

Rover Metro 1.1L



THE FIRST TIME YOU DRIVE THE NEW Metro, you'll be impressed. Like several of the small Japanese hatchbacks, it has instant-appeal controls and demure traffic manners that feel right first time. This is all the more surprising in a model that signally failed in these respects when the original was launched.

The power unit is the most costly part of an all-new model and when the original Metro appeared, it had to make do with old mechanicals under its new-look body. Now, the technical bits have caught up and although little has changed in the centre section of the Metro, it really is brand-new from the wind-screen forwards. This means little change to back seat or cargo-carrying arrangements; however, the cabin has been sorted out to improve the driving position – admirably so.

The latest Metros have the Rover 214's new K-Series engine (with four- or five-speed gearbox) in 8-valve 1.1- or 1.4-litre sizes. This lower range L with five gears (an optional extra) proved average for performance and really special in terms of smoothness and quietness, but was a let-down in our fuel consumption tests. The four-speed version won't be much different in mpg, but its lower top ratio makes it feel fussier at the motorway limit and

rather less flexible around town. This affability in slow traffic means smooth 30mph pull-aways in fifth, if you wish, although pulling power feels distinctly lethargic until 3000rpm is reached. Even then, the 1.1 feels somewhat restricted and breathless in response to hard pressure on the accelerator, but it's really sweet at high revs.

Only minor hang-ups afflict the otherwise light and precise gearchange, but occasionally, mild clumsiness caused the engine to stall; part of the trouble is that it ticks over so quietly!

The Hydragas suspension has been retained, with front to rear interconnection re-introduced. Results fully justify the move, for although the 65-Series radials thump prominently at times, the ride is generally very smooth and even, with or without a good load aboard. Steering changes include lower gearing, which retains pleasing lightness of response when bend-swinging or merely parking; at first, however, it feels vague from straight-ahead, but underlying agility and accuracy of line are excellent. It all adds up to a small car that may not possess the smoothest ride or the sharpest cornering in its class, but it does offer an impressive measure of both at the same time.

Out on the road, this new Metro 1.1 is a much

Living with the Metro . . .

better longer-journey car than before. You now feel really comfortable behind the wheel, noise is dramatically reduced and the provision of good heating, ventilation and luggage/oddments space lessens the small-car feeling. Yet it is a small car – 8in shorter than the Fiesta, for example – with all the nimbleness and unfraught parking potential of its predecessor. If you prefer more compactness outside rather than ultimate space inside, it could be the obvious choice. It's certainly a pleasure to drive, nowadays.

Pity about the fuel consumption, though.

At the Wheel

Driving position

The features that made the previous Metro a real pain on longer journeys have been sorted out at last. The seat, pedals and wheel are much more in line, thanks to subtle changes to the wheelarches, and a jointed steering column means a better wheel position. Seats borrowed from bigger Rovers, with backrest rake adjusters even on the basic C version, plus a couple of inches extra rearward travel, add up to an extremely comfortable drive.

Controls and displays

The carefully moulded facia isn't radically changed, but the clear instruments proved commendably accurate. Only the dim clock and a speedometer needle that is too short raised complaints. The push-button minor switches are masked by the wheel and, unlike the 214/216's, this wheel's centre boss doesn't operate the horn. The pedal pads are set low and the accelerator is too close to the brake for bigger feet, but anyone who has driven an early Metro will be amazed at the improvements to the gearchange and clutch action. Nevertheless, this gearbox does occasionally 'catch' between gear slots – usually into first from rest.

Vision

The combination of the car's size and its boxy rear-end make reversing a doddle, and the rear washer action is particularly effective. At the other end, we missed an intermittent wiper action (not available on 1.1 cars unless you opt for central locking!), but there are easy-to-set headlamp beam trimmers under the bonnet. The interior mirror gives a restricted view and the L's outside mirrors have no interior adjusters – irritating shortcomings.

