FAR FROM BEING KILLED OFF THE minute Rover’s extremely successful 214/216 hit the streets, the Maestro continues as a value-for-money, although admittedly less stylish, model in its own right.

It can’t survive the axe forever, of course, but in the meantime the range has been rationalised to offer a pair of 1.3s, a 1.6 (with optional automatic transmission), two MG versions – a 2.0i and a turbo – and, most recently, a pair of diesels.

These latest additions to the line-up are powered by the 2-litre Perkins direct injection oil-burner previously used in Maestro vans. Between them, however, Rover and Perkins have refined the installation for use in the car, not least by the use of two-stage injectors, designed to reduce the direct-injection diesel’s characteristic ‘death rattle’.

The Maestro diesel comes in two trim levels, Clubman D and DLX, with value-for-money price tags to match.

Although it lacks the central locking, electric windows and body-colour plastic bumpers provided on the DLX, the cheaper Clubman D nevertheless provides a five-speed gearbox, four-speaker stereo radio/cassette player, 60/40 split-fold back seats and a tilt and slide glass sunroof, all as standard. Additional items on the DLX include a rear centre armrest, map pockets in the front seatbacks, a load-space lamp and side rubbing

DIRECT INJECTION IN BRIEF
Instead of creating ignition in a pre-chamber which then spreads to the main combustion chamber, direct injection (as its name implies) squirts the fuel directly into a conventional combustion chamber within the piston crown. This arrangement promises significantly improved efficiency over the more common indirect injection, although the more abrupt bang that results gives direct injection diesels their characteristic underbonnet cackle. By starting a small fire first, then adding further fuel once the ‘bonfire’ is well ablaze, two-stage injectors should cut the cackle without sacrificing the intrinsic efficiency of direct injection.
strips. Disappointingly, though, power steering costs extra on both models.

Having experienced the impressive economy, if not terribly racy performance, of this power unit in turbocharged form on the Montego Turbo-diesel, we were keen to see how the normally aspirated Maestro compared.

**On the road**

We came to the Maestro straight from a Sierra Turbo-diesel and immediately thought that this engine felt quite refined. It feeds far less noise and vibration through to the cabin than does the singularly un-impressive Ford, although there are certainly quieter and smoother diesels to be had. Despite being well muted, the direct-injection rattle is, nevertheless, still quite apparent, yet once the car is into its stride on the open road, sedate cruising is really rather relaxed.

Performance isn’t one of the Maestro’s strengths, however, 62bhp doesn’t go very far in a relatively blunt, heavy car, and despite using significantly shorter gearing than the Montego, progress tends to be pretty sedate no matter how hard you drive. That said, the Maestro feels almost eager in the mid-range band, and provided you don’t mind taking a little longer to get there, its comparatively pedestrian performance isn’t too great a hardship in normal day to day motoring.

Unfortunately, a prolonged bout of wet and windy weather persisted throughout the test period – just what we needed when testing a low-powered diesel! So, although we’ve reluctantly included all the performance figures, these could undoubtedly be bettered on a calm, dry day. Even making some allowance for adverse conditions, the figures still underline the Maestro’s generally tardy performance.

Because the Maestro has to be driven fairly hard to make anything other than gentle progress, fuel consumption tends to suffer. Not surprisingly, then, it didn’t quite match the excellent 53mpg overall we obtained from the larger four-door Montego, but at almost 50mpg overall, it still makes a fair showing in the mpg stakes.

The petrol-powered Maestro has a compliant ride, even though its handling is far from sporty, and to its credit, the diesel version is little affected by the additional underbonnet weight. Although the ponderous, uncommunicative steering discourages spirited bend-swinging, the Maestro copes reasonably well, provided the driver doesn’t make excessive demands on it. That said, we rate the optional (£280 extra) power steering as highly desirable, if not absolutely essential, given the non-assisted set-up’s weighty, long-winded 4.3 turns between locks.

**VERDICT**

Now that Rover has the impressive 200/400 range on its books, one could be forgiven for asking why it soldiers on with the Maestro. The answer is that, despite its rather dated looks, there’s life in the old dog yet!

Racy GTis and ever-more sophisticated cars are fine for the well-heeled, many of whom never have to pick up the tab anyway, but there’s clearly a place in the market for keenly priced, no-nonsense family cars, especially economical ones, and that’s just where this Maestro comes in.

OK, so the Clubman can’t boast central locking, electric windows and the like, and power steering really ought to be part of the standard inventory. But there’s a lot of roomy, comfortable and practical car for the money – £8000 doesn’t buy much nowadays – and similarly sized diesel rivals generally cost from £1200 to £1500 more than the Maestro. Modest parts prices and insurance costs are further incentives to the economy-minded buyer.

Our biggest reservation concerns the distinctly ‘when I’m good and ready’ performance; a meagre power output, lower gearing and the need for a firm right foot to make reasonable progress, undermine the potential rewards of direct injection. And, although it could hardly be described as wasteful of fuel, several of the Maestro’s rivals can not only muster similar economy, but also provide livelier performance, albeit with a dearer price tag.

