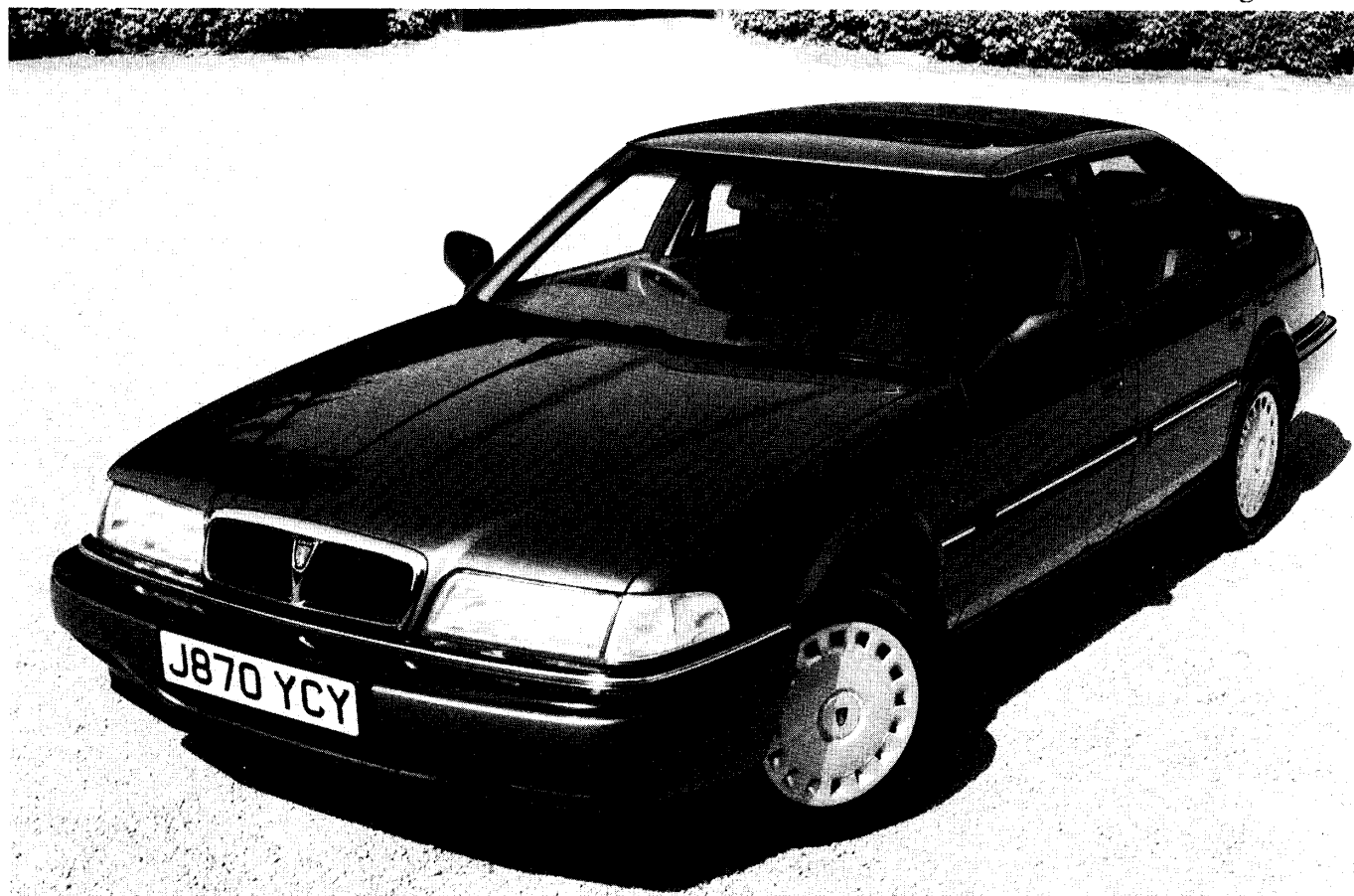


## Rover 800

Featuring 820Si



**R**OVER'S BIG EXECUTIVE-CLASS contender acquired an extensive facelift for 1992, resulting in softer, more rounded body styling and a new nose complete with a smart chrome radiator grille.