Space & Comfort

Seating

The centre cell of the Metro remains virtually unaltered. Because the front seats go farther back, rear room can appear worse – but it's unchanged really. Kneeroom is the more limiting dimension and the back seat profile isn't exactly pampering. Overall, however, smaller passengers manage reasonably well.

Getting in and out

This remains a problem for the less agile, because the three-door's seats have simple tilting backrests. Even on the five-door the sunken floor and obtrusive door sills cause difficulties. It's easy to kick the plastic covers off the seat hinge mechanism as well, while struggling out of the back. The sill treads are vulnerable, too.

Luggage and oddments stowage

The Metro pioneered the asymmetrically split back seat and this is fitted to all except the C version. Load length is not massive, but there's good protection from sliding cargo and the load cover fits flush and secure against the backrest. There's a 9in load sill, but good load height inside – in fact, it's a much better, regularly shaped cargo space than its smaller-than-average outside dimensions might imply. Oddments spaces are provided by roomy door bins and that flat facia shelf (covered by a non-skid mat)

that is now a valuable feature of all Rovers – ideal for coffee cups.

Interior trim and equipment

This L betrayed some cheap and unworthy interior details, such as crinkly plastic rear side trims, with too many grommets and too much painted metal on view. On the other hand, its more fundamental changes to the cabin have made a big difference to the Metro's civility.

Heating and ventilating

Here is a good case in point: this system is an object lesson to a lot of Oriental and Continental car makers on how to provide both heat and fresh air at the same time – and with easy-to-fathom controls. The absence of rear footwell warmth is a justifiable criticism, but otherwise it's a super set-up with four-shot ventilation even on the cheapest version.

Money Matters

Fuel economy

The 1.1 is a lovely, smooth quiet engine with a respectable turn of speed when required. It comes as a real disappointment to discover that, in mpg terms, it's worse than the venerable A+ Series, fitted until now; we obtained 43mpg on the last 1.0- and 1.3-litre Metros with their four-speed gearboxes.

The table reveals that the 1.1 five-speed's thirst moderates markedly in quiet driving; 45mpg is the target overall consumption these days, so the little Metro has some way to go to match the best in class. A reliable fuel gauge makes amends for having no low-level lamp, but the smallish tank still needs filling station stops rather too often. It takes its diet of unleaded to within three litres of brim-full without a hiccup.

Servicing

This new K8 power unit looks less demanding than most, in terms of routine attentions; let's hope that it proves reliable in service. The manual-choke SU carburettor is

PERFORMANCE

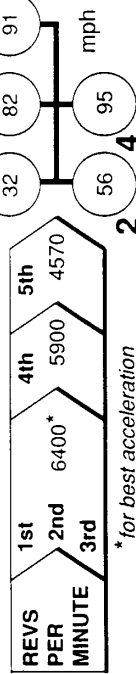
Acceleration

time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph	4.2	0-60mph	14.5	1/4 mile	20.0
THROUGH THE GEARS	30	40	50	60	70	
	2.7	5.9	10.2	16.5	16.5	
IN 5TH GEAR	8.0	16.6	26.5	39.0		
IN 4TH GEAR	5.6	11.6	18.0	26.4		

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
	16.9/11.7	18.5/12.4	22.4/14.8		
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES					

Maximum speeds



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade for tests: Unleaded Premium – 95 octane

