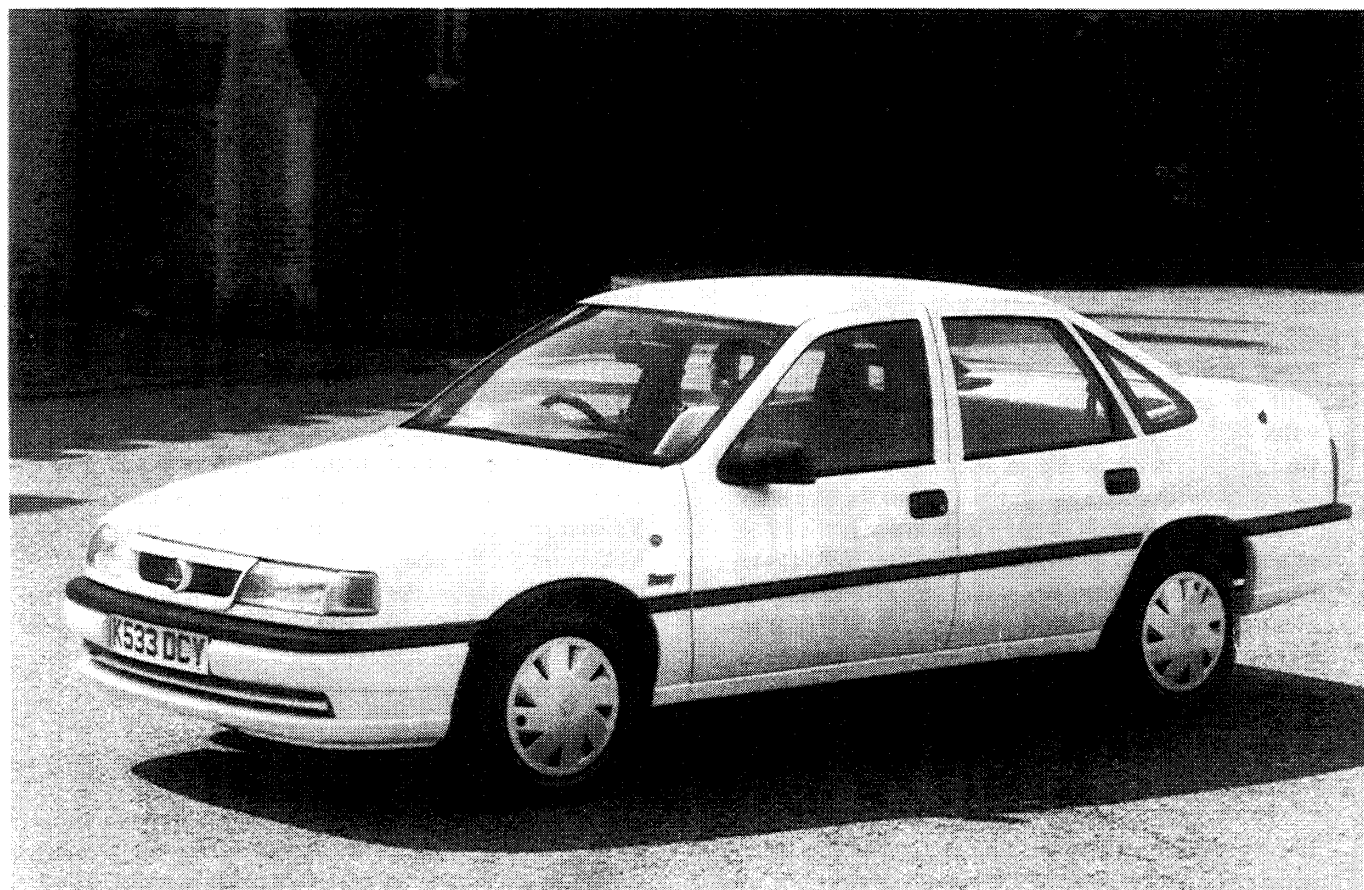


December 1993

Vauxhall Cavalier



NOW OVER FIVE YEARS OLD, THE Cavalier has recently been joined in the larger family car market by illustrious new rivals from Citroën, Toyota, Rover and especially arch-rival Ford, with its much-acclaimed Mondeo. Even so, the Cavalier is still selling well, especially in the fleet sector. Is it simply buyers' force of habit or does Vauxhall's venerable offering still possess superiorities in service, once you've got past the showroom novelty appeal of younger rivals?

