



Fiat Punto 1.9JTD

Featuring ELX 5-door



What's different?

New direct-injection diesel power in latest Punto ELX

THE OLD PUNTO DIESEL WAS A 1.7-litre/72bhp turbocharged engine but without the benefits of direct-injection and common-rail, high-pressure fuelling. This basic design soldiers on, without a turbocharger but with a 1.9-litre swept volume; result : 60bhp and an "official combined" mpg consumption that's identical to the 1.2 petrol version of equivalent power. Its lower price seems to be its only attraction, compared with this 80bhp diesel newcomer – £1500 more acquires latest diesel DI technology, as well as the worthwhile extra features of the ELX trim, as described in our general report R9971.

But how does this new diesel stand up to the closer scrutiny of our full test treatment? For the same money, you can opt instead for the 16-valve petrol version with identical power output (down 5bhp compared with its

predecessor). In a previous Punto test, this 1.2 16v gave a 30-70mph time of 11.7sec and 41mpg overall, but the current Fiat brochure suggests that it's now half a second slower, although more frugal.

Subsequent AA research will reveal the truth about the current 1.2 16v; however, the car under test here didn't achieve the trendsetting mpg figures we were hoping for – but then, neither did the latest Peugeot 206 sampled recently, nor the Brava which uses a closely related engine (see our comparison table for actual results).

This Punto diesel has a very different way of going about things compared with the 1.2 16v. Even by diesel standards it's very high geared and its effortless stride is combined with remarkable mechanical hush on any main road or motorway. It's a different story first thing, from a cold start, when the classic "death rattle" is clear to any ear; however, unlike the 206 and VW's diesels, it remains vibration-free when asked to pull from low revs – right down to 1200rpm. This is an important asset because it makes the strong low-speed acceleration more useable in practice – around the lanes at 30mph in fourth and street corners taken at 20mph in third, for instance.

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PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

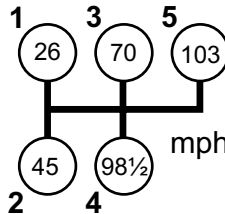
mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.1	5.3	9.0	14.2
IN 5TH GEAR		6.1	11.6	17.9	25.4
IN 4TH GEAR		3.7	7.8	12.2	17.1

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		15.2/8.2		11.9/8.5	
			11.6/7.8		13.8/9.3

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
		4400*		4400*	3425

* for best acceleration



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Type of use - air conditioning not fitted*	mpg
Urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	37
Suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	46
Motorway (70mph cruising)	47
Cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	52½
Rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	60
Typical mpg overall	51½
Realistic tank range (not nominal tank capacity)	45 litres/510 miles

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

FOR THE TECHNICAL

ENGINE

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

Size 82.0 x 90.4mm = 1910cc

Power 80bhp at 3000rpm

Torque 145 lb ft at 1500rpm

Valves belt-driven single overhead camshaft actuating two valves per cylinder

Fuel/ignition direct-injection diesel with electronically-controlled mechanical injection pump and high pressure, common-rail delivery; turbo charger and intercooler with exhaust catalyser. 49-litre tank with low-level warning light and digital range display

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual, front-wheel drive

Mph per 1000rpm 30.0 in 5th, 22.4 in 4th

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent damper struts with integral coil springs.

Rear: torsion beam (dead) axle with coil springs, twin trailing arms. Front anti-roll bar and telescopic dampers all round

Steering rack and pinion with "Dualdrive" two-level electric power assistance; 2.8 turns between full locks. Turning circles' diameter averages 10.85m between kerbs, with 14.4m for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 6J steel with 185/60R14H tyres (Michelin Energy on test car). Space-saver temporary spare.

Brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear with servo-pump assistance; ABS optional (not fitted to test car)

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

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

Seatbelts

front ●●●●○ rear ●●●●○

Door locking

central locking?

remote control?

auto window closure?

deadlocks?

Head restraints

front ●●●●○ rear ●●●●○

Interior

safety padding ●●●●○

driver's airbag?

other airbags? (3)

side impact protection ●●●●○

Luggage

secure from interior/hidden from view ●●●●○

Alarm

engine immobilised?

