

Autocar



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of the
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stars

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LEYLAND AUTOCODE
32 page supplement
analyzes Britain's
biggest range

Seat 1200 Sport

Small Spanish-built sports coupe using many Fiat-derived parts. Excellent as a driver's car though more comfortable for smaller people; good handling, willing engine but mediocre gearchange.

Ride bouncy but noise level surprisingly good.

Cramped back seat. Adequate equipment.

Might do well on British market at the right price.

IN BRITAIN, Seat are known — if they are known at all by the average car buyer — as makers of the slightly archaic little 133. That does the biggest car producer in Spain's expanding market less than justice. For a long time Seat have done well producing Fiat cars under licence, then "cocktails" of Fiat components like the 1430, and finally they took over responsibility for the 133. Now they have gone a step beyond that in producing the 1200 Sport.

The Sport is still mechanically composed of Fiat parts. The difference is that the body, and all development, was carried out by Seat at their splendid new technical centre at Martorell near Barcelona. Since it represents the independent thoughts of a firm which has become a large European manufacturer in its own right, we thought it right to test the 1200 Sport when the chance became available, even though the car is not imported to Britain and there are no plans for doing so. There is always the chance that it may yet be, and in the meantime, many British tourists are likely to see the car, and perhaps drive it, in its native country.

Engineering background

It is no accident that the 1200 Sport, like its Torinese contemporary the Fiat 128 3P, shares the main chassis dimensions of the Fiat 127. In both cases the running gear has much in common with the smaller Fiat, but the power units are different. While the 128 3P uses the latest version of the 1.3-litre single ohc power unit, the 1200 Sport takes the simpler course of turning the old Fiat 124 pushrod engine of 1,197 c.c. (still used in the Seat 124D) sideways and mounting it to a Fiat 127-type transmission.

Although the wheelbase is the same as that of the 128-3P — somewhat shorter than average at 87.5in. — the 1200 Sport is a good deal smaller, and in particular shorter. There is much less effort to provide a roomy and versatile body, simply a stylish yet compact one. As a result, the Seat is appealingly small with its overall length of fractionally over 12 feet.

Performance and economy

As installed in the 1200 Sport, the pushrod engine develops a creditable 67 bhp at a modest 5,600 rpm

only 6 bhp less than Fiat extract from their bigger, more advanced and faster-running ohc unit. Given the small size of the car, it is not surprising that it should turn out to be just about as fast. Mean maximum speed emerged as 97 mph, just 1 mph less than the 128-3P. This might be improved with slightly higher gearing, for maximum speed takes the 1200 to just about 6,000 rpm, well over the power peak. Were the final drive raised even slightly to give more than the present overall gearing of 16.4 mph per 1,000 rpm, overall performance and economy might both benefit.

The low gearing means that, if one sticks to the red line at 6,250 rpm, the lower gears are limited by modern standards with first gear running to its limit well before 30 mph, and second before 50 mph. Third gear is rather better off with its maximum of over 70 mph. Though the red line is firmly set on the rev counter, the engine runs smoothly beyond the limit and one is driven to suspect some Fiat-inspired conservatism. Certainly there is no sign of the engine

choking itself at high speeds.

The acceleration is not quite as impressive, but the 1200 gets off the line cleanly and records a time of 13sec to 60 mph, not bad for a car with a pushrod engine of this size. The performance naturally starts to tail off from 80 mph onwards though we had no trouble obtaining sensible times to 90 mph within the confines of the one-mile MIRA horizontal straights. A glance at our comparison table confirms that the acceleration is well up to the standards of the class. The performance in each gear is almost equally impressive. The 1200 can be trickled along in top at 10 mph but it does not like full throttle at that speed, so our top-gear figures were taken from 20 mph. The even spread of the figures all the way to 70 mph shows how evenly spread is the torque, and the impression is borne out by the third-gear times.