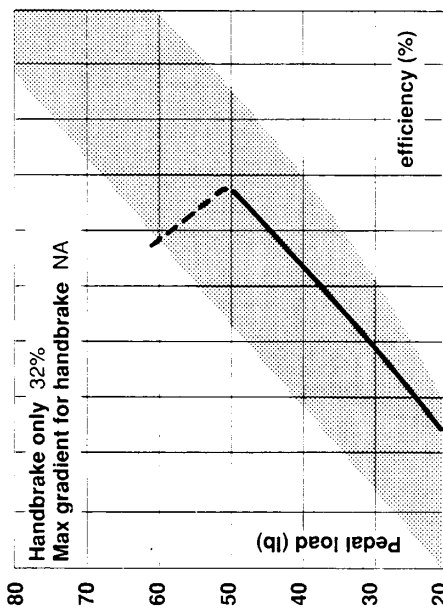
Normal range	mpg	33
Hard driving, heavy traffic		31 1/2
Short journeys in the suburbs		42 1/2
Motorway – 70mph cruising		40
Brisk driving, mixed roads		50 1/2
Gentle driving – rural roads		41 1/2
Typical mpg overall		30 litres/275 miles
Realistic tank range*		

* based on gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience

SAFETY

Brakes

How pedal loads affect braking



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. When the curve becomes broken, the wheels are skidding.

Fade test

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

Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)

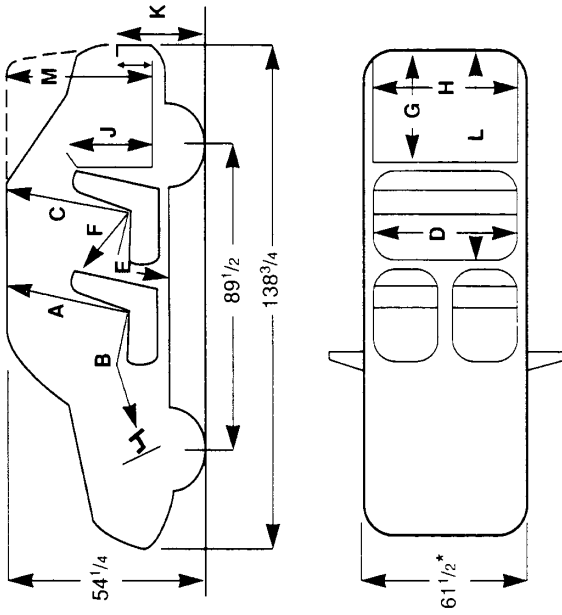
At start of test	42
After constant use	42
After severe use	46
After watersplash	NA
Number of stops to recover	NA

Safety check list

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

MEASUREMENTS

Dimensions (inches)



* with mirrors folded

Inside (inches)

A Front headroom (with sunroof)	38 (37)	G Load length	1848
B Front legroom (min - max)	32 1/2-41	H Load floor width (min - max)	20
C Rear headroom	35	J Load height	40-48 1/2
D Back seat width (between armrests)	49 (46 for 4-door)	K Sill height (inner/outer)	19 1/2
E Typical rear * legroom	37 3/4	L Load length	10/24
F Typical rear * kneeroom	24 1/2	M Load height (to tailgate hinge)	44 1/2
			35 1/2

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

very reliable, and hydraulic tappets, breakerless distributor and a camshaft belt claimed to last 100,000 miles, all look encouraging to those worried about service costs. In fact, servicing is scheduled to take half the time needed on the old A-Series cars. Some items are best reached from below, but otherwise the eight-valved K-Series looks quite attractive from a DIY viewpoint.

Warranty and insurance

The six-year Rover anti-rust warranty requires annual dealer checks to keep it in force, but these are not chargeable if they coincide with routine servicing. A three-year paintwork (cosmetic) warranty is now included, too. Group 2 insurance applies to 1.1 versions.

Value for money

The Metro L is really the natural successor to the old City X, or a rival to a Fiesta Popular Plus or Nova Merit. As such, it's priced on a par with these and matches their trim and equipment levels. The cheaper C version and the nicely 'complete' S version, with central locking, flank this L's compromise approach, with £2000 or so separating these two extremes – which is a lot for essentially the same car.

Safety

Accident avoidance

Once you're accustomed to the less immediate steering response from straight-ahead compared with the old Metro or Mini, the new 1.1 litre proves just as stable, with progressive understeer and no nasty sting in the tail.

