

AA**Car test**

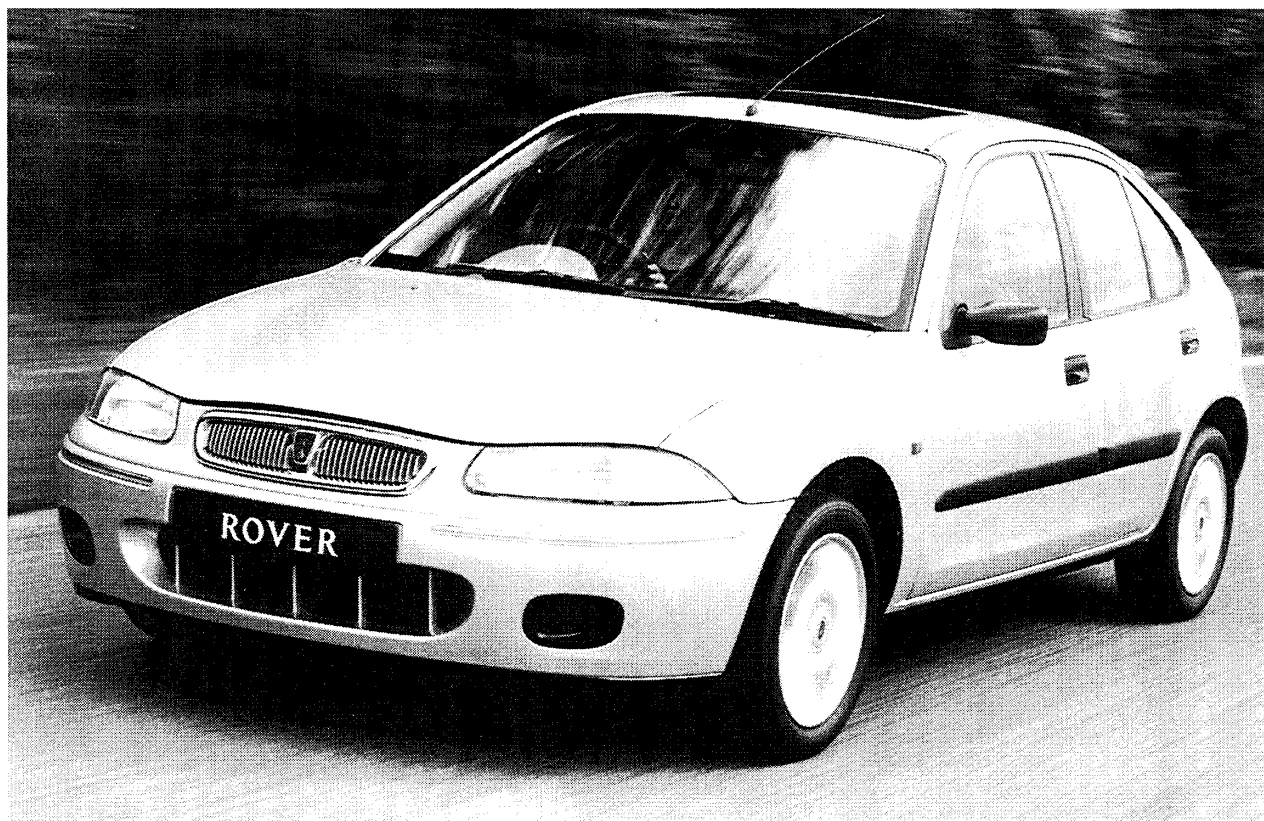
R9856A

See also R9633

September 1998

**TEST
EXTRA**

Rover 211i, 216Si Auto



What's different?

Even cheaper and lower-powered version of the 200-Series recently introduced, plus an expensive automatic with more power.

ROVER ISN'T HAVING AN EASY TIME at present and we suspect that it's over-ambitious pricing that's to blame rather than anything inherently deficient about the cars.

The now smallest and cheapest 200 range illustrates the point nicely. Since the demise of the Metro/100, Rover weighs in with the 60bhp 211i, tested here, at over £10,000 if you want five doors – and most will, because the three-door is very unwieldy in tighter parking slots.

Now this is ambitious pricing, because the features list is short and the options list expensive. There's no central locking, sunroof or driver's seat lumbar adjuster – they add £850 to the price. Yet to be fair, you do get rake adjustment for the power steering, a rear wiper that helpfully switches on by itself when the front wipers and reverse gear are both engaged,

not to mention bits of mock-wood veneer on the fascia and stainless steel cladding on the door sills.

For safety and security, too, the 211i acquits itself well, with a standard airbag for the driver, five inertia-reel seatbelts and a perimeter alarm, although the last can be more trouble than it's worth in the absence of central locking that can be controlled by the same handset.

The 211i – little wonder?

If the 211i continues to look expensive against the likes of a Punto 60SX, Micra Equation or Mazda 121, it does continue to exude a feeling of quality, both in the way it looks and in the way it goes. This 60bhp K-Series engine's performance is admittedly leisurely, but the 211i proves the smoothest over the bumps and the quietest in the whole range – despite very low gearing. Whether you want to amble at 30mph or something vaguely illegal, the 211i will do the job with supreme rattle-free refinement and there are times when you forget to change up because you can't hear the engine!

