

Seat Arosa

Featuring 1.4 – manual and automatic



WHAT GOES ROUND, COMES AROUND again. Car makers have just “discovered” the merits of the truly small car – Renault Twingo, Ford Ka, Daihatsu Cuore and now this Seat Arosa, soon also to be seen as the VW Lupo.

But surely, we’ve been this way before – the original Polo occupied the same kerb or garage space 22 years ago, as did the Renault 5 and Fiat 127. Even more intriguing is that the recently defunct Rover Metro/100 offered remarkably similar internal as well as external dimensions to the new Arosa and possessed a gem of an engine, yet has just been declared obsolete!

So what’s so special about Arosa – apart from novelty value? Not much really, but this dock-tailed Ibiza does share its bigger stablemate’s able handling with light and precise steering and a ride that jostles when lightly laden, heaves a bit with a full load, but never jars. The 1.4-litre engine is the current Ibiza and Polo’s, but in this lighter body it acquits itself even more impressively, in terms of both acceleration and frugality – in the five-speed manual, at least.

The automatic alternative is especially tempting because it’s on offer at no extra cost – until you use it.

Its 20 per cent increase in fuel thirst didn’t totally surprise us – we’ve long since learned that this sort of ‘box, with its power-wasting torque converter, is bad news in a smaller car – CVTs do much better. However, apart from the vague and rather tetchy selector quadrant (which also demands that you press the brake pedal to get into gear), it bowls along and shifts obligingly at all times – except when it’s cold; in the first couple of upshifts, away from the garden gate, our test car snatch-changed violently, with a real thud. Unless you have special need of an auto, the manual would be our preferred choice.

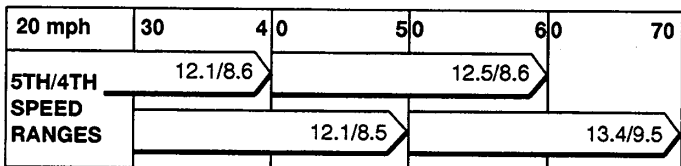
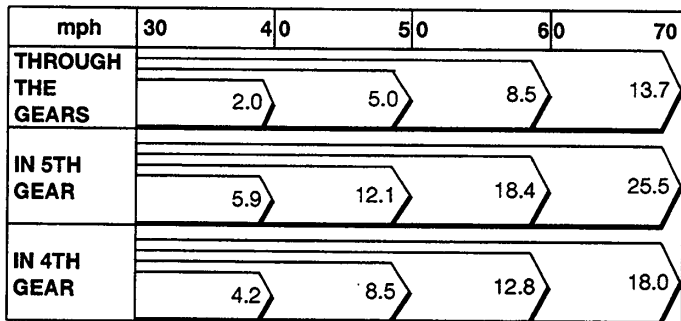
In most respects, the Arosa is surprisingly easy to get along with, for those who are less agile or on the large side. The sheer size of the doors can be a parking problem and the door sills sorely lack protection from scuffing but otherwise, it’s an easier car to enter and leave (even in the back) than you might expect. It also has a well shaped back seat, affording reasonable support and space – so long as there’s enough kneeroom.

Sensibly split 50/50, both rear cushions and backrests fold separately to give well trimmed, additional boot space, which will be needed if there’s

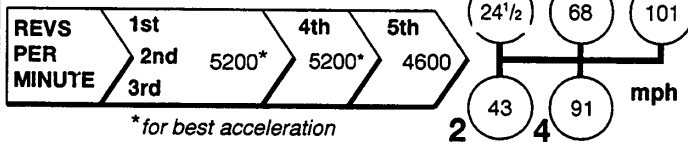
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PERFORMANCE – 1.4 manual

Acceleration time in seconds

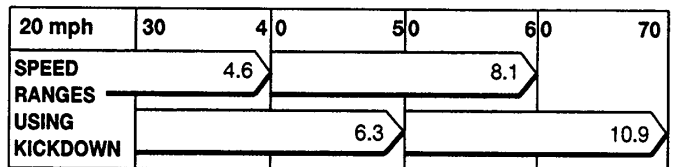
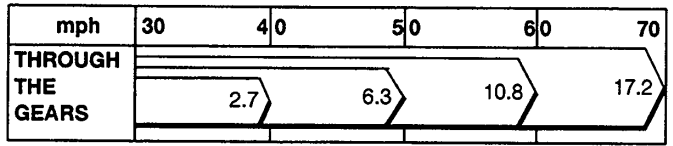