Sadly, a malfunction in our flowmeter equipment prevented us from taking constant-speed fuel consumption figures in our short time with the car, but it was interesting to observe the various

Stranger to our shores, the neat and handy Seat 1200 Sport handles well



Seat 1200 Sport

continued

brim-to-brim figures recorded by our testers. The worst figure seen was 29.2 mpg, while the best was not so very different at 31.4 mpg. These figures reflect the enthusiasm with which the car tended to be driven, though the same thing applied to the Fiat 128-3P which returned a significantly better overall consumption. One annoyance in the 1200 was the limited tank capacity of 6.6 gallons, as in the Fiat 127. This gives a safe range of no more than 200 miles, and still less if one takes heed of the red warning light for low fuel level. In the test car this began to flash after little more than 100 miles, when the tank was still over half-full. The fuel gauge needle, set into the speedometer face, tended to waver badly when the car was cornered fast.

Handling and brakes

Though the 1200 bears more than a passing resemblance to the Fiat 127 in the handling department, it seems to have been set up very differently. The rack and pinion steering is low-geared, considering the size and weight of the car, with three and a half turns between extremes and an undistinguished 32ft lock. This is noticed when driving around town or manoeuvring in tight corners. At any real speed however things feel much tighter and more direct, with no perceptible lost motion but noticeable kick-back from bumps in the road. Feel is excellent.

The change in the character of the steering comes about because the handling, remarkably for a front-driven car, is set up almost neutral. When entering a corner at

anything more than mimsing speed the driver is conscious of a fairly abrupt leaning-over, not to any great roll angle but noticeable because it happens all at once instead of progressively. At this moment there is a feeling — slightly unnerving at first — that the car is about to oversteer. What happens in fact is that it settles down on the chosen line, which can be altered very easily and safely. Unlike most front-drive cars in which delicate changes of line are better accomplished with the accelerator, the Seat responds crisply to the steering in mid-corner and there is little change of attitude with power on or off. As a result it is up to the driver to pick his speed and watch for the limit, with none of the fierce tyre scrub so often encountered.

This neutral handling throws the roadholding into focus and here again the Seat acquits itself well. The chosen 145-13 tyre size is quite adequate for a car of this size and weight and the Pirellis fitted to the test car hung on well to give an extremely high cornering limit, set by the natural tendency of the car to slither sideways on all four wheels, still under control. Seat offer wider, low-profile tyres on wider rims as an option for drivers seeking even more cornering ability. We were not conscious of the inside rear wheel lifting during hard cornering but it seems unlikely that this should not happen, especially if the car is slowed in mid-corner.

As should be expected in almost any front-drive car, the Seat showed exemplary straight-line stability — to an extent which

suggested, like the heaviness of the steering towards full lock, that there is considerable castor action.

The brakes are entirely conventional, with discs front and drums rear, but Seat have elected to do without a servo. As a result the braking effort is high by comparison with most cars in this class though not at all excessive. A 40lb shove on the pedal suffices for firm check braking and the ultimate stop obtained was 0.95g for an effort of 80lb. This limit was set by the locking of the left rear wheel, causing the car to slew slightly: behaviour at variance with that experienced on the road when the car tended if anything to weave to the right if the brakes were applied quickly and firmly.

There was a noticeable rise in pedal effort needed to maintain 0.5g during the latter stops of our fade test, though the tenth stop showed some evidence of recovery and there was never any sign of increased pedal travel or other misbehaviour. The handbrake worked well, giving a 0.35g stop when used alone on the level, but it would not hold the car facing down the 1 in 3 test slope because the lightly-laden rear wheels dragged down. There was no problem when facing up the hill and the 1200 restarted on this gradient without too much effort, or any smell of clutch.

Comfort and convenience

Nobody would call the 1200 a full four-seater. The back seat, though well appointed, is woefully short of legroom. The front seat passenger can trade some of his room to favour the man behind, but the

Specification

ENGINE	Front, front drive
Cylinders	4, in line, transverse
Main bearings	5
Cooling	Water
Fan	Electric
Bore, mm (in.)	73.0 (2.87)
Stroke, mm (in.)	71.5 (2.81)
Capacity, cc (in ³)	1,197 (73.0)
Valve gear	ohv
Camshaft drive	Chain
Compression ratio	8.8-to-1
Octane rating	97 RM
Carburettor	Bressel 32DFB2
Max power	67 bhp (DIN) at 5,600 rpm
Max torque	67 lb. ft. at 3,700 rpm

TRANSMISSION

Type	Four-speed, all-synchromesh	
Gear	Ratio	mph / 1000 rpm
Top	0.963	16.36
3rd	1.348	11.69
2nd	2.055	7.67
1st	3.636	4.33
Final drive gear Ratio		Helical spur 4.08-to-1

SUSPENSION

Front — location	MacPherson struts, lower links
springs	Coil
dampers	Telescopic
anti-roll bar	Yes
Rear — location	MacPherson struts
springs	Transverse leaf
dampers	Telescopic
anti-roll bar	No

STEERING

Type	Rack and pinion
Power assistance	No
Wheel diameter	14 in.

