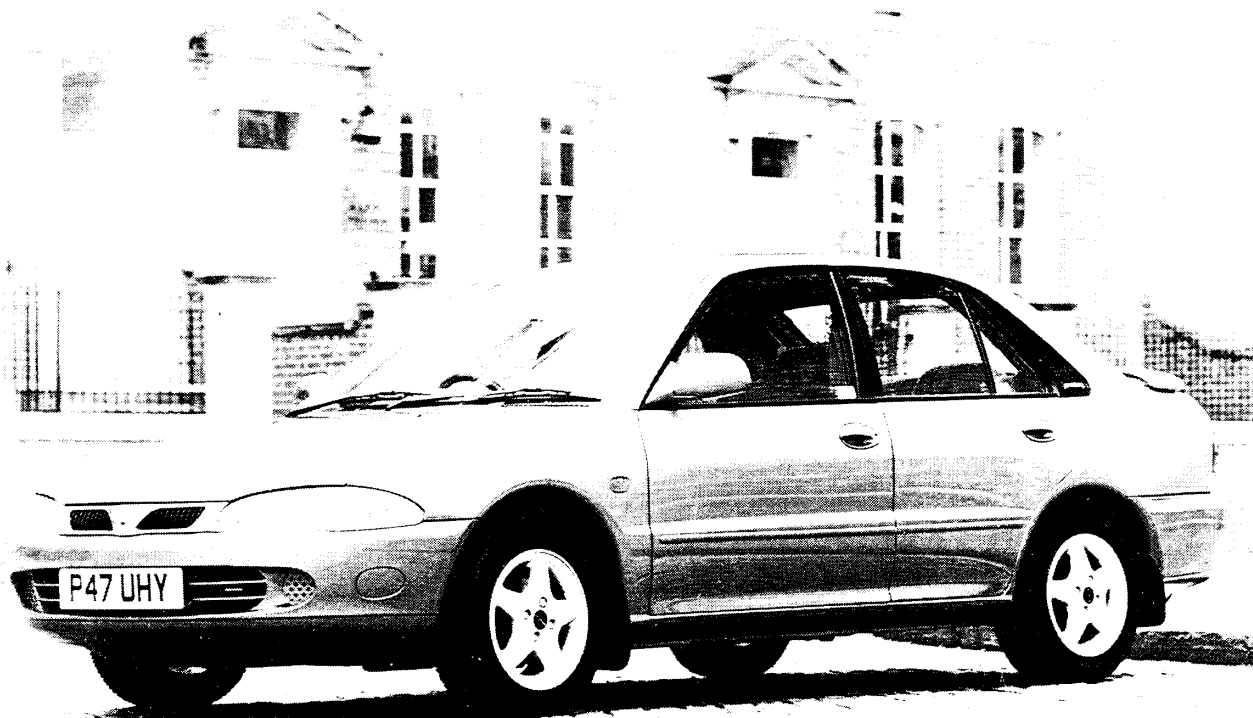


Proton Persona

Featuring 1.3LSi Compact and 2.0TDi 5-door



THE FIRST PROTONS WE SAW IN THE UK were really modified Mitsubishi Lancers; Daewoo is currently playing the same game with ex-GM models. The Persona has now finally elbowed the original MPi models aside and is much more home-grown in Malaysia, although Mitsubishi components can still be found, especially underbonnet.

What Proton has done to cater for the cheaper end of the market (where it originally won a lot of UK sales), is to complement the no longer cheap standard four- and five-door versions with a shortened three-door hatch. This "Compact" 1.3 currently represents Proton's basement bargain – although it's still more expensive than a Daewoo Nexia or a Skoda Felicia. It's surprisingly well equipped and nicely trimmed inside, however – the use of soft-feel plastic and smart, durable fabrics represent a big improvement for Proton, making a Kia Mentor look unconvincing by comparison.