Maximum speeds



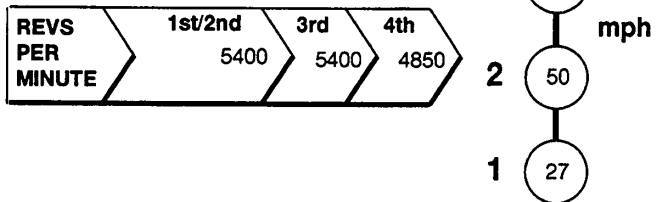
PERFORMANCE – 1.4 automatic

Acceleration time in seconds



Maximum speeds

using accelerator kickdown



FUEL CONSUMPTION – 1.4 manual

Type of use – air conditioning not fitted*	mpg
Urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	31
Suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	38 1/2
Motorway (70mph cruising)	42 1/2
Cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	46 1/2
Rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	54 1/2
Typical mpg overall	45
Realistic tank range (not nominal tank capacity)	28 litres/275 miles

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

FUEL CONSUMPTION – 1.4 automatic

Type of use – air conditioning off*	mpg
Urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	24
Suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	28 1/2
Motorway (70mph cruising)	36
Cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	37 1/2
Rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	42
Typical mpg overall	36
Realistic tank range (not nominal tank capacity)	28 litres/220 miles

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

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

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

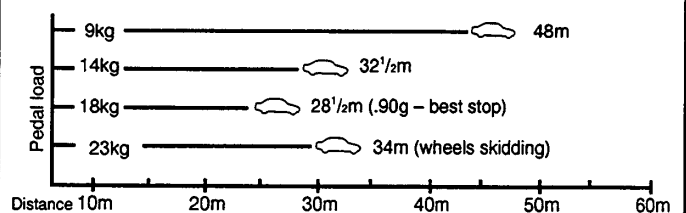
Seatbelts	front ●●●○○ rear ●●●○○	Door locking	●●●○○
Head restraints	front ●●●○○ rear ●●●○○	central locking?	○
Interior	safety padding ●●●○○	remote control?	×
driver's airbag?	○	auto window closure?	×
other airbags?	×	deadlocks?	○
side impact protection	●●●○○	Luggage	
Fuel anti-spillage	●●●○○	secure from interior/hidden from view	●●○○○
		Alarm	×
		engine immobilised?	✓

standard on test car
 factory fitted option
 not available

BRAKES

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: 13kg at start of test, 16kg at end of test. (Ideal brakes show no change)

much luggage, as the normal space behind the seats is restricted. Being able to carry three with an L-shaped flat cargo deck is a good compromise, however, and the front occupants have the upturned cushion to protect them, as well.

It's a good driving position, too – a rather erect, dining chair posture, a supportive seat, with a real air of quality in our test cars – but their equipment was enhanced by the inclusion of a "Comfort Pack". The height-adjustable front seats included in this £300 option, significantly enhance the driving position for some, because the wheel is non-adjustable; it's an expensive way to see out, however!

We didn't experience the anti-lock braking option and our brakes were rather over-servoed, requiring too much delicacy to obtain serious emergency stops without skidding; no complaints in more mundane conditions, however.

Both manual and automatic wafted around town and country lanes with hushed affability, but as 60 approaches (or 3000rpm on the rev counter) a sonorous engine growl begins to intrude; it's a nuisance by 70mph, insufferable by 80. The automatic's fluid coupling dampens the noise a bit, but its lower geared, shorter stride counteracts any benefit and there's some driveline vibration around 40mph, as well, as you gain speed. In heavier traffic or when parking, the boxy shape greatly assists manoeuvrability and the power steering's good lock plus a superb over-the-shoulder view, make parking so much easier.

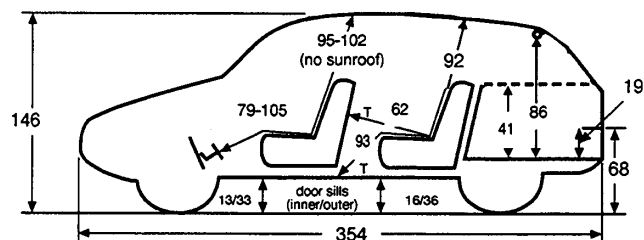
We approve of the attention to detail in matters of injury prevention – no sharp edges under the facia and the provision of four head restraints, reinforcement in the front seatbacks to spread the load, and a driver's airbag on the options list. The rear belts don't get in the way when resecuring the rear seat latches, and although there's quite a lot of painted metal on view inside the Arosa, it's free from projections.

Heating serves front occupants reasonably when required, but infuriating draughts emerge at the front footwells when you set the direction control to "screen" or "face level". These four facia vents do have their own output controls – a plus point – but, like most VW group products, they tend to deliver warmer air than you wish for, with the heater on. If you want a recirculation mode, you'll have to have air conditioning – it's not provided otherwise.