BRAKES

Front	8.9 in. dia disc/drum
Rear	7.0 in. dia disc/drum
Servo	No

WHEELS

Type	Ventilated pressed steel disc
Rim width	4½ in.
Tyres — make	Pirelli Cinturato (on test car)
— type	Radial-ply tubeless
— size	145-13 in.

EQUIPMENT

Battery	12 volt 45 Ah
Alternator	40 amp
Headlamps	Rectangular, 90/80 watt (total)
Reversing lamp	Extra
Hazard warning	Standard
Electric fuses	8
Screen wipers	Two-speed (inc. intermittent)
Screen washer	Manual
Interior heater	Water valve
Interior trim	Cloth seats, pvc headlining
Floor covering	Rubber mats
Jack	Screw pillar type
Jacking points	One each side under sills
Windscreen	Toughened
Underbody protection	Phosphate treatment prior to painting

MAINTENANCE

Fuel tank	6.6 Imp galls (30 litres)
Cooling system	12.3 pints (inc. heater)
Engine sump	6 pints SAE 10W/40
Gearbox	2.4 pints SAE 90
Grease	No points
Valve clearance	Inlet 0.010 in. (hot/cold)
	Exhaust 0.010 in. (hot/cold)
Contact breaker	.016-.019 in. gap
Ignition timing	10 deg BTDC (static) deg BTDC (stroboscopic at rpm)
Spark plug — type	Champion N9Y or equivalent
— gap	0.025 in.
Tyre pressures	F 24, R 27 psi (normal driving)
Max payload	320 lb (705 kg)

Fiat influence is still evident in interior details like wheel, pedals and instruments. Minor control layout is borrowed almost entirely from the current Fiat range though many parts are made in Spain rather than Italy. Right hand drive cars are not made in Barcelona, hence this "left-hooker" test car



Maximum Speeds

Gear	mph	kph	rpm
(mean)	97	156	5,930
(best)	99	159	6,050
3rd	73	117	6,250
2nd	48	77	6,250
1st	27	43	6,250

Acceleration

True mph	Time secs	Speedo mph
30	3.4	31
40	6.0	42
50	8.6	53
60	13.0	64
70	17.7	75
80	27.1	85
90	42.9	96

Standing 1/4-mile:
18.5 sec, 72 mph
Kilometre:
35.6 sec, 87 mph

mph	Top	3rd	2nd
10-30	—	8.5	4.8
20-40	12.6	7.2	4.3
30-50	12.1	7.1	4.7
40-60	11.6	7.7	—
50-70	13.8	8.6	—
60-80	17.3	—	—
70-90	25.1	—	—

Consumption

Fuel

Overall mpg: 29.9
(9.4 litres/100km)

Constant speed:
Figures not obtained (see text)

Autocar formula

Hard driving, difficult conditions
27.2 mpg
Average driving, average conditions
32.9 mpg
Gentle driving, easy conditions
38.9 mpg

Grade of fuel: Premium, 4-star
(97 RM)

Mileage recorder: 1.0 per cent
over reading

Oil

Consumption (SAE 10W/40)
1,500 miles/pint

Regular Service

Interval

Change	3,000	6,000	12,000
Engine oil	Yes	Yes	Yes
Oil filter	No	Yes	Yes
Gearbox oil	No	No	No
Spark plugs	No	No	Yes
Air cleaner	No	Yes	Y.
C/breaker	No	Check	Yes

Total cost not available for UK

Brakes

Fade (from 70 mph in neutral)

Pedal load for 0.5g stops in lb		start/end	
1	40/40	6	40/55
2	35/40	7	40/60
3	40/45	8	45/65
4	40/45	9	45/65
5	45/50	10	45/55

Response from 30 mph in neutral

Load	g	Distance
20lb	0.25	120ft
40lb	0.50	60ft
60lb	0.75	40ft
80lb	0.95	32ft
Handbrake	0.35	86ft

Max gradient 1 in 4 (see text)

Clutch

Pedal 38lb and 7in

Test Conditions

Wind: 8-12 mph
Temperature: 24 degC (75 deg F)
Barometer: 29.7 in Hg
Humidity: 17 per cent
Surface: dry asphalt and concrete
Test distance 840 miles

Figures taken at 5,400 miles by our own staff at the Motor Industry Research Association proving ground at Nuneaton.