We've sampled no less than five current versions to compile this report, from the parsimonious 1.6 E-Drive to the 170bhp 2.5-litre V6. Our main conclusion is that the Cavalier's greatest asset is what's under the bonnet. Vauxhall has been more successful than most in adapting its engines to handle the latest cleaner-exhaust laws and catalysts. The current range includes a slow but super-economical version (30–70mph in 15.7sec and over 43mpg typically), a superb V6 that does the same speed range in under 7sec yet still manages 32mpg, plus a 52mpg turbo-diesel that impresses with its lively acceleration and mechanical

smoothness. They are all easier to work on under the bonnet than the Mondeo, and Vauxhall's parts prices and labour times are more competitive than most.

This combination of the practical and the dynamically rewarding doesn't apply to the Cavalier's suspension and steering, which feel more outmoded nowadays. It's not bad, but you can buy smoother-riding and more adroit-handling family medium contenders these days. The interior space and seat comfort are not outstanding, either, although both the ride and the back seat space have been improved since the model's launch. A big, flat-floored luggage area is a Cavalier feature, as is the proper seat-folding facility on saloons as well as five-door versions.

Up front, the driving position and control layout are fine on GLS versions and above, but you miss the lumbar adjusters on the lower-range versions and the advent of the driver's airbag has (temporarily?) caused the loss of wheel height adjustment – the seat still goes up and down, though. The gears can be notchy when changing down and 1.8- and 2.0-litre versions sound and feel a bit harsher at tickover or when accelerating;

high gearing makes motorway cruising quiet and relaxed. Undoubtedly, it's the V6 that's the most impressive from a keener driver's standpoint. It will burble along obligingly at 25mph in fifth, as well as scorch up to 6500rpm, accompanied by a lovely cammy yowl – that's nearly 70mph in second, by the way.

The Cavalier isn't an easy car to reverse, but standard power steering keeps the parking effort low. The standard deadlock provision on the driver's door is reassuring, although there's no way of securing the boot area from the interior. On the safety front, door impact beams and the driver's airbag have recently been added, but belt pretensioners and shoulder height adjusters have always been standard and the interior is well padded, too, with no hard edges lurking in obscure areas. The brakes anti-lock option isn't as cheap as it used to be, although a tendency to too much servo-assistance makes it a desirable feature. Our V6's stopping power was conspicuously superior to that of lesser variants.

If you're looking for the best economy or the best value V6 among medium-sized contenders, the Cavalier scores decisively on both counts. Its accommodation is adequate, too, but as is often the case with Vauxhalls, the chassis doesn't match the proficiency or competitiveness of the rest of the car. Still, at the right price (and there are some attractive discounts available on many good-as-new examples), the Cavalier has a lot to offer buyers who are interested in what's under the bonnet.

AT THE WHEEL

– driver appeal?

The twin lumbar support adjusters make for more comfort on longer stints at the wheel and there's little to criticise about the displays and control layout. Although the gearchanges on lower powered versions are a trifle notchy and obstructive when changing down to second, they otherwise feel slicker than the V6's; the clutches are lighter, too. Traction control on the V6 is useful, but torque steer tugging can still be felt at times and the higher the power in your Cavalier, the more you're aware that the chassis is lagging behind the best of the competition. Even the higher geared steering of the V6 feels less deft than the 1.6 version's, though this slight unwieldiness isn't apparent when parking.

Indifferent over-the-shoulder vision is no worse than on many current rivals and the see-through head restraints and especially the interior dipping mirror are better than most. Interior headlamp beam setting is an asset, but we wish that the outside mirrors folded more readily.

The current mid-range 1.8- and 2.0-litre versions aren't quite as lively as their non-catalysed predecessors – the 2.0-litre/115bhp version is a second slower from 30 to 70mph and the 1.8 barely exceeds the performance of the original 1.6. However, everyone else has been struggling, too, and these two Cavaliers compare

favourably with current rivals, while the new V6 is something of a *tour de force*. Like all the best power units, it's as delightful going slowly as it is going quickly, with all the right muted sounds, as well, to delight the ear of the driver-enthusiast. It's supremely smooth and very quick when revved; its only fault is that there's not much acceleration below 3000rpm.

