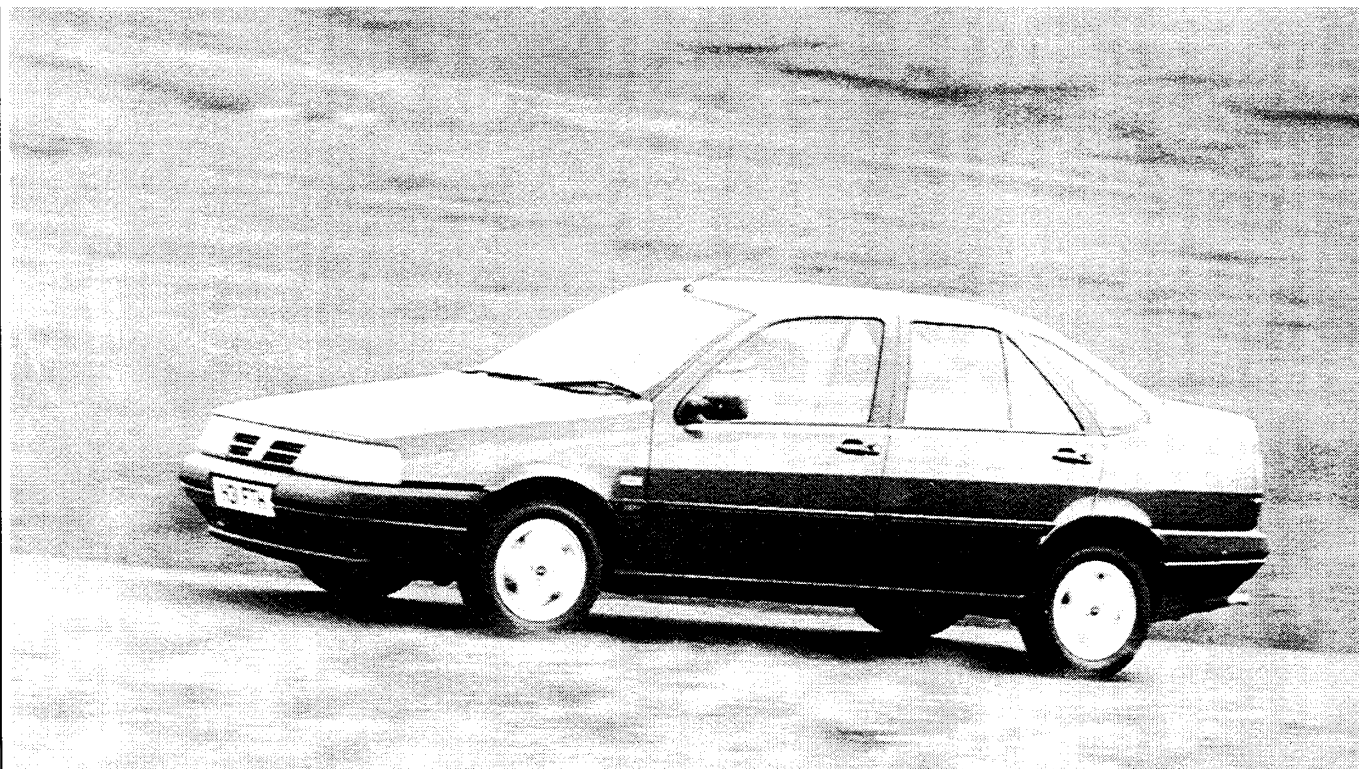


## Fiat Tempra 1.6SX



**T**HE TEMPRA PLUGS A VITAL GAP IN Fiat's line-up. It's the Cavalier/Sierra 'upper medium' segment (to use boring trade jargon) where half of all fleet sales are achieved – and up till now, the Regata was all that Fiat could muster. Based on the smaller but exceptionally space-efficient Tipo, the new Tempra is designed to steal sales from Ford and Vauxhall in Britain and is pivotal to its future success here.

The links with the Tipo are obvious, but great pains have been taken to improve the Tempra's styling, equipment and trim quality – this is apparent as soon as you examine it in the showroom. The Tipo is worthy but rather drab; this saloon's digital facia layout may still look insipid but otherwise, it has many details that enhance comfort and convenience. It also shares the Tipo's brilliant packaging, so that even against the stiffer competition in this bigger class of saloon, it emerges with praise for its roomy, comfortable accommodation.

The 1.6 offers 86bhp on paper, but although excellent aerodynamics confer a high top speed, out-and-out acceleration is a mite disappointing. Low overall gearing is used to help it along – a strategy that keeps acceleration in the gears quite responsive

and makes the car very flexible in slow traffic. However, it doesn't do much for mpg and at higher cruising speeds, after 60mph, the car can sound busy rather than relaxed. True, the noise subsides again if you drive even faster, but by then you're on the wrong side of 70mph.