Move up £3500 to the other test car – a five door with intermediate trim – and the equipment looks even more generous. This is better for families, as well; the longer wheelbase and easier back seat access, with more legroom once you're in, enables the Persona to take four adults seriously.

Both models have a reasonably comfortable driving position, however, with both seat and wheel height adjusters even on the cheapest version. Spinal support is sufficient for most and the major controls include power steering, too. This requires more effort than the old MPi's fingerlight approach, almost to the extent of feeling ponderous out on the open road at times. Go for it with a will, though, and the underlying cornering response proves alert and willing to be hustled, although some torque-steer deviation of line reveals itself in the diesel.

It's the over-active ride in response to secondary roads that lets the suspension down, undermining these Personas' role as relaxing transport. There's not much to choose between the Compact and the five door – our diesel's squatter tyres meant good grip, but as much agitation as we experienced with the shorter-wheelbase Compact.

The brakes tend to be overservoed, making serious stops without skidding too delicate an art – although the best stop is powerful enough and well balanced if you can attain it. Fade isn't a big problem, either.

Petrol or diesel – which to choose? Well, on the basis of this two-car test, the latest turbo-diesel fails to deliver the expected economy advantage, but goes like a dingbat if you press the loud pedal in fourth; indeed,

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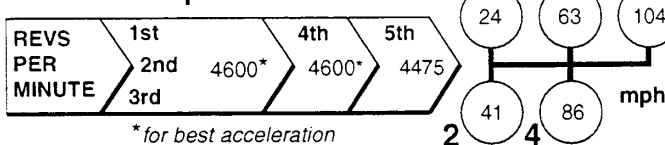
PERFORMANCE – 2.0TDi 5-door

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.1	5.1	8.8	13.9
IN 5TH GEAR		5.8	10.7	15.7	21.5
IN 4TH GEAR		3.8	7.7	11.7	16.6

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		13.3/8.7		9.9/7.9	
			10.7/7.7		10.8/8.9

Maximum speeds



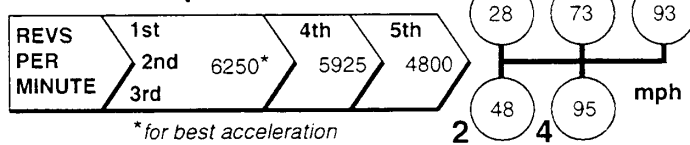
PERFORMANCE – 1.3LSi COMPACT

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.2	5.3	9.2	14.7
IN 5TH GEAR		7.0	14.3	21.7	32.1
IN 4TH GEAR		5.2	10.3	16.3	23.2

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		14.2/10.3		14.7/11.1	
			14.3/10.3		17.8/12.9

Maximum speeds



FUEL CONSUMPTION – 2.0TDi 5-door

Fuel grade for tests:	diesel
Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	34
Short journeys in the suburbs	37½
Motorway – 70mph cruising	37
Brisk driving, mixed roads	42
Gentle driving, rural roads	49½
Typical mpg overall	41
Realistic tank range*	42 litres/380 miles
*based on fuel gauge, warning lamp and filling station experience	

FUEL CONSUMPTION – 1.3LSi COMPACT

Fuel grade for tests:	unleaded Premium, 95 octane
Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	30½
Short journeys in the suburbs	33½
Motorway – 70mph cruising	38½
Brisk driving, mixed roads	42
Gentle driving, rural roads	50
Typical mpg overall	40½
Realistic tank range*	42 litres/375 miles
*based on fuel gauge, warning lamp and filling station experience	

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES – 5-DOOR

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

Seatbelts

front ●●●○○ rear ●●○○○

Head restraints

front ●●●○○ rear [X]

Interior

safety padding ●●●○○

driver's airbag? [✓]

other airbags? [X]

side impact protection ●●○○○

Fuel anti-spillage

●●●●○

Door locking

central locking? [✓]

remote control? [X]

auto window closure? [X]

deadlocks? [X]

Luggage

secure from interior/hidden

from view ●○○○○

Alarm

engine immobilised? [X]