Rover's own 2-litre engine is substantially revised, too, with extra low-speed torque and modifications that make it more refined and easier to build and maintain. There's also an exciting turbocharged version for the sporting Vitesse model, so company car drivers looking for high performance will no longer have to venture beyond the 2-litre tax threshold.

Although a catalytic converter has been added, Rover's 2-litre, four-cylinder engine produces healthier-than-average vigour for the class. This helped it to achieve an impressive 130mph maximum speed at the test track, which is faster than even Rover claims.

It's just as quick through the gears, too, beating the 10 per cent more powerful BMW 520, for

example, but it's still not especially refined. It gives the 820 quite lively performance, though, whereas many two-litre rivals tend to feel underpowered.

Honda has gone its own way with a bigger 3.2-litre V6 engine for the latest Legend, but the unchanged 2.7-litre Japanese engine still provides effortless progress for top spec Rovers. The 827 Sterling Automatic continues to impress with its smoothness, power and wonderful gearshift quality, whether left to its own devices or controlled by the delightfully easy quadrant. Its Honda power steering is all right, but continues to be outshone by the home-grown alternative that has much less speed-sensitive power assistance.

The 800 has always had fine handling, but its ride was rather too firm and jittery for the smooth refinement Rover was aiming for in these new versions. However, the latest model's revised suspension rather turns the tables. It smooths out the bumps better, but at some expense to the previously taut, crisp handling. This means that the

## Living with the 800 . . .

Rover 800 is now less rewarding as a driver's car.

Inside, there's more walnut veneer on the fascia, together with a thick-rimmed steering wheel that's bulky enough to house an air-bag – due to be fitted later. The front seats are better, with a wide range of adjustments, but the back seat is less supportive than before and too reclined for our liking.

There are no disappointments as regards equipment, however, thanks to a generous list of features, even on the "mid-level" 820Si. Split-fold back seats are now fitted on both the saloon and hatchback.

Anti-lock brakes are standard on all except the 820i and 825 Turbo-diesel, and increased anti-theft protection is provided by high-security locks and a comprehensive ultrasonic alarm system. There's also Rover's so-called "lazy locking", which closes the electric windows and sunroof via the remote control handset if you forget to shut them before getting out. The sunroof and electric windows are fitted with safety cut-outs.

In the past, the big Rover hasn't enjoyed the best of reputations, with poor reliability and mediocre long-term durability leading to higher-than-average depreciation. There are some encouraging signs in the new model, but the build quality still lacks that really solid BMW feel.

Although the new 820 is heavier than the old model (yet very nearly as quick), its fuel economy suffers very little. We recorded 32mpg for an 820Si with a manual gearbox, compared with 33<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>mpg for the previous model. This is quite respectable for a brisk 2-litre executive car.

While the new Rover has progressed in a number of respects (smart new looks, improved engine and enhanced equipment levels), we think it's taken a step backwards in chassis

poise and driver appeal – important qualities in this sector of the market. There's no denying, though, that the tax-breaking 820i is excellent value for money.

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### At the Wheel

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#### Driving position

If you're familiar with the previous model, you'll find yourself instantly at home in the new one, although the seats feel more comfortable and have a good range of adjustments – for the driver, at least. Headroom isn't over-generous, though, even with the seat-height adjuster set at its lowest, and most drivers found the thick-rimmed steering wheel awkward to hold.

#### Controls and displays

There's not much change here, either, although new steering column stalks – derived from the Rover 200/400 – are more convenient. The bold, clear instruments are nicely illuminated at night, but they're obscured by the bulky steering wheel in all except the straight-ahead position. Also, whoever sited the instruments' dimmer control low down on the centre console could use a few lessons in ergonomics.