Fuel anti-spillage

●●●●○

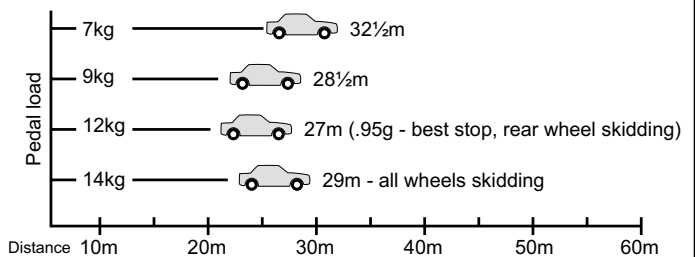
standard on test car factory fitted option not available

Euro NCAP crash test results -Front/side impact rating ◆◆◆◆
-Pedestrian test rating ◆◆◆◆

BRAKES

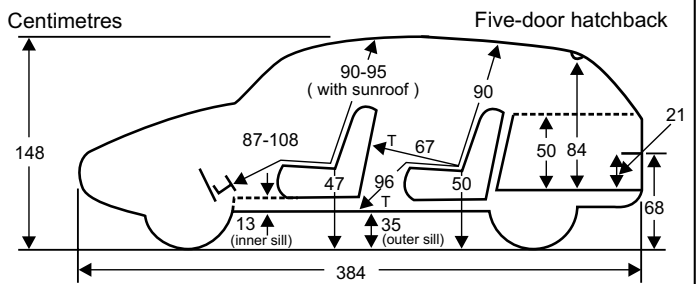
Pedal feel ●●●●○ Behaviour in an emergency ●●●●○ Handbrake ●●●●○

Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (without ABS option)
A good-to-average best stop is about 28m at 20-30kg pedal load

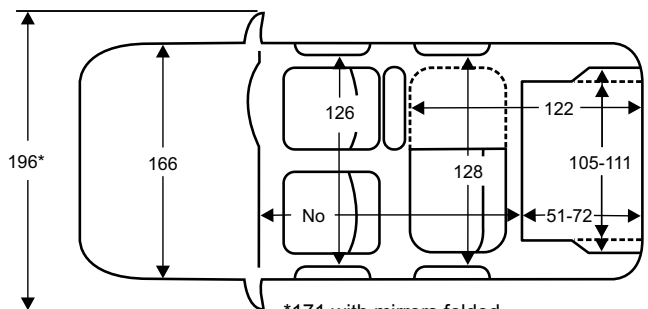


Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:
5½kg at start of test, 8½kg at end of test (Ideal brakes show no change)

MEASUREMENTS



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



*171 with mirrors folded

kerb weight (maker's figure) 1055kg

Ultimate acceleration through the gears sets no new records (the previous 85 ELX was 2½ sec quicker from 30 to 70mph), but this diesel is emphatically swifter in its fifth and fourth gear response, despite the tall gearing.

Our track tests revealed a couple of Punto shortcomings that a road-based demonstration drive is unlikely to reveal. Surprisingly, the clever two-level power-assistance, designed to ease parking effort, (and which could be a real boon to the disabled driver) is undermined by a turning circle diameter that's not as tight as before. Of more concern are the brakes that proved treacherous in more urgent arrests. The pedal lacks progression in both its longish travel and the foot pressure needed, but more worrying is the tendency to lock the rear wheels and pull to one side. Most of these tendencies would be overcome with the £350 ABS

option fitted, it's salutary to note.

On a more prosaic note, the heater's proneness to deliver more warmth to the front passenger than the driver suited our tester's man and wife team very well – but what about back home in Italy!

VERDICT

The previous Punto's flaws have not been entirely eliminated and there are one or two new ones, as well, as our "Likes and Gripes" column makes plain. However, this diesel is probably Fiat's best effort yet and deserves serious consideration because of its sheer driveability. We wonder how long it will be before Fiat marries it up to that new "Speedgear" automatic transmission – it could be a great combination.