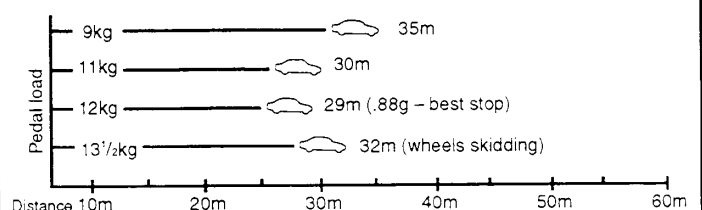
[✓] standard on test car [○] factory fitted option [X] not available

BRAKES – 1.3LSi COMPACT

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)

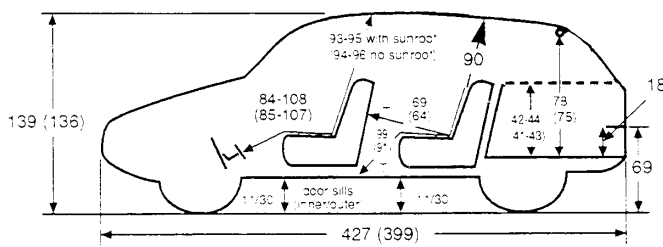


Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:
9kg at start of test, 13½kg at end of test. (Ideal brakes show no change)

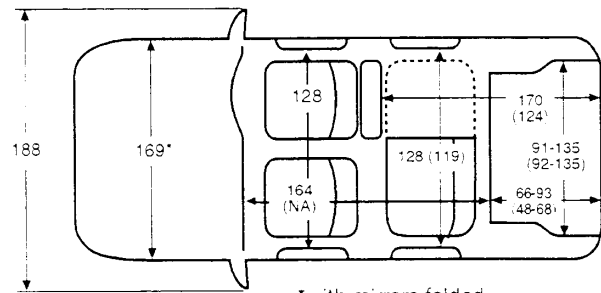
MEASUREMENTS – 5-DOOR

Centimetres

(Compact in brackets, where different)



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

^awith mirrors folded

FOR THE TECHNICAL

2.0TD- 5-door

ENGINE

Type	transverse four cylinder with iron block and alloy head; five main bearings
Size	82.7 x 93.0mm = 1998cc
Power	80bhp at 4500rpm
Torque	127 lb ft at 2500rpm
Valves	belt-driven single overhead camshaft, actuating two valves per cylinder
Fuel/ignition	indirect injection diesel with mechanical distributor type pump and turbocharger. Exhaust catalyser and 50-litre fuel tank with low-level warning lamp. Compression ignition with electrically heated cold-start glow plugs

TRANSMISSION

Type	five-speed manual, front-wheel drive
Mph per 1000rpm	23.2 in 5th; 18.7 in 4th
Rpm at 70mph	3010 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension	front: independent by MacPherson damper/struts with integral coil springs and an anti-roll bar. Rear: multi-link (trailing and transverse), concentric coil springs/dampers and an anti-roll bar
Steering	hydraulic, power-assisted rack and pinion with 2.8 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 10.7m between kerbs, with 15.0m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5½in alloy with 185/60R14H tyres
(Goodyear Eagle GA on test car)

Brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear with engine-driven servo pump.
No ABS

1.3LSi COMPACT differences

71.0 x 82.0mm = 1299cc
74bhp at 6000rpm
80 lb ft at 3000rpm
three valves per cylinder
electronic multi-point petrol
injection with integrated spark
timing via coil and distributor

19.3 in 5th; 16.0 in 4th
3620 in top gear

no rear anti-roll bar
shorter wheelbase, so turning
circles average 10.45m
between kerbs, with 14.55m
circle for one turn of the wheel
5in steel with 155/80R13T
(Bridgestone) tyres
solid discs front and vacuum
servo



only 2½sec separate the 30–70mph time through the gears, compared with doing it the lazy way. Of course, its relatively low gearing contributes to both the urgency and the profligacy – 37mpg at a 70mph motorway pace really is disappointing when you can do just as well popping to the station or shops. However, it's not noisy with it – most of the diesel rattle and vibes occur at lower engine revs and it gets into its stride beyond 45mph, to prove quieter than the 1.3 Compact thereafter (though not before).