This eager-beaver feel is quite well suited to the car's chassis, which confers more than a hint of the sporting in the way that it steers and handles corners and bends.

Standard power steering gives the car alert response, yet the distinct weight of the steering means that reasonable feel and control are retained. The Tempra's steadiness of line in blustery winds or around bumpy bends is exemplary. Yet it rides well, too, feeling more composed over the bumpy bits than a Passat or a Cavalier; always in touch, but not too agitated.

The brakes prove less reassuring, though, especially in arduous use.

The Tempra's town manners are good, with pleasant controls and jerk-free progress right from a cold start, thanks partly to a sensible manual choke; parking in reverse is made tricky by poor rearward vision, though. There's lots of driving seat adjustment, but the very tall might still have

# Living with the Tempra . . .

problems. The rear occupants are particularly well considered and families of the buyer/driver should feel well-pleased with their lot.

Fiat is anxious to demonstrate its cars' reliability and rust-resistance these days, with a better warranty and a galvanised body to make the point. Yet we still had faults and failures in our test car.

With an attractive and useful list of standard features at a competitive price, the Tempra 1.6SX (or the 1.6S) has a lot to offer the family or fleet motorist. With more comfort and attention to detail inside than the Tipo, the Tempra manages to assert its own identity. It's also an enjoyable (though a sometimes fussy) car to drive; even if its performance and economy prove unremarkable. It's a pity, therefore, that we are left with lurking doubts about its reliability.

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## At the Wheel

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### Driving position

You tend to sit on rather than in the front seats, but otherwise, it's a reasonable driving position – if you feel comfortable with almost level pedals. The headroom and legroom could be problematic for the tall, but we like the SX's wide range of adjusters, including a friction grip, stepless backrest lever and a clever two-way fore-and-aft adjustment Mercedes Benz-style. There's even a folding armrest between the front seats.

### Controls and displays

The SX's digital instruments don't really convince us and ours had a defective tacho, as well. The speedo is quite accurate, though. Analogue displays are on offer, in fact, in the cheaper versions. The stalks work with less than BMW precision and the various wiper permutations are confusing. Having all the tell-tales in the main displays – rather than within

switches – is a good point. The gears work well and the clutch is medium weight with shunt-free progress in slow traffic, but there's a tendency to scabble a wheel too easily in rapid T-junction take-offs.

### Vision

Full marks for the SX's rear sunblinds and deep front visors: the wipers are a constant irritation, however, with their 'fast intermittent' action, accompanied by a judder that is endemic in their design. The back window shelf is high, leaving the rear extremities to guesswork. The door mirrors fold flush, but the driver's waved in the breeze at 75mph – it lacks the rest of the car's stability in blustery conditions. Finger adjusters for headlamp beams can be set in only two positions – the desired midway position is spoilt when one shuts the bonnet.

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## Space & Comfort

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### Seating

The Tipo is about the roomiest hatchback in the lower-medium segment, so it's no stretch of the imagination to class the larger Tempra as a true Cavalier/Sierra-sized upper medium alternative. It has a really comfortable back seat, although, again, there is less headroom than in the Tipo. There's excellent width, however, and a generously proportioned seat that folds forward as well (in 60/40 style on the SX). What's more, there's still a centre armrest and even the underside of the cushion is trimmed. Good interior lights, with delayed-action courtesy switches, are other SX assets in the back. It's also easy to get into the car and slide across the back seat.

### Luggage and oddments stowage

The roomy, flat-floored boot is well-trimmed, but space is gained by relegating the spare to being a 'space-saver' for emergency use only. The seat folds just like an estate car's, so protecting front occupants from sliding cargo – and

lashing eyes are provided, too. The seatbelts don't seriously complicate the seat-folding operation either, as they do on too many cars these days. Up front, oddments spaces are generous, but many are of unlined hard plastic, and the glovebox is the wrong shape to take the documents' wallet.

### Heating and ventilating

The Tempra gives especially thoughtful attention to rear passengers, with the SX featuring face-level and footwell outlets. The front vents, too, give good stratified flow, with the upper outlets set to be 10 degrees cooler than those at the floor. On really chilly days, however, one has to resort to the booster fan to get sufficient airflow – especially to one's outside foot. The SX also has a tilt-and-slide sunroof, complete with a sun canopy and electric control.

### Trim and equipment

We find this aspect one of the most impressive features on the Tempra range – naturally, one would expect the SX to be well endowed, but the ordinary 1.6 is impressive, too, and the price differential between versions is less steep than on many rival ranges. The analogue displays, standard power steering and central locking, make the 1.6S a very attractive compromise if the SX is out of reach. However, we confess that the SX's fascia, with its heavy-handed styling and dust-attracting surfaces, is a disincentive to us, in spite of its several other useful features at a reasonable price premium.