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Parts Cost

(including VAT)

Not applicable — vehicle not available in UK

Weight

Kerb, 15.8 cwt/1,774 lb/805 kg
(Distribution F/R, 58.7/41.3)
As tested, 19.6 cwt/2,199 lb/997 kg

Boot capacity: 9.6 cu. ft.

Turning circles:

Between kerbs
L, 31ft 7in.; R, 32ft 2in.
Between walls
L, 32ft 8in.; R, 33ft 3in.
Turns, lock to lock 3.5

Test Scorecard

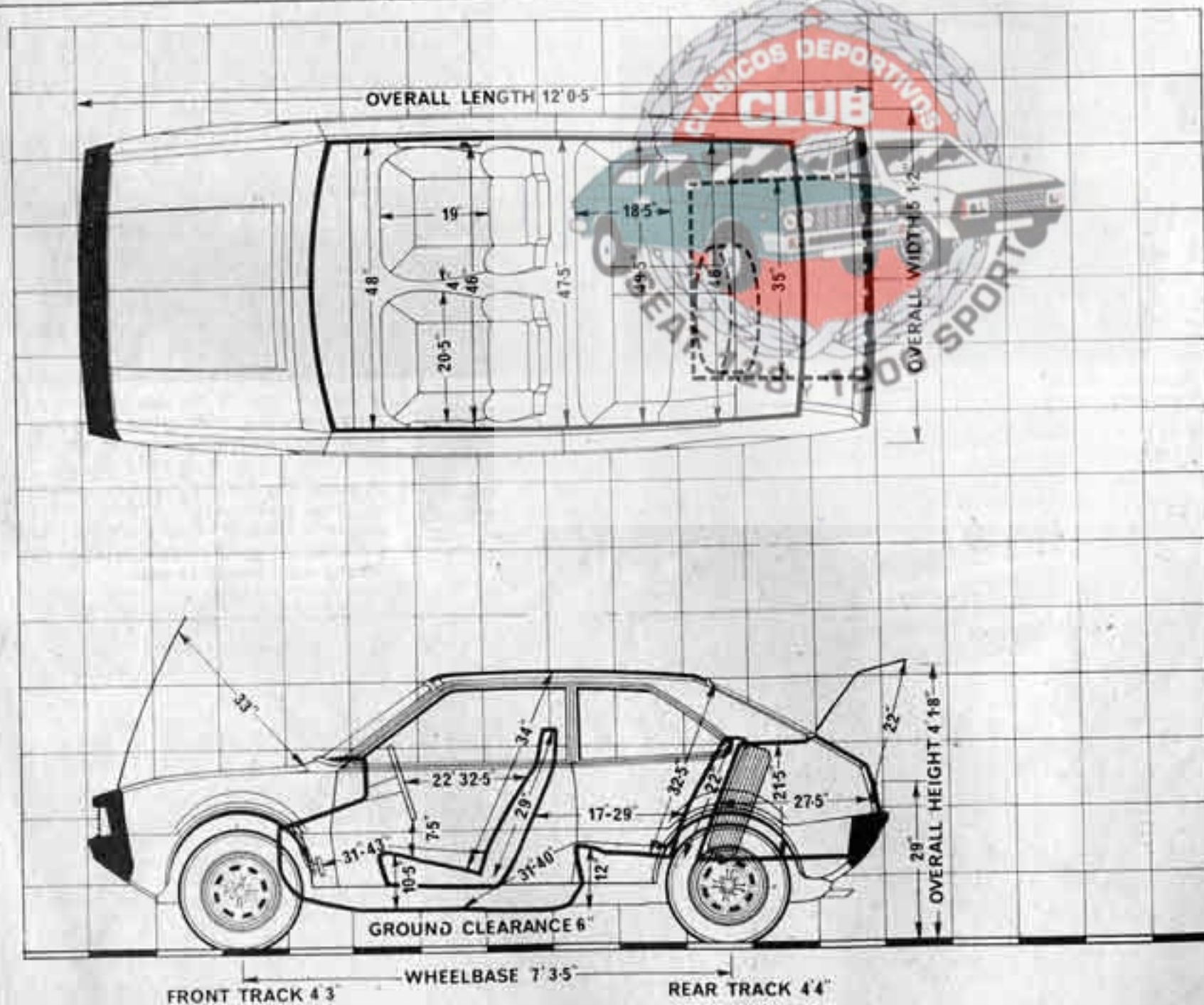
(Average of scoring by Autocar Road Test team)