#### Vision

Rearward vision suffers from the saloon's taller bootline, while head restraints all round further spoil the view for shorter drivers. The twin-shot headlamps provide powerful main beam illumination, but there's no provision for easy beam-trimming – to compensate for heavy loads – either on the fascia or under the bonnet. These are about the only criticisms, though; even the windscreen wiper mechanism seems far less "Heath Robinson" now, no longer performing St Vitus's dance before parking.

#### Driver satisfaction

The Rover's increased weight has

slightly blunted its top-end performance, but the T-Series' enhanced mid-range urge makes it feel much more flexible on the road – an impression confirmed by small but significant gains in all the in-gear acceleration times.

While the new 800's retuned suspension proves more compliant over bumps than its predecessor's, this softer approach undermines the chassis' formerly excellent responses.

Despite light, responsive power steering, the car needs a little more persuasion into corners, with driver appeal further reduced by more body roll and a generally woollier feel.

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### Space & Comfort

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#### Seating and ride comfort

The latest Rover's seats look and feel more comfortable, although confining height and lumbar support adjustments to only the driver's seat seems mean in this class.

There's ample leg-stretching space in the roomy, well-appointed cabin, but headroom is a little on the tight side, despite the adoption of the previous Fastback's lower, more-reclined back seat.

Refinement is aided by the Rover's quieter ride and generally unobtrusive power unit, but we were unimpressed by wind noise from around the top of the doors on our test car.

#### Getting in and out

Entering and leaving the 800 could hardly be easier, with Rover's novel "lazy locking" supplementing infra-red remote-controlled central locking. This allows the sunroof and electric windows to be closed via the remote-control handset, if you've forgotten to close them before leaving. The big, wide-opening doors have armrest-mounted courtesy lights

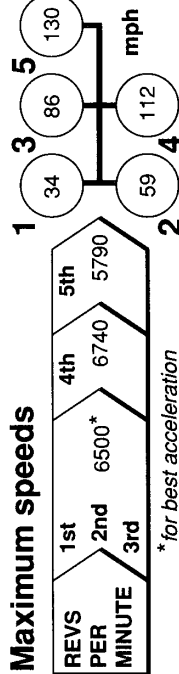
## PERFORMANCE

**Acceleration** time in seconds

|                |         |         |          |
|----------------|---------|---------|----------|
| STANDING START | 0-30mph | 0-60mph | 1/4 mile |
|                | 3.2     | 9.4     | 17.2     |

|                   |     |      |      |      |    |
|-------------------|-----|------|------|------|----|
| THROUGH THE GEARS | 30  | 40   | 50   | 60   | 70 |
|                   | 1.6 | 3.6  | 6.2  | 9.2  |    |
| IN 5TH GEAR       | 30  | 40   | 50   | 60   | 70 |
|                   | 5.8 | 11.6 | 17.2 | 23.3 |    |
| IN 4TH GEAR       | 30  | 40   | 50   | 60   | 70 |
|                   | 3.7 | 7.3  | 11.2 | 15.3 |    |

|                      |          |          |          |    |    |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|----|----|
| 20 mph               | 30       | 40       | 50       | 60 | 70 |
| 5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES | 12.7/7.8 | 11.4/7.5 | 11.7/8.0 |    |    |



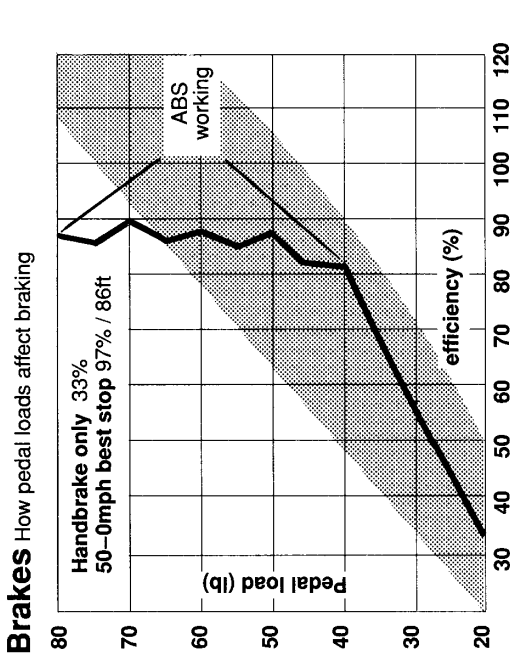
## FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade for tests: unleaded Premium, 95 octane