SPACE AND COMFORT

– popular with passengers?

There's been a general tightening up of damping that has improved the Cavalier's ride since its launch, but it still can't match the Mondeo, Xantia or Primera for all-round compliance over bumpy, uneven roads. The 1.6LS comes off best among this clutch of Cavaliers, although the best-riding one at present is probably the Turbo 4x4, with its independent rear suspension. It's a pity that the V6 can't share it.

The back seat is reasonably roomy, with nothing to choose between saloon and hatch for overall comfort. Both have split-fold cushions as well as backrests, that convert into a flat load platform when required, and there's a 9in load sill to negotiate from the back, but it's well protected from scuffing by plastic. The central locking on the LS obeys keyholes on both front doors and the boot lid, but the deadlocks respond only to the driver's door, which is inconvenient at times.

Lined oddments receptacles and displays for ambient temperature as well as time are nice details up front and we note with satisfaction that the former inconvenient cassette holders in the console have been deleted; they were always a nuisance.

The heater works well, with rear outlets (on the GLS upwards), a quiet fan and fresh air vents that deliver independently of heater direction settings. The vents turn warm, especially on the passenger's side, on higher heat settings, though. Full marks to the tilt and slide sunroof. Obviously wind tunnel tested, it's one of the least hair-ruffling and buffeting we've sampled. The good quality in-car-entertainment has four or six speakers (depending on trim level) plus RDS; it delivers too much bass bias for some tastes, however.

SAFE AND SOUND

– how reassuring?

The tables reveal the V6's superior stopping power: 77ft from 50mph is 10 per cent better than average, even for ABS-equipped cars. By comparison, the 2.0i LS we tested reveals a too-insistent servo which makes emergency stops without skidding tricky. Fade is never a problem, although the handbrake's efficiency isn't so clever with rear discs.

The well-padded interior has all the features that proclaim "safety", such as door beams, pretensioned and height adjustable seatbelts (even in the back) plus that big airbag for the driver. They amount to an impressive tally for a five-year old. The security of deadlocks is augmented on dearer versions only by an

Continued on page 4

alarm/immobiliser that senses interior disturbance – so it can be switched off when desirable. Remote control isn't a feature, however.

The fit and finish, even in places where they don't normally show, is impressive on current Cavaliers, and we reckon that rust will be less of a problem than on the earlier-shape Cavalier or the Sierra. Reliability is only average, but a good dealer back-up plus competitive parts prices lessen the longer-term liability. The warranty isn't particularly generous at 12 months for everything plus six years' idemnity against serious rust; however, our experience is that Vauxhall tends to be quite liberal in its interpretation of the former. Furthermore, the second year's warranty can be bought for around £200, currently.

Environmentalists will be pleased to know that both the E-Drive and the V6 already meet the more stringent 1996 emission requirements.

HOW MUCH

– to buy and to run?

If you compare the fuel economy of each of these Cavalier engines with its rivals, all except the 1.8