This 1.3-litre petrol version acquits itself quite well, but our test car's normally light gearshift could balk when the oil was cold and its clutch felt too short and sudden.

Nearly every aspect of the five door's interior proved more convenient than the Compact's – both in general and in the details: height-adjustable front seatbelts, electric windows in place of heavy manual winders, a convenient roof lamp with its lens acting as a switch – all drew favourable comment. However, it lacks the Compact's 50/50 split hinged cushion and backrest, resorting to a much less convenient arrangement that's only redeeming feature is that the one-piece cushion can be removed entirely to take really long, slim items.

The heating doesn't feed air to rear footwells and the Compact's rear windows are fixed, but it's good at stratifying a cooler supply at face level up front. The heated rear window tell-tale is hard to see behind the wheel rim and over-the-shoulder vision isn't a strong point on the five door. Although its electric, fully-folding door mirrors work well, the interior mirror is stiff and awkward to dip.

Safety and security aren't significantly developed to surpass current standards: there are no seatbelt

pre-tensioners up front and there's little attention to whiplash prevention or ease of locating belt-ends in the rear. The central locking on upper range models is key operated and doesn't cover the tailgate or fuel filler – toggle switches on the driver's floor suffice for these. There's a driver's airbag and an engine immobiliser in the ignition key, however.

Reassurance of a different kind is offered by a three-year, 60,000-mile warranty that's extended to six years on some engine and transmission components, plus two years' free servicing; this makes Proton second only to Daewoo in this area of real-life costs.

VERDICT

The formula for the old MPI's success was keen pricing and a reliable, if unexciting ownership experience. The Persona's prices have risen closer to those of the European competition, but the underlying reliability has been augmented by a better, more contemporary finish.

The Compact's road manners aren't significantly better, though, and its "more looks – less space" approach to budget-priced motoring means that you'll have to be more athletic than the old MPI demanded.

The full-sized, more expensive four- and five-door versions overcome this handicap, and it has to be said that the latest Turbo-diesel feels a real goer, infusing more than a whiff of driver-appeal into the Proton approach. It's a pity it fails to deliver convincing economy and feels rather uncouth when driven gently, because if you stretch its legs, you'll discover that here is a Proton that's enjoyable to drive.

Likes . . . and gripes

Neat, clear displays . . . but mileage recorder 5 per cent "long"
 Good in-car entertainment . . . but tape cassette masks view of display
 Rheostat and beam trimmer on TDi . . . but sun visors floppy
 Illuminated ignition keyhole . . . but key must be removed if door open

HOW THE PERSONAS 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)
PROTON PERSONA 2.0TDi 5-door (d)	1998/80	3010	13.9	21.5/16.6	41	–	108	99/69	2.8/10.7	427
PROTON PERSONA 1.3LSi COMPACT	1299/74	3620	14.7	32.1/23.2	40½	29/12	107	91/64	2.8/10.45	399
Ford Escort 1.8TD 5-door (d)	1753/88	2800	12.6	24.6/15.3	48	27/34*	107	97/70	3.0/10.35	414
Vauxhall Astra 1.7TDS 5-door (d)	1686/82	2820	13.2	37.4/24.7	50	27/17	107	101/70	3.5/9.9	405
Rover 214i 3-door	1396/75	3520	13.6	29.3/19.8	39½	28/16*	107	94/65	3.4/10.4	397
Kia Mentor 1.6SLX †	1598/79	3220	12.0	28.2/20.0	36½	28/15	107	99/75	3.1/10.1	428
(d) diesel † current version 1.5/80bhp						*(with ABS)				