Ratings: 6 Excellent

- 5 Good
- 4 Better than average
- 3 Worse than average
- 2 Poor
- 1 Bad

PERFORMANCE	3.67
STEERING AND HANDLING	4.08
BRAKES	3.40
COMFORT IN FRONT	3.25
COMFORT IN BACK	2.71
DRIVERS AIDS	3.13
<i>(instruments, lights, wipers, visibility etc)</i>	
CONTROLS	2.63
NOISE	3.50
STOWAGE	3.00
ROUTINE SERVICE	2.90
<i>(under-bonnet access, dipstick etc)</i>	
EASE OF DRIVING	3.45

OVERALL RATING 3.26



Comparisons

Car	Price £	max mph	0-60 sec	overall mpg	capacity c.c.	power bhp	wheelbase in.	length in.	width in.	kerb weight lb	fuel gall	tyre size
SEAT 1200 Sport	—	97	13.0	29.9	1,197	67	87 1/2	144 1/2	61	1,774	6.6	145-13
Alfasud ti	2,298	100	14.0	26.2	1,186	68	96 1/2	154 1/2	62 1/2	1,896	11.0	165/70-13
Fiat 128 3P	2,237	98	11.7	32.7	1,290	73	87 1/2	151	61 1/2	1,874	11.0	145-13
Mini 1275GT	1,892	86	14.6	30.8	1,275	54	80	124 1/2	55 1/2	1,488	7.5	145/70-12
Renault 5TS	2,120	94	13.4	31.9	1,289	64	95	138	60	1,764	8.2	145-13
Vauxhall Chevette L	1,822	91	14.5	30.3	1,256	59	94	155	62	1,863	8.5	155-13

Seat 1200 Sport

continued

driver cannot afford to be so generous. Only a small child can be comfortable behind a large driver.

The large driver himself is not well catered for because the Seat shares the familiar Fiat layout which places the steering wheel much too far forward relative to the pedals. Even if a straight-armed driving stance is adopted, the legs still have to be bent acutely to operate the pedals if one is anything like six feet tall. To add to the problem, this position means it is a long stretch forward to reach first and third gears, and some of the minor controls including those for the heater.

The front seats are well shaped to provide sideways support and received general praise: despite our previous reservations, the driver's seat provides adequate adjustment for tall people. The squab angle is adjustable and a neat release (locked in position when the door is closed) allows the squabs to fold forward for access to the back.

The steering wheel is a pleasant sports-styled one whose small size helps the overall impression of handiness. We were less happy with the pedals which were well offset to the right (this being, of course, a left-hand drive car). This at least gave the driver the option of resting his left foot clear of the clutch pedal on the front wheel arch. The accelerator linkage felt sticky and did not lend itself to fine control, while the clutch surprised us by being very heavy and long in its travel. This could have had something to do with the poor quality of the gearchange, with first very inclined to baulk and a general feeling of unsureness that any gear was properly engaged until the



Above: Spanish styling has produced an attractive shape that most British onlookers found more than usually pleasing. Matt black polymer bumpers are functional as well as pretty. Rear quarter extractor vents work very well and shape is good enough to allow fast driving with windows open

Left: Front seats give excellent support but driving position is poorly planned for tall or long-legged drivers with wheel and gearchange too far forward. Back seat looks quite comfortable but legroom is extremely limited (below)





Bonnet opens to reveal sideways-placed Fiat 124 power unit. Note the massive heater air intake box, the MacPherson strut "turrets" and the electric fan

springing or damping would improve matters, especially towards full rebound.