|                               |                     |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Normal range</b>           | mpg                 |
| Hard driving, heavy traffic   | 27                  |
| Short journeys in the suburbs | 25 1/2              |
| Motorway - 70mph cruising     | 35 1/2              |
| Brisk driving, mixed roads    | 32                  |
| Gentle driving - rural roads  | 35 1/2              |
| <b>Typical mpg overall</b>    | <b>32</b>           |
| Realistic tank range*         | 58 litres/410 miles |

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

## SAFETY



Braking efficiency shown as a percentage of gravity (ie 100% = 1.0g). Ideally the braking curve should fall within the shaded zone of this graph. If it's above, the brakes are too heavy; if it's below, they are too light - particularly on cars without ABS. When the curve becomes broken, the wheels are skidding.

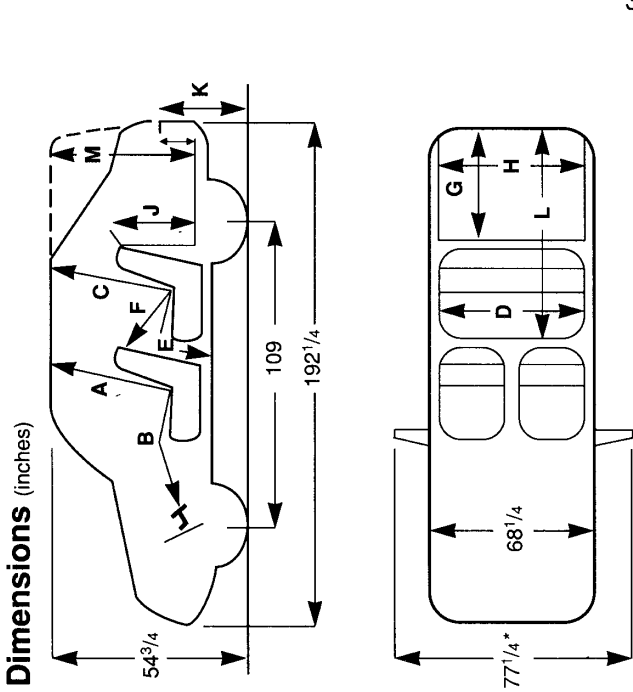
**Fade test**  
How hard use or water affects braking. (Ideal brakes show no change.)

|  |                            |    |
|--|----------------------------|----|
| <b>Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)</b> | At start of test           | 32 |
|  | After constant use         | 34 |
|  | After severe use           | 45 |
|  | 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



\* mirrors don't fold

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Inside</b> (inches)                      | <b>Kerb weight in lb</b> (full of fuel)  |
| <b>A</b> Front headroom                     | 3031                                     |
| <b>B</b> Front legroom (min - max)          | 41 1/2                                   |
| <b>C</b> Rear headroom                      | 33-54                                    |
| <b>D</b> Back seat width (between armrests) | 19                                       |
| <b>E</b> Typical rear * legroom             | 6 3/4/26 1/2                             |
| <b>F</b> Typical rear * kneeroom            | 76                                       |
|   | <b>M</b> Load height (to tailgate hinge) |
|   | 31 1/2                                   |
|   | <b>L</b> Load length                     |
|   | 41                                       |
|   | <b>J</b> Load height                     |
|   | 36                                       |
|   | <b>H</b> Load floor width (min - max)    |
|   | 35 3/4-43                                |
|   | <b>G</b> Load length                     |
|   | 35 1/4-36 1/2                            |

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

that make the interior feel safe and inviting at night-time.