The fuel consumption suffers as a result of this short-striding gearing, however – especially in

PERFORMANCE – 211i**Acceleration** time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.8	6.2	10.9	17.4
IN 5TH GEAR		8.0	16.0	25.0	36.6
IN 4TH GEAR		5.5	11.2	17.7	25.3

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		16.0/11.1		17.0/12.2	
			16.0/11.2		20.6/14.1

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	
		6000*		6000*	5075	
			27	70	93	
			48	88		mph

*for best acceleration

PERFORMANCE – 216i Auto**Acceleration** time in seconds – in Drive or Low

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.2	4.4	6.9	10.3
20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
SPEED RANGES USING KICKDOWN		3.2		4.7	
			4.4		5.9

Maximum speeds

with accelerator fully depressed

REVS PER MINUTE	Low	Drive	
	5725	5725	
			111 mph
			111

FUEL CONSUMPTION – 211i

Type of use – air conditioning not fitted*	mpg
Urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	28
Suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	34
Motorway (70mph cruising)	36½
Cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	41
Rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	48½
Typical mpg overall	39½
Realistic tank range (not nominal tank capacity)	39 litres/340 miles

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

FUEL CONSUMPTION – 216i Auto

Type of use – air conditioning not fitted*	mpg
Urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	22½
Suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	28
Motorway (70mph cruising)	34½
Cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	36
Rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	38½
Typical mpg overall	34½
Realistic tank range (not nominal tank capacity)	39 litres/300 miles

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

motorway driving; overall, all the petrol powered 200s we've tested have delivered the same (indifferent) 40mpg result.

We didn't miss the driver's lumbar and seat height adjusters and found only the heavy, long-throw clutch marred an otherwise very satisfactory driving position. Of course, the clutch problem was eliminated on our other test car...

The two-pedal 216i

The Automatic uses the stepless, continuously variable type of transmission that Ford and Fiat (and more recently Honda and Nissan) have also offered for some years. This latest installation is even more successful than the Metro/100s, with a smoothness when pulling away that's now a match for a torque

converter. There's just the merest trace of unevenness when coming to rest or in a traffic crawl, but otherwise, the seamless way in which gearing is varied to suit conditions is admirable. A dab on the selector, down into "Low", to provide hill-descent engine braking, for example, would challenge the prowess of even the smoothest manual driver and everyone appreciates the "creep" that means the car stays put on a typical up-gradient.

The biggest remaining impediment to CVT's wider acceptance on small cars has to be in the mind set of the user. After a lifetime of assessing your rate of progress by the rising note of the engine, it's hard to accept the (technically superior) notion of gearing that varies to produce a steady engine speed rather than engine speed having to vary to suit a fixed gear.

Admittedly, there's also still a penalty in terms of fuel efficiency compared with a manual, but CVT's losses are about half those of a typical four-speed automatic with a torque converter, fitted to a smaller car with a smaller engine.

Just as important is that the car's maximum overtaking potential is available to any driver at any time, however inexperienced, simply by pressing hard on the accelerator. This transforms a relaxed, long-legged cruiser into power mode – you don't even have to select L to make the car give its best. Nevertheless, depressing the accelerator gently on, say, a hill climb doesn't produce this rise in the revs – a welcome feature to pacify critics who find CVTs fussy, with a mind of their own.

Incidentally, anyone who wants to know about these subtleties will find a tachometer invaluable – the 216 is fitted with a really accurate one (which is more than we can say about its speedometer).

VERDICT

Do these 200s possess special virtues that other small hatchbacks lack, to justify their premium prices? Yes, they do. In the case of the 216 Automatic, here's a transmission that simply

works better than all torque converter types can manage in smaller cars. As for the 211i, its little gem of an engine has now been matched by the Fiesta Zetec 1.25, in terms of sheer mechanical refinement, but nobody else's 60bhp version is this smooth and quiet. Pity then that it disappoints in terms of fuel economy.

It also has to be said in the 200's favour that while its rear passenger accommodation is bettered by some other small hatchbacks that occupy less kerb space, its luggage deck makes amends – and is nicely trimmed, too, with a split/fold provision even on this entry-level 211i.

If only the CVT Automatic were available at a price closer to that of our 211i, or the 211 incorporated a few of those "essential" extras as standard, we could see a rosy future for both. As things are, the 214 8v/75bhp version offers the best compromise for small hatchback buyers – there's no way the 200 can be viewed as an Astra/Golf rival, despite the pricing.

No, it's for buyers of smaller hatchbacks who need a larger-than-average luggage deck and image, and aren't too bothered by its larger-than-average external size or asking price.

Likes . . . and gripes

Radio interference now suppressed . . .	but cassette rewind confusing
Headlamps now adjustable inside car . . .	but still no dial rheostat
Engine immobiliser more user friendly . . .	but central locking sorely missed on 211i
Good rear wash/wipe facilities :	Auto's starter worryingly lethargic
Melodic horns :	Poor nudge-protection – just painted bumper shields

FOR THE TECHNICAL

	211i	216i Automatic
ENGINE		
Capacity	75 x 63mm = 1120cc	80 x 79mm = 1589cc
Power	60bhp at 5700rpm	111bhp at 6000rpm
Torque	66 lb ft at 3900rpm	107 lb ft at 3000rpm
Valves	single OHC – two valves per cylinder	same as 214Si (see report R9633)
TRANSMISSION		
Type	five-speed manual	continuously variable automatic with steel-element pusher belt and pulleys; hydraulic control
Mph per 1000rpm (cruising on level surface at steady speed)	18.3 in 5th 14.7 in 4th	25.0 in Drive

All other details similar to those shown in R9633