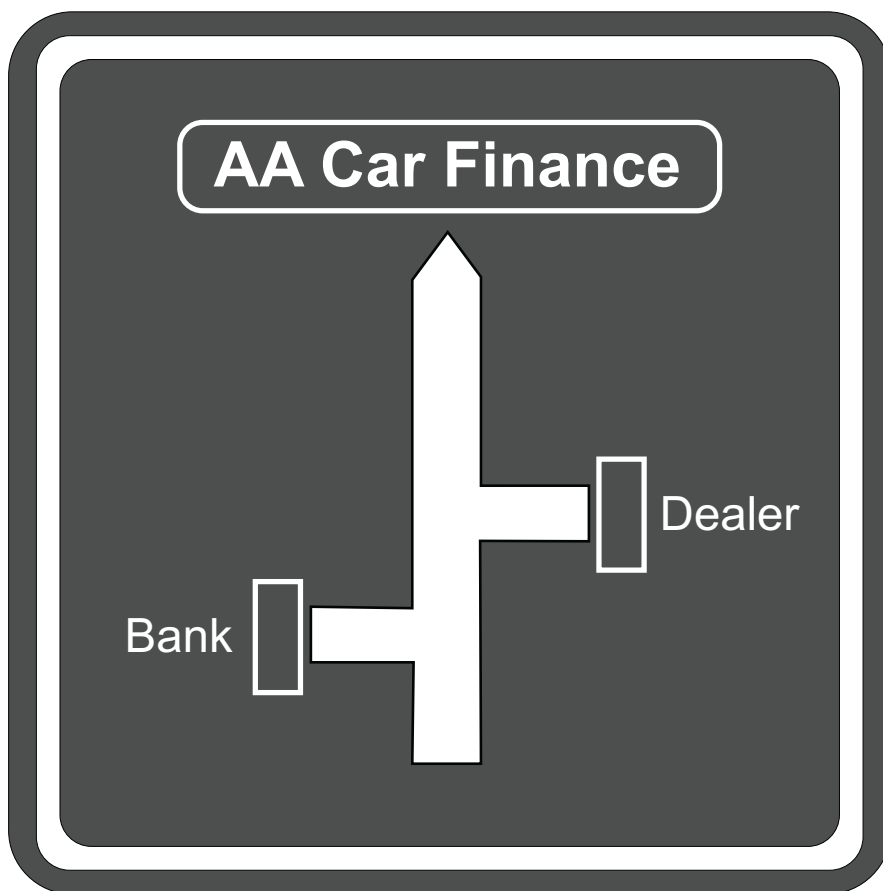
LIKES AND GRIPES

Supportive driver's seat with lumbar adjustment	...	but clutch too far, accelerator too close and left footrest deleted
Clear displays with minor control warning lights incorporated	...	but no rheostat and fog lamp can be left on
Lots of oddments stowage - at back and front	...	but none lined and facia plastic grain will easily get grubby
Clever delay between screen wash and wipe sequence	...	but no intermittent rear wipe and blind strip beside driver's pillar as well as obstructive rear quarters
ELX tilt electric-slide sunroof with sunshade	...	but no cooler air from centre facia vents with heater on or with demister screen vents in use
Both rear seat cushions and backrests have 60/40 split with no belt entanglements	...	but there's noticeably less leg and kneeroom than before
Clever "headlamps on after parking" lights stalk arrangement	...	but turn indicators silent and prone to stay on after the turn
Generous fuel tank size and range display	...	but difficult to fill fast - unless filler nozzle is held upside down

HOW THE PUNTO COMPARES	Engine cyl/cap/power (no/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/ (p) circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
FIAT PUNTO 1.9 JTD	4/1910/80	2330	14.2	25.4/17.1	51½	27/12	108	96/67	2.8/10.85	384
Peugeot 206 Dturbo	4/1997/90	2600	11.4	19.8/14.4	52½	26½/8	108	94/66	3.3/10.1	384
Seat Ibiza 1.9 TDi*	4/1896/90	2400	11.3	21.7/15.1	57	28/32	109	94/72	3.1/10.1	385
Vauxhall Astra 2.0 Di	4/1994/82	2750	12.8	22.1/15.9	51½	26/21	108	99/75	3.1/10.4	411
Fiat Brava JTD 105	4/1910/105	2500	11.9	25.6/16.3	48½	25/18†	102	96/73	3.1/10.7	419
Old Punto 1.7 TD	4/1698/72	3210	15.5	28.3/19.0	46½	27½/20	105	101/71	2.9/10.2	376
* 1998 model - Polo similar						† with ABS			(p) all power assisted	



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