We were little inclined to try the heater in the very hot weather of the test period, but a brief operation showed it likely to be well capable of keeping the car warm in winter. Distribution of warm air is via Fiat-type deflector flaps, apparently crude but effective and easy to understand. Ventilation proved very good despite the small size of the fresh air inlets at each end of the fascia. The through-flow induced by the louvred extractors in the rear quarters is considerable.

One expects a small and sporting car to be noisy, but this was one of the pleasant surprises of the Seat. There was a marked body boom at about 65 mph, but apart from that the whole car seemed to have been well engineered to keep noise levels down — not to suppress them altogether, but to keep them to a reasonable minimum. This has been achieved with road and wind noise, with the engine (thanks in part to an electric fan) but not entirely with the transmission. Even so, it proved possible to cruise the 1200 at 80 mph and carry on a normal conversation. Even more remarkable, it was possible to drive the car quite quickly — up to perhaps 60 mph — with the windows open, without creating objectionable draughts or buffet inside.

Living with the Seat 1200

The little 1200 Coupe came in for a great deal of admiration while we were driving it, and there were several inquiries as to where it might be bought. In some ways the styling seems akin to that of the Renault 5 in its appealing and individual cheekiness, and it evidently appeals strongly to women. The matt-black polymer bumpers

at nose and tail were generally admired, and thought smart as well as sensible.

The boot lid is opened by a pull-up lever in the driver's door pillar, a good security feature. The boot is inevitably not large though it is easy to load. A neat sprung-bar arrangement holds the spare wheel in place (it needs a moulded blister in the rear parcels shelf to clear it) but the position of the wheel means that luggage would have to be removed from the boot to reach it. Jacking is by a simple screw pillar jack, with just the one point each side, quite adequate with a car of such short wheelbase. The fuel filler cap, flush-fitting, is housed in the left rear wing and is of the locking plug type. It takes one or two tries to get used to it, but after that seems convenient enough.

The bonnet is released from under the driver's side of the fascia and opens to reveal the singular sight of a Fiat 124 engine sideways on. With such a simple engine it might be thought that access would be generally good, but there are some poor points. Access to the dipstick, the distributor and the plugs has not been helped by the angling of the engine 16deg forward. On the credit side, however, the reservoirs and battery are easily checked and the cooling system is sealed. The small electric fan is quite noisy when it cuts in and the driver is never in any doubt that it has done so.

In conclusion

The 1200 Sport is an agreeable car with several strong points in its favour, not least the sporting, positive handling and its attractive yet practical styling. It performs well, but there are several smaller faults to be rectified before it could become a strong international challenger. In particular, the ride might be improved and the gear-change, to judge by our car, is certainly in need of improvement. Its possible success in Britain, were Seat to consider producing the car in right hand drive form which is doubtful, would depend very much on its price. As things stand, there would be no point in bringing it in unless it undercut the Fiat 128-3P (now £2,237) by a fairly substantial margin: because the Fiat is a roomier, more versatile and almost equally sporting car. We have to say that from what we have seen of the 1200's home-market price, this condition is unlikely to be fulfilled in the near future. However, as an indication of the design potential of Seat, the 1200 Coupe represents an encouraging step in the right direction. □