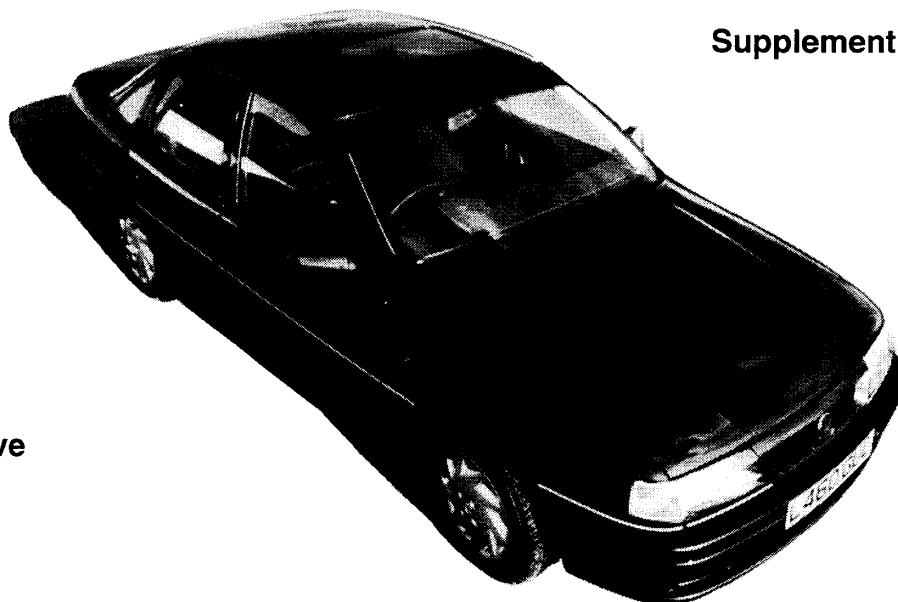
emerge with distinction. The E-Drive is unbeatable in this size and class of car, giving results that wouldn't discredit a supermini – but it's quite slow, of course. The 2.0i's 38mpg stacks up well against a Mondeo 1.8 (offering similar power) and easily surpasses Ford's 2.0-litre Zetec engine, which, like the Rover 600, will only just match the economy of the Cavalier 2.5 V6. No wonder higher-mileage operators buy them. Finally, the 1.7 Turbo-diesel emerges as second best in class; not quite as smooth running as a Peugeot/Citroën diesel, it's nevertheless cheaper to fuel and goes well in the overtaking stakes, too.

Those keen parts prices, Group 7 insurance on cheaper variants and reasonable depreciation on a three-year old in sound condition, make a lower-range Cavalier a sensible buy. But do consider a very late used example rather than a brand new one, because initial depreciation will be avoided that way with very little risk. Insurance on the V6, at Group 16, is something else!

Servicing is due every 9000 miles or 12 months (whichever comes first) and averages 1½ hours per visit on petrol versions – the diesel also requires an oil change at half-time.

HOW THEY COMPARE

All five-speed manual versions	1.6 E-Drive	1.8i LS	2.0i LS	2.5 V6	1.7 Turbo-diesel
Engine capacity (cc)	1598	1796	1998	2498	1686
power (bhp/rpm)	70/5000	90/5400	115/5200	170/6000	82/4400
torque (lb ft/rpm)	94/2800	107/3000	125/2600	167/4200	124/2400
Gearing 5th/4th (mph per 1000rpm)	25.7/20.5	24.4/19.5	26.5/21.0	23.8/20.6	25.9/20.7
Rpm at 70mph in top gear	2725	2875	2650	2950	2700
Maximum speed in 5th gear (mph)	103	111	121	140+	111
30–70mph through gears (sec)	15.7	12.3	10.0	6.7	14.7
30–70mph in 5th/4th (sec)	45.5/29.3	31.9/21.7	28.7/19.4	21.2/16.6	36.0/23.4
Fuel – typical mpg overall	43½	37	38	32	51½
short journey suburban (mpg)	32½	28½	30	25½	44½
motorway (mpg)	45½	40	41½	33	52
gentle touring (mpg)	50½	42	42	37	60½
realistic tank range (miles)	525	450	460	385	580
Suspension	independent by MacPherson damper/struts with coil springs at the front; torsion beam dead axle with coil springs and trailing arms at the rear, with anti-roll bars and telescopic dampers. Traction control on V6				
Steering	power-assisted rack and pinion on all, but gearing varies:				
turns from lock to lock	_____	3.4	_____	2.9	3.4
turning circle diameter (ft)	_____	34	_____	36	34
turning circle for one turn of wheel (ft)	_____	59	_____	52	59
Tyres	175/70R14T	175/70R14T	195/60R14H	195/60R15V	175/70R14T
Brakes (servo assisted) front	— 9.3in solid discs —		10.1in ventilated discs	11.2in ventilated discs	As 1.6/1.8
rear	— 7.9in drums —		7.9in drums	10.6in solid discs + ABS	As 1.6/1.8
Kerb weight – full of fuel (lb)	2390	2480	2625	2840	2750



Cavalier 1.6 E-Drive

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph	4.5	0-60mph	14.7	1/4 mile	20.0
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mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.6	5.8	10.2	15.7
IN 5TH GEAR		10.4	21.2	33.2	45.5
IN 4TH GEAR		7.1	14.3	21.4	29.3