Ultimately, it rather depends on who’s writing the cheque – if someone else is footing the bill, the Peugeot 309 takes a lot of beating, particularly in turbo-diesel form. If, on the other hand, the money is coming out of your own pocket and you’re not too bothered about having the very latest in automotive style parked on the driveway, the Maestro looks a tempting proposition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOW IT COMPARES</th>
<th>Engine</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>30-70mph</th>
<th>Fuel</th>
<th>Maximum lego -</th>
<th>Typical leg/</th>
<th>Steering turns/</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cap/power</td>
<td>speed</td>
<td>through gears</td>
<td>overall</td>
<td>gearfront</td>
<td>knee</td>
<td>circle (ft)</td>
<td>length (in)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rover Maestro Clubman D (Diesel)</td>
<td>199/62</td>
<td>21.2*</td>
<td>42.1/28.3*</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>97/48</td>
<td>40/2</td>
<td>4.3/34/157/2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiat Tipo 1.7 Diesel</td>
<td>1697/58</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>38.6/28.2</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>87/50</td>
<td>42/4</td>
<td>3.3/34/156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peugeot 309 1.9GLD (Diesel)</td>
<td>1905/65</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>27.2/21.2</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>93/35</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3.5/33/159/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vauxhall Astra 1.7L Diesel (?)</td>
<td>1699/75</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>43.4/29.3</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>92/40</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3.8/33/157/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VW Golf 1.6CL Umwelt (Diesel)</td>
<td>1588/60</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>33.8/25.7</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>95/55</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3.8/33/157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rover Maestro 1.3 Clubman (Petrol – 5-speed)</td>
<td>1275/69</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>44.6/25.9</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>97/37</td>
<td>40/2</td>
<td>3.9/34/157/2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(?) performance figures for 4-door Astra Belmont  
* see text
**PERFORMANCE**

**Acceleration**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time in seconds</th>
<th>STANDING START</th>
<th>THROUGH THE GEARS</th>
<th>IN 5TH GEAR</th>
<th>IN 4TH GEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-30mph</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-60mph</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/4 mile</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 mph</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23.7/14.5</td>
<td>19.0/12.3</td>
<td>23.1/16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES</td>
<td>19.0/12.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Maximum speeds**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REVS PER MINUTE</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>3870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* for best acceleration

**FUEL CONSUMPTION**

Fuel grade for tests: Diesel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normal range</th>
<th>mpg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hard driving, heavy traffic</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short journeys in the suburbs</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motorway – 70mph cruising</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisk driving, mixed roads</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentle driving – rural roads</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Typical mpg overall** 49 1/2

**SAFETY**

**Brakes**

- How pedal loads affect braking
- Handbrake only 31%
- Max gradient for handbrake NA

Braking efficiency shown as a percentage of gravity (ie 100% = 1.0g)

Ideally the braking curve should fall within the shaded zone of this graph. If it’s above, the brakes are too heavy; if it’s below, they are too light. When the curve becomes broken, the wheels are skidding.

**Fade test**

How hard use or water affects braking. (Ideal brakes show no change.)

**Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)**

- At start of test: 38
- After constant use: 41
- After severe use: 45

**Safety check list**

- True ‘feel’ of the road? X
- Brakes
  - Powerful? ✓
  - Sensible effort? ✓
  - Fade resistant? ✓
- Seatbelts
  - Front – effective? ✓
  - Convenient? ✓
  - Rear – effective? ✓
  - Convenient? ✓
- Head restraints
  - Front effective? ✓
  - Rear effective? ✓
- Interior
  - Thoroughly padded? ✓
- Fuel
  - Shielded filler? ✓
  - Protected tank? ✓

**MEASUREMENTS**

**Dimensions** (inches)

- 56 1/2
- 98 3/4
- 157 1/2
- 76 *

* mirrors don’t fold

**Inside** (inches)

- A Front headroom: 36
- B Front legroom (min-max): 32-40 1/2
- C Rear headroom: 35
- D Back seat width (between armrests): 51
- E Typical rear * legroom †: 39 1/4
- F Typical rear * kneeroom: 27 1/2
- G Load length: 30
- H Load floor width (min-max): 36-55
- J Load height: 18 1/2
- K Sill height (inner/outer): 5 23
- L Load length: 46 1/2
- M Load height (to tailgate hinge): 34 1/2

* ‘Typical’ represents the mean measurement behind the driver’s seat set at 39in legroom and the passenger’s seat set at 41in
TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE
Type and size front-mounted, transverse 4 in line; water-cooled. 84.5mm bore x 88.9mm stroke = 1994cc. Iron block and aluminium alloy head; 5 main bearings
Compression ratio 18.1:1
Valve gear single belt-driven overhead camshaft actuating 2 valves per cylinder via shim-adjusted bucket tappets
Fuel system direct injection diesel. Bosch EPVE mechanical distributor pump with CAV two-stage injectors, fed by mechanical lift pump from 50-litre (11-gallon) tank; low-level warning lamp
Ignition system compression ignition, with glow-plug pre-heating for cold starts
Maximum power (DIN-net) 62bhp at 4500rpm
Maximum torque (DIN-net) 90 lb ft at 2500rpm

Ratios: first 3.25, second 1.89, third 1.22, fourth 9.71, fifth 0.71 and reverse 3.00:1. Automatic transmission not available
Final drive 4.20:1 to front wheels
Mph per 1000rpm 23.0 in top, 18.1 in 4th
Rpm at 70mph 3040 in top gear

CHASSIS
Suspension front: independent, MacPherson damper/struts, coil springs, lower wishbones. Rear: torsion beam axle located by trailing arms; coil springs. Dampers: telescopic all round
Steering non-assisted rack and pinion (standard) with 4.3 turns between full locks (power steering optional). Turning circles average 34½ft between kerbs, with 69ft for one turn of the wheel
Wheels 5½x13 steel with 175/70R14 84T tyres (Goodyear GT 70 on test car)
Brakes 9.5in plain discs front, 8.0in drums rear with engine-driven vacuum servo pump

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