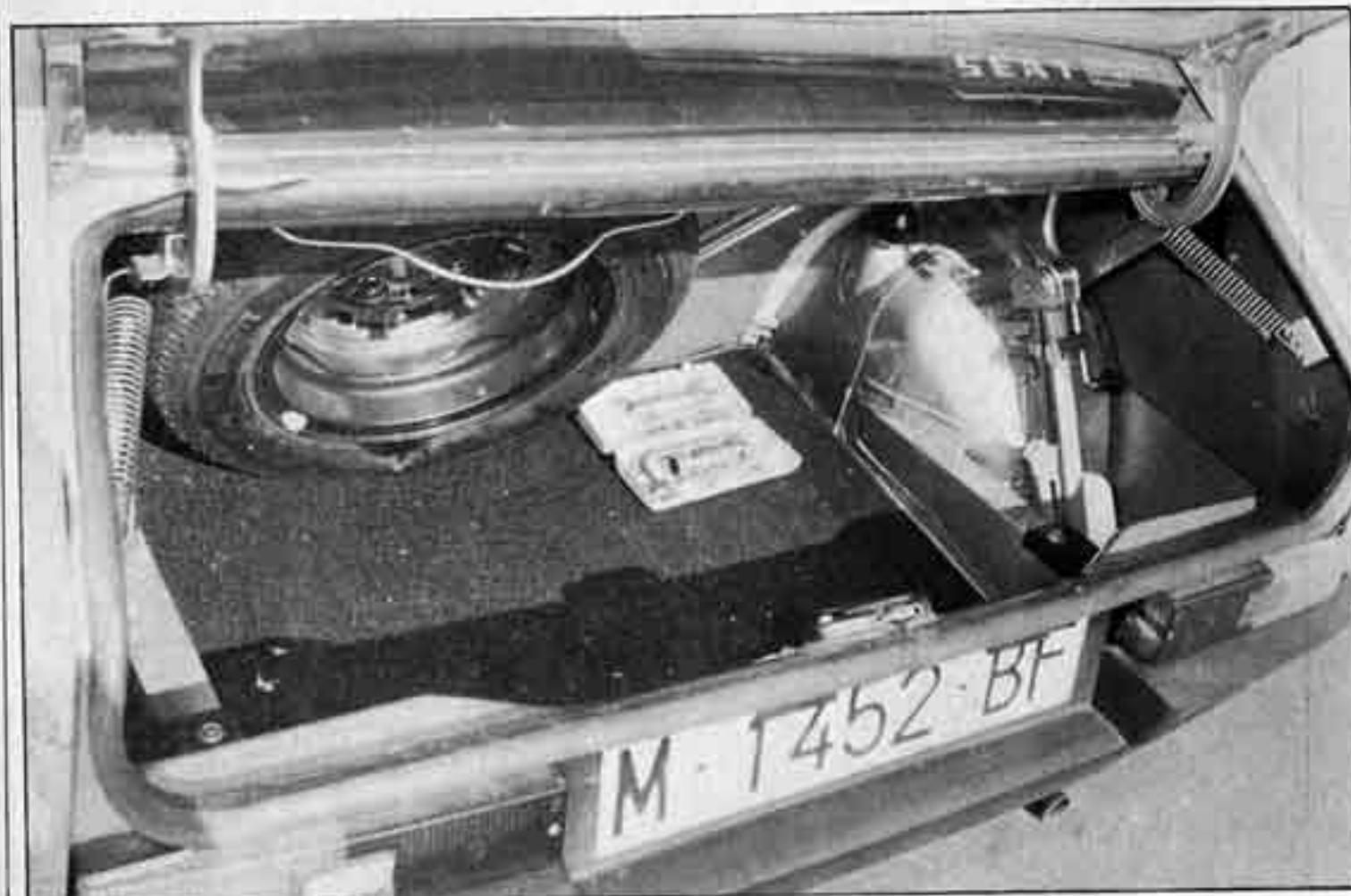
clutch was released and the drive taken up. Even so, the synchromesh proved unbeatable on our acceleration runs. It seems a shame that the pleasure of driving the 1200 should have been spoilt to an extent by this gearchange, and we hope the test car was not entirely representative.

The minor controls are entirely Fiat-derived with the three familiar column stalks taking care of indicators, lights (in conjunction with a master switch) and wipers — the latter having one intermittent setting and one continuous speed. The washer is a rather mean squashy thumb-pressed bulb such as used to be found on the smaller Fiats. The instruments are well laid out, slightly ornate with a yellow line on the speedometer at 120 kmh as well as the yellow and red lines on the

rev counter. Smaller gauges towards the centre of the fascia contain a clock, oil pressure and water temperature gauges.

Ride comfort

There were two schools of thought about the Seat, one of which found the car well sprung for its sporting character, keeping its wheels as close to the ground as possible, while the other thought it needlessly bouncy, especially over bumpy minor roads. Certainly when driving quickly over such roads, and wearing the fixed seat belts with which the test car was provided, one was conscious of being brought up sharply by the belts at the top of their travel, so to speak. Wheel travel appears generous for a car of this size, and it could be that more progressive



Left: No scope for big boot but loading is easy. Spare wheel is held up by spring-bar system. Took kit echoes Fiat practice. Above: Boot lid release is effected by lever in driver's door jamb

MANUFACTURER:
SEAT,
Barcelona,
Spain

UK CONCESSIONAIRES:
NOT IMPORTED INTO UK

PRICES
NO UK PRICE APPLICABLE