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		22.6/14.3		22.8/14.3	
			21.2/14.3		24.3/15.0

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	1	2	3	4	5
		5500*		5100	4000	28	51	77	105	103
										mph

*for best acceleration

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade for tests: unleaded Premium, 95 octane

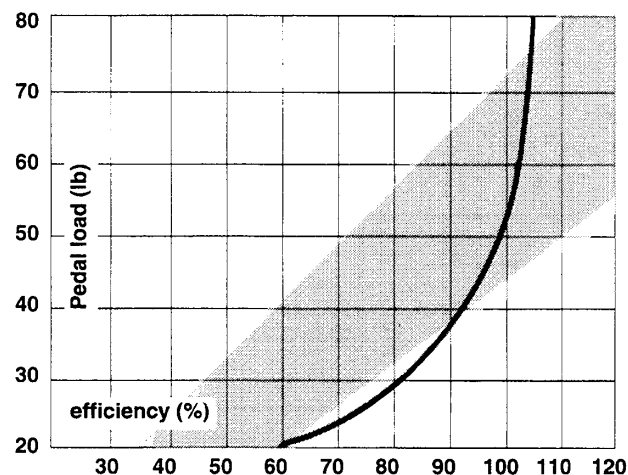
Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	35 1/2
Short journeys in the suburbs	32 1/2
Motorway – 70mph cruising	45 1/2
Brisk driving, mixed roads	43
Gentle driving, rural roads	50 1/2
Typical mpg overall	43 1/2

Realistic tank range* 55 litres/525 miles

*based on fuel gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience

SAFETY

Brakes (without ABS) How pedal loads affect braking



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

Ideally the braking curve should be a gentle sweep and lie within the shaded zone of this graph. If it's above, the brakes are too heavy; if it's below, they are too light – although this is more acceptable on cars with ABS. When the curve becomes broken, the wheels are skidding.

50-0mph best stop 99% / 84 1/2ft

Handbrake only 35%

Fade test

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

Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)

At start of test 26

After constant use 30

After severe use 55

Safety check list

Steering	true 'feel' of the road?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Brakes	powerful?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	sensible effort?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	fade resistant?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Seatbelts	front – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	rears – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Head restraints	front – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	rear – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Interior	thoroughly padded?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Fuel	shielded filler?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	protected tank?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



Cavalier 1.7TD GLS

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph	3.9	0-60mph	13.4	1/4 mile	19.3
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mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.4	5.5	9.5	14.7
IN 5TH GEAR		10.7	20.4	28.4	36.0
IN 4TH GEAR		7.1	12.5	17.7	23.4

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES	21.9/14.6		18.1/10.7		
		20.4/12.5		15.9/10.9	

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	1	3	5
		4700*		4840	4280	24	67	111
						44	100	

*for best acceleration

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade for tests: diesel

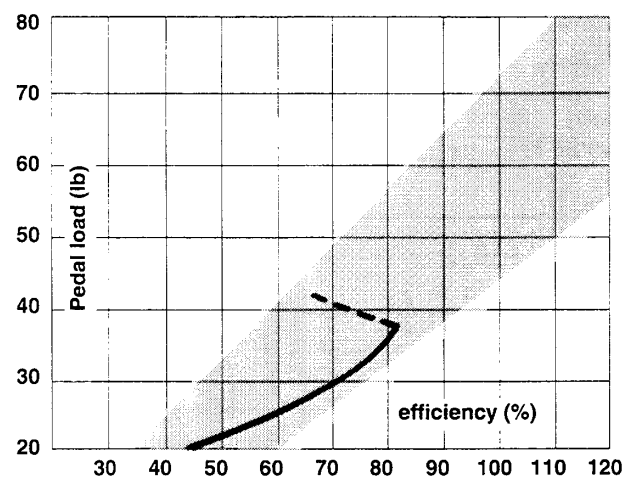
Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	40 1/2
Short journeys in the suburbs	44 1/2
Motorway – 70mph cruising	52
Brisk driving, mixed roads	51 1/2
Gentle driving, rural roads	60 1/2
Typical mpg overall	51 1/2

Realistic tank range* 51 litres/580 miles

*based on fuel gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience

SAFETY

Brakes (without ABS) How pedal loads affect braking



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

Ideally the braking curve should be a gentle sweep and lie within the shaded zone of this graph. If it's above, the brakes are too heavy; if it's below, they are too light – although this is more acceptable on cars with ABS. When the curve becomes broken, the wheels are skidding.