The brakes' ultimate stopping power proved mediocre on the Dunlop SP9s fitted to our test car,

but progressive servo assistance up to that point proved to be ideal and fade resistance is exemplary.

Injury prevention

The Metro's roof padding and front seatbelts left something to be desired, especially on this three-door – the fixed shoulder anchorage, sited well back, chafed too many necks to be popular. Outside, the new fuel filler location leaves us worried about fuel spillage following a side-swipe. The steering wheel and column design have impeccable safety credentials, however.

Security

The stiff tailgate release has its own keyhole, but there's no interior release latch for the tailgate or fuel cap. The back seat tilt-levers are in the boot, below the load cover. The Metro's new

wiring and fusing arrangements include a fusible link near the battery – a reassuring feature to prevent a major wiring burn-out.

Durability

Build quality

The old Metro suffered from more serious rusting than Fiestas and Novas; perhaps this gives added point to the new zinc-coating of all doors (including the tailgate) and wings. Wheelarch liners are also fitted to prevent mud from accumulating. In other aspects, too, it's clear that the new Metro has been developed where it matters, rather than where it shows. One immediate benefit is the use of colour-toned plastic bumper/spoilers – they look fit to handle parking nudges and stone chipping, and emerge unscathed.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, transverse 4 in line; water-cooled. 75mm bore x 63mm stroke = 1120cc. All-alloy; 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 9.75:1

Valve gear belt-driven, single overhead camshaft, actuating two valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel system SU-Hobourn variable-venturi carburettor (with manual choke) fed by mechanical pump from 35.4-litre (7.8-gallon) tank; no low-level warning lamp. Fuel required: leaded or unleaded, 95 octane minimum

Ignition system coil and breakerless distributor with mechanical advance

Max power (DIN-net) 60bhp at 6000rpm

Max torque (DIN-net) 66 lb ft at 3500rpm

TRANSMISSION

Clutch diaphragm-spring,

dry plate; cable-operated.

Pedal load/travel: 20 lb/5¹/₂in

Gearbox optional 5-speed fitted to test car. Ratios: first 3.42, second 1.95, third 1.33, fourth 1.05, top 0.85 and reverse 3.58:1

Final drive 3.56:1 to front wheels

Mph per 1000rpm 19.9 in top

Rpm at 70mph 3520 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent wishbones, Hydragas displacers interconnected with rear.

Rear: trailing arms with Hydragas displacers.

Dampers: telescopic all round

Steering rack and pinion with 3.6 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 32ft between kerbs, with 58ft for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 4¹/₂J steel with 155/65 R13 tyres (Dunlop SP9 on test car)

Brakes 9¹/₂in plain discs front, 7in drums rear with vacuum servo

HOW IT COMPARES

	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Max speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel overall (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom – front (in)	Typical leg/kneeroom – rear (in)	Steering turns/circle (ft)	Overall length (in)
Rover Metro 1.1L (5-speed)	1120/60	95	16.5	39.0/26.4	41 ¹ / ₂	87/50	41	37 ³ / ₄ /24 ¹ / ₂	3.6/32	138 ³ / ₄
Ford Fiesta 1.1 Popular Plus (5-speed)	1118/54	91	19.1	41.0/27.5	45 ¹ / ₂	86/50	41	37 ¹ / ₂ /28 ¹ / ₂	4.2/32 ³ / ₄	147 ¹ / ₂
Peugeot 205 1.1XR	1124/55	95	15.1	39.0/24.5	43	96/40	40 ¹ / ₂	36 ³ / ₄ /26 ¹ / ₂	3.7/33 ¹ / ₄	145 ³ / ₄
Citroen AX 11TRS	1124/55	97	14.2	31.6/22.1	47 ¹ / ₂	97/60	40 ¹ / ₄	36/25 ¹ / ₂	3.5/30	138
Fiat Uno 60S	1108/57	95	15.8	36.2/24.8	46	87/35	40	39/26 ¹ / ₂	4/31	145 ¹ / ₄