#### **Luggage and oddments space**

The Rover does well here, with the generous, low-silled boot gaining a little more space inside, while split-fold back seats are no longer confined to just the Fastback model.

Up front, the glovebox and door bins are both mean on capacity, though there's cassette storage under the centre console's padded armrest, as well as seatback map pockets and Rover's highly effective non-slip mat for the fascia-top shelf.

#### **Heating and ventilation**

The fast, efficient heating and ventilation system proves easy to fathom and use, but the 800 retains fiddly sliding adjusters, rather than the now more fashionable rotary controls.

Ample cool air is available from the fascia, winter or summer, although the low-sited vents are more effective in cooling the driver's hands than his face. A tilt-and-slide glass sunroof with an interior sunblind is standard on all models – manually operated on the 820i and 825 diesel, electrically on all other models.

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## *Safety*

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#### **Accident avoidance**

Power steering, generous tyre grip and anti-lock brakes (standard on most models) help to prevent the accident in the first place, although, as mentioned earlier, suspension revisions have made the new model a little less lithe. The Rover feels safe and reassuring in all conditions, however, and there are no nasty surprises in store at the limit.

The brakes deliver nicely weighted, progressive stops in normal use, but their ultimate stopping capability proved rather disappointing at the test track.

#### **Injury prevention**

Safety details in the 800's cabin

include height-adjustable front seatbelt mounts and head restraints all round, while the Rover's bulky safety steering wheel hints at the airbag restraint that will be made available later.

Recesses in the rear backrest, to accommodate the unused seatbelt stalks, are a neat little feature, too. Anti-trap sensors are fitted to both the sunroof and electric windows.

#### **Security**

All models in the new range are fitted with a sophisticated ultrasonic alarm system as standard, armed automatically each time the remote-controlled central locking is used. The bonnet, boot, doors and cabin are all monitored, with an audible warning as a reminder if the sunroof or any windows are left open when securing the car.

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## *Money Matters*

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#### **Value for money**

The Rover's generous standard specification is complemented by competitive pricing at the lower end of the range, although this tends to make top spec versions look a little expensive in comparison. Consequently, the options list makes fairly short reading, but pricing is identical for both body styles.

Rover 800 depreciation has been heavy in the past, but only time will tell whether the new model fares any better.

#### **Fuel economy**

This latest model's 32mpg overall is a creditable result, with increased weight and a catalyser bringing only a small penalty over its predecessor's 33<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>mpg, despite most of the performance being retained. This places it well towards the front of the class. Hard or short journey use increases consumption to around the mid-20s, but most users should get about 35mpg.

The tank allows about 400 miles between refills, and a prominent

low-fuel warning lamp lights as the tank nears empty; filling to the brim can take an eternity, however – few owners will have the patience to manage it.

#### **In service**

Supported on gas struts, the massive bonnet lifts easily to give access to the routine topping-up items underneath, but the complex-looking ancillaries dotted about the place discourage much more involved owner-attention, here.

Long-life items reduce servicing costs by around 20 per cent over 60,000 miles, compared with previous 820 models; Rover claims material costs are reduced by a similar amount over the same period. Servicing is required at 12,000-mile intervals, while parts prices through the extensive dealer network are reasonably competitive.

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## *Durability*

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#### **Warranty**

You get only 12-months'/unlimited-mileage mechanical and breakdown cover without extra charge, but the six-year anti-rust warranty is free from small-print niggles and there's cover for three-years against cosmetic paint defects.

#### **Rust prevention**

As with the 200/400 and the new Metro, zinc-coated steel is used in vulnerable areas, with comprehensive wax injection and underbody sealing evident elsewhere.

Plastic bumpers at each end should resist the onset of unsightly gravel rash, and the front wheelarches are conscientiously plastic lined.

