

FIRST
DRIVE

Daewoo Nubira



NUBIRA MIGHT SOUND LIKE AN ANCIENT queen of the Nile or something you buy in a tube from Boots, but it's actually the second of Daewoo's important new models. The small Lanos is to Astra and Rover 200 what Nubira is to Vectra – or Neon, Lantra and Carisma, come to that.

Physically the South Korean newcomer fits between the Nexia and Espero, the two departing Daewoos that were rebodied versions of previous-generation Vauxhall Astras and Cavaliers. That policy has changed – the Nubira is virtually all new. Engineered in Britain, styled in Italy and built in Korea, it's available as either a four-door saloon or a five-door estate. What hasn't changed is Daewoo's keen pricing, generous customer benefits and an after-sales service that's second to none.

There are two equipment levels, SE and CDX, and a choice of either a 1.6 or a two-litre engine. These power units are, in fact, the only things that aren't new all through, because they're based on existing General Motors' engines that have been extensively reworked and revised.

The first is the 1.6 E-Tec unit, which also powers the Lanos SX. With twin cams and 16 valves it develops 105bhp and, says Daewoo, gives the car a 0–60mph time of 10.8sec and a top speed of 116mph. There's a good spread of torque, thanks to variable-

length induction tracts, but the system's solenoid valve operation may be the cause of a stutter, rather like a brief misfire, that we experienced on occasions.

It's rather unusual to meet a four-cylinder engine that's so remarkably tractable at low revs; you don't need to call on the gearchange much – slick and easy though it is – unless you're in a hurry. The engine is generally smooth running, as well, but becomes a bit growly and doesn't feel particularly refined when revved beyond 4000. To make matters worse, there's too much driveline shunt with on-off throttle movement; this is something we complained about on the previous models.

This also applies to some extent to the potent two-litre, which again features 16 valves and a twin-cam head. The so-called D-Tec unit develops a vigorous 132bhp and 136 lb ft of torque to give the CDX model a claimed top speed of 122mph and 0–60mph in a no-nonsense 8.8sec. It's a quiet and affable engine when driven moderately, but enjoy its snappy gearchange and spirited performance and it becomes more vocal – though much of the noise appears to emanate from the exhaust system rather than from under the bonnet.

Not surprisingly, compared with the Lanos, this bigger car has a bigger-car feel. The supple suspension not only gives an easy, untroubled ride on smooth surfaces, but also manages to soothe away the

most common sort of road faults rather well.

Handling on both the saloon and estate is nimble and surefooted, aided by nicely weighted power steering and 185/65 Bridgestone Potenza tyres. Anti-roll bars front and rear mean that there's not excessive lean through fast bends, but we noted some wavering in motorway crosswinds. The brake pedal has a reassuringly positive feel and works an all-disc system incorporating ABS as standard on both models.

The driving position has one or two anomalies: all-round vision is excellent, particularly in the estate, but whereas the cheaper Lanos has handwheel backrest adjustment, the Nubira employs the less desirable lever-and-notch system. And while lumbar support adjustment (CDX only) and adjustable cushion tilt are provided, there's no left footrest. Curate's eggish, then, but even so, we found it easy to get comfortable behind the height-adjustable wheel and well-placed pedals. Clear instruments are well sited in a shapely, soft-touch facia that looks and feels more upmarket than the Lanos's hard, plasticky dash.

Both versions of the Nubira are very well equipped, with items including air conditioning, twin airbags, those anti-lock brakes, an alarm and immobiliser and remote-control central locking. The SE lacks only the CDX's electric rear windows, foglamps and electrically adjustable and heated door mirrors, and has four speakers to the sound system, instead of six.

Back seat passengers are treated to excellent

kneeroom and foot space; headroom is good, too. More's the pity, though, that the seat itself lacks the Espero's exemplary comfort and support.

The high-silled boot is generous in size, and if you need even more space the 60/40 divided backrests fold down on to the fixed cushion. This creates a step in the load floor, but because there's a gaping hole in the rear bulkhead, there's plenty of width. You don't get a flat floor in the estate either, as the cushion is again a permanent fixture. This means that there's no protective barrier against shifting cargo. Watch your head on the tailgate, too – it's slow to rise out of scalping range.

VERDICT

The Nubira proves that Daewoo has come a long way in a short time and has learned a lot in the process. But while this new model is undoubtedly generously sized and well equipped, it's competent rather than trendsetting and proves unremarkable on the road. A little more fine tuning and refinement will work wonders.

There's no denying, however, that it's keen value for money, substantially undercutting its obvious rivals when all the items of equipment are taken into account. It also represents a reassuring family car buy, because what it lacks dynamically, it makes up for by that incomparable after-sales

BRIEF SPECIFICATION

	1.6	2.0
Body style	four-door saloon and estate	
Trim level	SE	CDX
Engine	4 cylinder, 1598cc, double OHC, 16 valves 105bhp at 5800rpm	4 cylinder, 1998cc, double OHC, 16 valves 132bhp at 5400rpm
Transmission	five-speed manual, front-wheel drive (four-speed automatic optional on 2.0) 20.5mph per 1000rpm	
Suspension – front	independent by MacPherson coil spring/damper struts and an anti-roll bar	
– rear	independent by coil spring damper struts, multi links and an anti-roll bar	
Steering	rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance	
Wheels	5.5J x 14 steel with 185/65R14 tyres	
Brakes	ventilated discs front, drums rear ABS standard	ventilated discs front, solid discs rear ABS standard
Height x width	saloon 447 x 170cm; estate 451 x 170cm	