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## Safety

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### Handling and accident avoidance

Carefully developed suspension not only makes the Tempra fun and rewarding to drive lustily through the bends, it also reveals excellent roadholding and stable, safe responses at the limits of grip. The steering is always willing to

## PERFORMANCE

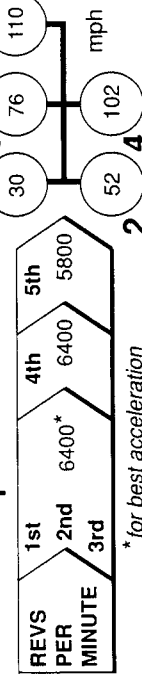
### Acceleration time in seconds

<b>STANDING START</b>	0-30mph	4.1	0-60mph	13.1	1/4 mile	18.9
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mph	30	40	50	60	70
<b>THROUGH THE GEARS</b>		2.2	5.0	9.0	13.7
<b>IN 5TH GEAR</b>		6.1	11.8	17.7	24.7
<b>IN 4TH GEAR</b>		4.6	9.0	13.8	19.2

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
<b>5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES</b>		12.9/9.6	11.8/9.0	11.6/9.2	12.9/10.2

### Maximum speeds



## FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade for tests: unleaded Premium/95 octane

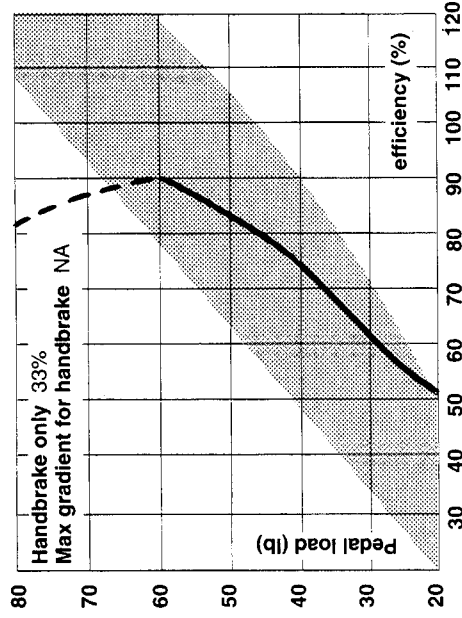
Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	28
Short journeys in the suburbs	28
Motorway - 70mph cruising	35
Brisk driving, mixed roads	35
Gentle driving - rural roads	41
<b>Typical mpg overall</b>	<b>35</b>
Realistic tank range*	58 litres/450 miles

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

## SAFETY

### Brakes

How pedal loads affect braking



### Fade test

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

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

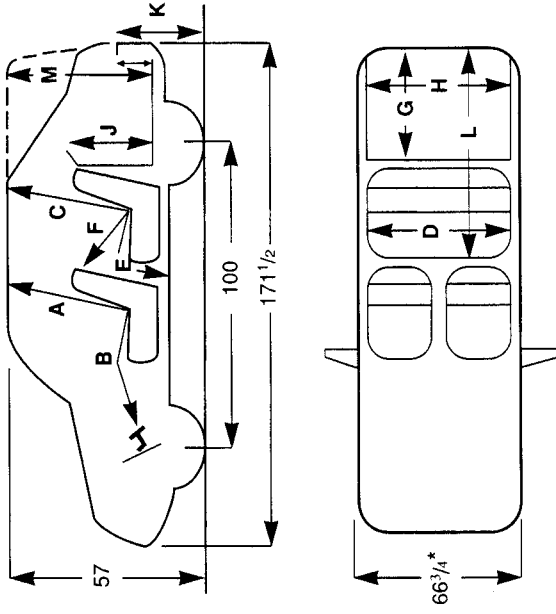
40	At start of test
55	After constant use
80	After severe use
NA	After watersplash
-	Number of stops to recover

### Safety check list

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

## MEASUREMENTS

### Dimensions (inches)



\* with mirrors folded

### Kerb weight in lb (full of fuel)

2280

### Inside (inches)

**A** Front headroom

34 1/2-36

**B** Front legroom (min - max)

34-41 1/2

**C** Rear headroom

35 1/2

**D** Back seat width (between armrests)

52

**E** Typical rear legroom\*

40

**F** Typical rear kneeroom\*

28 3/4

**G** Load length

42-55 1/2

**H** Load floor width (min - max)

18-21

**J** Load height

7/28

**K** Sill height (inner/outer)

64

**L** Load length

NA

**M** Load height (to tailgate hinge)

NA

\* Typical represents the mean measurement behind the driver's seat set at 39in legroom and the passenger's seat set at 41in