#### **Build quality**

These latest models seem better built than their predecessors, but some of the switchgear and fittings lack the robustness found in an Audi or a BMW, for example. One or two minor problems surfaced on our test car.

| <b>HOW IT COMPARES</b><br>(All four-door saloons) | Engine cap/power (cc/bhp) | Max speed (mph) | 30-70mph through gears (sec) | 30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec) | Fuel economy (mpg) | Brakes best stop (%g/lb) | Maximum legroom – front (in) | Typical leg/kneeroom – rear (in) | Steering turns/circle (ft) | Overall length (in) |
|---|---------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Rover 820Si (c)                                   | 1994/134                  | 130             | 9.2                          | 23.3/15.3                       | 32                 | 90/70*                   | 43                           | 41/31½                           | 3.2/39 (p)                 | 192¼                |
| BMW 520i-24v (c)                                  | 1991/150                  | 131             | 9.3                          | 25.2/18.7                       | 30                 | 103/40                   | 43¼                          | 38½/28½                          | 3.5/35¾ (p)                | 185¾                |
| Ford Granada 2.0EFi GLX                           | 1998/123                  | 118             | 11.3                         | 26.6/19.4                       | 30                 | 96/40*                   | 42                           | 43¾/33¾                          | 3.0/34½ (p)                | 186¾                |
| Peugeot 605 2.0SRi                                | 1998/120                  | 121             | 10.8                         | 27.6/18.6                       | 29½                | 89/30+*                  | 42¾                          | 41/33½                           | 3.3/36¾ (p)                | 186                 |
| Vauxhall Carlton 2.0i CD                          | 1998/120                  | 121             | 11.3                         | 28.0/20.9                       | 33½                | 103/45+*                 | 43                           | 42/33¾                           | 3.3/34½ (p)                | 184½                |
| Volvo 940 2.0SE Turbo (c)                         | 1986/155                  | 124             | 8.9                          | 24.3/15.8                       | 29½                | 106/45                   | 43                           | 39½/30                           | 3.6/32 (p)                 | 191¾                |
| (c) catalyser fitted                              |                           |                 |                              |                                 |                    | * ABS fitted             |                              | (p) power assisted               |                            |                     |



## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

### ENGINE

**Type and size** front-mounted, transverse 4 in line; water-cooled. 84.5mm bore x 89.0mm stroke = 1994cc. Iron block and aluminium alloy head; 5 main bearings

**Compression ratio** 10.0:1

**Valve gear** twin belt-driven overhead camshafts actuating four valves per cylinder via hydraulic bucket tappets

**Fuel system** Lucas/Rover electronic multi-point fuel injection, three-way regulated catalyser and lambda sensor. 68-litre (15.0-gallon) tank, with low-fuel warning lamp. Fuel required: unleaded only, 95 octane minimum

**Ignition system** fully programmed electronic, integral with fuel injection, via coil and distributor

**Maximum power** 134bhp at 6000rpm

**Maximum torque** 136 lb ft at 2500rpm

### TRANSMISSION

**Clutch** 8.5in dry plate, diaphragm spring; hydraulically operated. Pedal load/travel: 22 lb/6¼in

**Gearbox** 5-speed manual (all synchromesh) and reverse.

Ratios: first 3.25, second 1.89, third 1.31, fourth 1.03, fifth 0.76 and reverse 3.00:1. (4-speed automatic available as optional extra)

**Final drive** 4.20:1, to front wheels

**Mph per 1000rpm** 22.3 in top, 16.5 in 4th

**Rpm at 70mph** 3130 in top gear

### CHASSIS

**Suspension** front: independent by double wishbones, concentric coil spring/damper units and an anti-roll bar. Rear: independent by trailing arms and transverse links, coil spring/damper struts and an anti-roll bar.

**Dampers:** telescopic all round

**Steering** power-assisted rack and pinion with 3.2 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 39ft between kerbs, with 60¼ft circle for one turn of the wheel

**Wheels** 6J x 15 steel, with 195/65R15 91V tyres (Michelin MXV 3-A on test car)

**Brakes** 10.3in ventilated discs front, 10.2in solid discs rear with vacuum servo. Bosch ABS-2E anti-lock system standard on all models except 820i and 825 Diesel