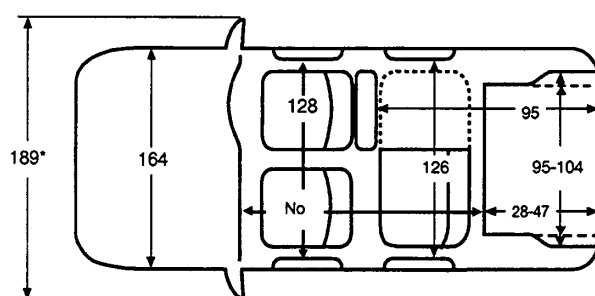
Door locking arrangements can be upgraded (for £410) by opting for the "Electron Pack" – you get all three doors lockable from either front keyhole, with deadlocks, as well, plus front electric windows. The tailgate can be locked or unlocked independently, if required. It's effective but expensive on a three-door car.

MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres Three-door hatchback



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



*170 with mirrors folded

FOR THE TECHNICAL

ENGINE

Type transverse four in line with iron block and alloy head; five main bearings

Size 76.5 x 75.6mm = 1390cc

Power 60bhp at 4700rpm

Torque 85 lb ft at 2800rpm

Valves belt-driven, single overhead camshaft, actuating two valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel/ignition electronic multi-point petrol injection integrated with spark timing via coil and distributor. Three-way catalyser and 34-litre tank, with low-level warning lamp

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual or four-speed automatic (epicyclic with torque converter); front-wheel drive

Mph per 1000rpm

Manual: 22.0 in 5th; 17.5 in 4th
Auto: 19.8 in 4th; 14.4 in 3rd

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent damper/struts with coil springs and lower wishbones and an anti-roll bar. Rear: torsion beam (dead) axle with trailing arms and coil springs. Telescopic dampers all round

Steering rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance; 2.9 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 10.1m between kerbs, with 14.35m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5½J steel with 175/65 R13T Michelin Energy tyres on both test cars (4½J with 155/70 R13T standard on Manual). "Space saver" temporary spare wheel

Brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear with vacuum servo. Optional electronic anti-lock control not fitted to test cars

VERDICT

Pity the automatic Arosa suffers such a penalty in terms of mph and mpg – small automatics make a lot of sense, whether the owner has special needs or merely wants an effortless town runaround – and this one is offered for free! In manual guise, the Arosa pulls ahead of Ford's Ka in acceleration and isn't so thirsty, either – unless you do without the Ford's power steering.

When the bumps and bends come along together, or when you want to drive on dual carriageways, Ka (especially with higher gearing) proves to be much more relaxed than this small

Seat. However, the Arosa's back seat is a better place to be and this car is certainly a much better shape to manoeuvre in tight spaces. Its studied, understated styling versus Ka's whacky, "love me or hate me" looks, is another stark contrast, which we're happy to leave to you.

In general, we recommend that you choose between the cheapest Ka (they're all 1.3 litre) and the Arosa 1.4, but without the options. Pay more for either and you're drifting into territory where they both come up against more serious competition, including the Fiesta and Ibiza – both excellent cars.

Likes . . . and gripes

Handy interior headlamp beam trimmer . . .	but confusingly close to facia rheostat
Ideal front wiper arcs . . .	but rear wiper blade doesn't cope with curve of glass
Sensible "tilting lens" roof lamp . . .	but no boot lamp
Footrest beside clutch . . .	but one's toecap can catch facia underside when declutching
Radio performs well on FM . . .	but terrible interference on AM
. . . heated rear window warning lamp masked by wheel	and has no timer

HOW THE AROSA 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)
SEAT AROSA 1.4	1390/60	3180	13.7	25.5/18.0	45	28 ¹ / ₂ /18	105	93/62	2.9/10.1(p)	354
Ford Ka (manual steering)	1299/60	3040	16.1	38.0/25.0	47	28/22	105	92/65	4.2/9.9	362
Skoda Felicia 1.3 (5-door)	1289/68	3240	18.6	36.5/24.5	42 ¹ / ₂	29/18	105	97/71	3.7/10.5	386
Proton Persona 1.3 Compact	1299/74	3620	14.7	32.1/23.2	40 ¹ / ₂	29/12	107	91/65	2.8/10.5 (p)	399
Peugeot 106 1.1	1124/60	3790	14.1	29.6/20.8	46 ¹ / ₂	29/27	106	89/65	4.1/9.8	368
VW Polo 1.4L	1390/60	3180	14.5	29.9/20.4	42	28/23	107	95/66	3.8/10.1	372
Rover 114	1396/75	3520	11.9	23.6/17.5	42	28/26	104	93/62	3.7/9.8	357

(p) power-assisted

