rides rather well, too.

Short seats and height adjustment that tilts the driver's cushion forward as it rises, mar what is otherwise a satisfactory driving position. Taller drivers might prefer more upward travel to the adjustable steering wheel, though, to clear their knees. The switchgear is convenient (low heater controls excepted), the large speedometer and tachometer are clear, and all-round vision is pretty good, with

the rear head restraints partially recessed into the backrests. The door mirrors are on the small side, however.

Although cut-price plastics and fittings let the side down, even the entry-level Impian is remarkably well equipped, our "notable features" panel doesn't tell the whole story, either. Neither has Proton skimped on safety features.

Because passengers sit low in the back, there's not much thigh support for the tall. Otherwise, the seat (complete with centre armrest) is comfortable for shorter people, and there's good kneeroom. But when it comes to legroom, the Impian trails its competitors by up to 11cm; it turns out, after all, to be more lower-medium than upper-medium in its accommodation.

The boot is roomy, although rear wheelarch intrusion robs it of some space and there's a prominent sill to cope with. It's useful that the rear seatbacks can be folded forward to provide an extended load area, but it's nowhere near flat.

VERDICT

Proton's sound but uninspiring newcomer brings nothing new or innovative to the upper-medium market, where it struggles to keep up with the best in class. On the other hand, it's a very well-priced family saloon that's loaded with equipment and will impress loyal Proton fans, particularly if they're trading up from Wira, or those seeking value-for-money motoring.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Controls/displays	☆☆☆☆
Handling/steering	☆☆☆☆
Comfort	☆☆☆☆
Space/practicality	☆☆☆☆

THE IMPIAN RANGE

size and type upper-medium (budget priced) 4-door saloon

trim levels 1.6, 1.6X

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.6 litre/102bhp only (1.8 DOHC 16v due 2002); diesel: none

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (4-speed stepped automatic with torque converter optional)

notable features front and side airbags, alarm/immobiliser, 4-disc ABS brakes, traction control, air conditioning, alloy wheels, driver's seat height adjustment, foglamps, 60/40 split fold back seats, electric windows. X adds: electric folding mirrors, leather trim, adjustable lumbar support, CD player

VITAL STATISTICS (cm)

length x width (folded mirrors)	447x174
front - legroom	89-109
- headroom (no sunroof)	97-99
rear - typical legroom	97
- typical kneeroom	73
- headroom	95
load space (all seats in use) (litres/cu ft)	515/18.2
load length (seats up/folded)	93/180
load width	93-136
load sill height (inside/outside)	17/71
boot height	48

LIKES ...

indicator stalk now on the left
radio controls on steering wheel
rear headrests lower into seat back
plastic tread-plates to protect sills
seat padding at rear shin/ankle level
good feel to ABS-equipped brakes

and GRIPES

nasty adhesive/plastic smell to cabin
boot lid arms descend into load space
red clock/trip numerals hard to read
interior mirror vibrates
instrument cowl wobbly
temporary spare wheel