50-0mph best stop 84% / 99 1/2ft

Handbrake only 32%

Fade test

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

Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)

At start of test 34

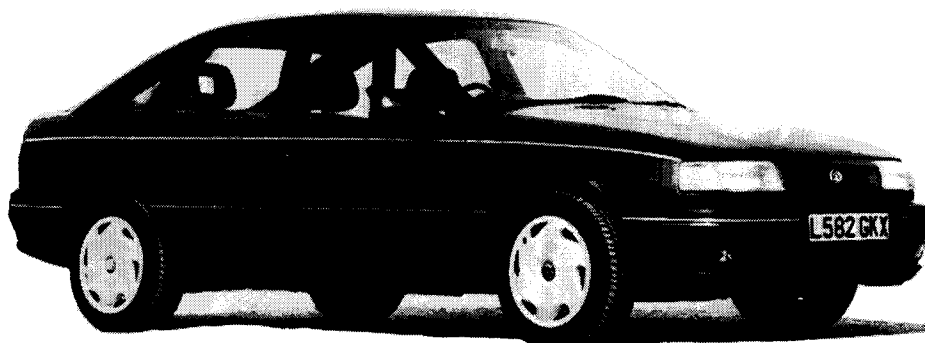
After constant use 34

After severe use 37

Safety check list

Steering	true 'feel' of the road?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Brakes	powerful?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	sensible effort?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	fade resistant?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Seatbelts	front – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	rears – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Head restraints	front – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	rear – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Interior	thoroughly padded?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Fuel	shielded filler?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	protected tank?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Cavalier 2.5 V6



PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph	3.2	0-60mph	7.8	1/4 mile	16.4
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mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		1.3	2.8	4.6	6.7
IN 5TH GEAR		5.1	10.1	15.3	21.2
IN 4TH GEAR		4.0	8.1	12.4	16.6

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		10.8/8.5		10.2/8.4	
			10.1/8.1		11.1/8.5

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	
		6500*		6500*	6000 approx	
						1
						3
						5
						35
						106
						140+
						2
						67
						4
						134
						mph

*for best acceleration

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade for tests: unleaded Premium, 95 octane

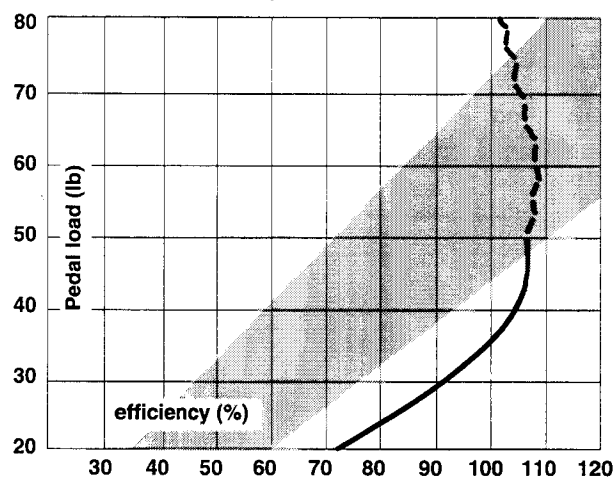
Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	25 1/2
Short journeys in the suburbs	25 1/2
Motorway – 70mph cruising	33
Brisk driving, mixed roads	32 1/2
Gentle driving, rural roads	37
Typical mpg overall	32

Realistic tank range* 55 litres/385 miles

*based on fuel gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience

SAFETY

Brakes (with ABS) How pedal loads affect braking



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

Ideally the braking curve should be a gentle sweep and lie within the shaded zone of this graph. If it's above, the brakes are too heavy; if it's below, they are too light – although this is more acceptable on cars with ABS. When the curve becomes broken, the ABS is operating.

50-0mph
best stop

109% / 77ft

Handbrake only

21%

Fade test

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

Pedal load needed for
75% stop (lb)

At start
of test

22

After
constant use

25

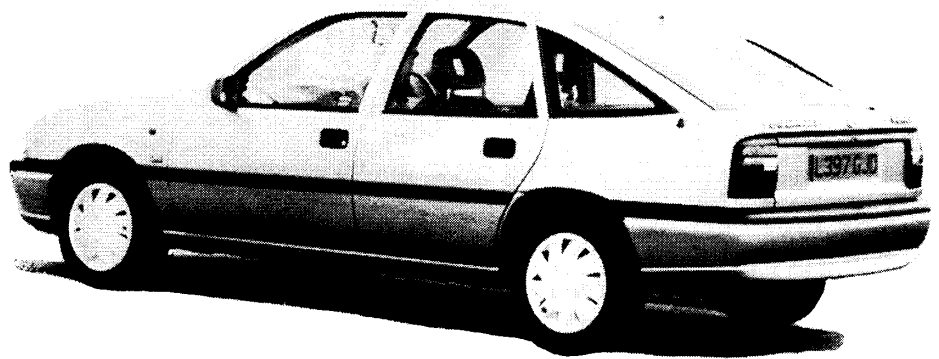
After
severe use

30

Safety check list

Steering	
true 'feel' of the road?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Brakes	
powerful?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
sensible effort?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
fade resistant?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Seatbelts	
front – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
rears – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Head restraints	
front – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
rear – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Interior	
thoroughly padded?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Fuel	
shielded filler?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
protected tank?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Cavalier 1.8i LS



PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph	0-60mph	1/4 mile
	3.7	12.0	18.8

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.2	4.6	8.3	12.3
IN 5TH GEAR		7.8	16.0	24.0	31.9
IN 4TH GEAR		5.7	11.0	16.1	21.7

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES	15.9/11.4		16.2/10.4		
		16.0/11.0		15.9/10.7	

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
	6000*	5850	4625			
	29	52	79	112	111	

*for best acceleration

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade for tests: unleaded Premium, 95 octane

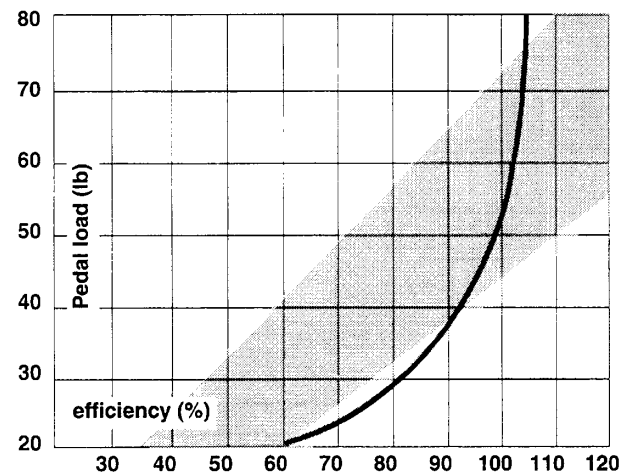
Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	31 1/2
Short journeys in the suburbs	28 1/2
Motorway – 70mph cruising	40
Brisk driving, mixed roads	36 1/2
Gentle driving, rural roads	42
Typical mpg overall	37

Realistic tank range* 55 litres/450 miles

*based on fuel gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience

SAFETY

Brakes (without ABS) How pedal loads affect braking



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

Ideally the braking curve should be a gentle sweep and lie within the shaded zone of this graph. If it's above, the brakes are too heavy; if it's below, they are too light – although this is more acceptable on cars with ABS. When the curve becomes broken, the wheels are skidding.

50-0mph
best stop

99% / 84 1/2ft

Handbrake only

35%

Fade test

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

Pedal load needed for
75% stop (lb)

At start
of test

26

After
constant use

30

After
severe use

55

Safety check list

Steering	true 'feel' of the road?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Brakes	powerful?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	sensible effort?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	fade resistant?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Seatbelts	front – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	rears – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Head restraints	front – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	rear – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Interior	thoroughly padded?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Fuel	shielded filler?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	protected tank?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>