TEST UPDATE May 1992

AA Car Test

R9217A

Supplements R9046

Rover Metro 1.4GTa 16v

What's different?

The Rover 214's catalysed, single-point fuel injected engine, fitted into what's otherwise an ordinary Metro with S trim and equipment. It has an anti-roll bar and lower-profile tyres, but lacks the GTi's sports suspension and spoiler and skirt treatment.

THE GTA COULD EASILY BE VIEWED AS an unsatisfactory compromise between the everyday 1.1 and the extrovert GTi. With 90bhp under the bonnet, it loses 13bhp to the current GTi. Our report R9112A was of the previous version, it should be noted, although our comments about the rest of the test car are still up to date and valid.

In fact, we really took to this GTa because it transforms the Metro's straight line acceleration, yet doesn't compromise the lesser versions' ride comfort and mechanical refinement one iota. Indeed, over coarse asphalt, there seems to be less tyre noise than with the 1.1S, and the slightly lower gearing of the GTa is detectable only on the tachometer, not on the ear. It rides country roads demurely two-up, although a full load compromises the composure of all Metros to a noticeable extent.

The Pirelli 185/55 x 13in P600 tyres give impressive extra grip through wet corners and the emergency stopping power is enhanced, as well. Fade is still a problem in arduous repeated use. Braking demands quite high pedal loads by modern standards, but this makes it easier to brake hard without skidding, and the servo gives alert response in ordinary check braking.

Inside the GTa, only the different seat fabric and the tachometer differentiate this version from an S version. In fact, as with the S, you have to pay extra for central locking and a variable intermittent wipe.

The Metro's driving seat can feel too low and place too much weight on the lower spinal region of some smaller drivers. The situation can be cured by adding washers to raise the seat cushion at the back or front. It's proved so effective on a long-term test car that

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PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

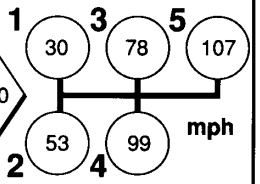
STANDING START	0-30mph	0-60mph	¼ mile
	3.4	10.3	18.0

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS	1.9	4.0	6.9		10.5
IN 5TH GEAR	5.7	11.4	17.4		23.8
IN 4TH GEAR	4.0	8.2	12.4		16.8

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES	11.5/8.3		11.7/8.4		
		11.4/8.2			12.4/8.6

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
	6500*			6500	5700



*for best acceleration

FUEL CONSUMPTION

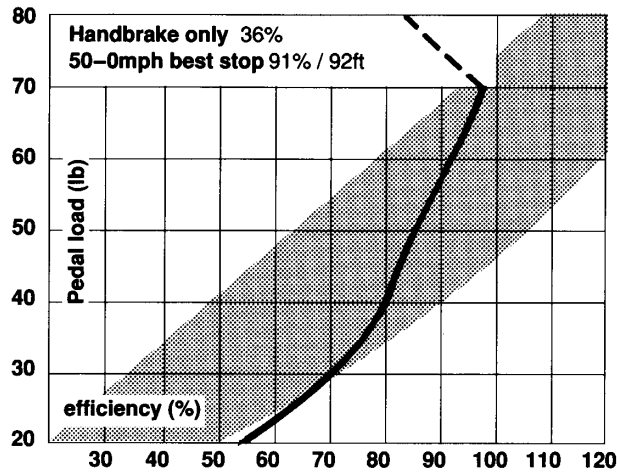
Fuel grade for tests: unleaded Premium /95 octane

Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	32
Short journeys in the suburbs	31½
Motorway – 70mph cruising	38
Brisk driving, mixed roads	39½
Gentle driving – rural roads	46½
Typical mpg overall	**39**
Realistic tank range*	29 litres/250 miles

*based on gauge 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 – 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.)

Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)

38	At start of test
38	After constant use
77	After severe use
80	After watersplash
3	Number of stops to recover

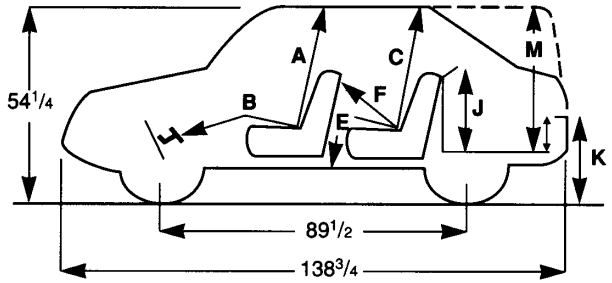
Safety check list

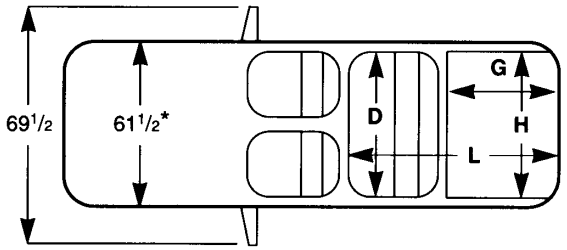
Steering true 'feel' of the road?	✔
Brakes powerful?	✔
sensible effort?	✔
fade resistant?	✘
Seatbelts front – effective?	✔
convenient?	✘
rears – effective?	✔
convenient?	✘
Head restraints front– effective?	✔
rear – effective?	✘
Interior thoroughly padded?	✘
Fuel shielded filler?	✔†
protected tank?	✔

†unshielded on three-door model

MEASUREMENTS

Dimensions (inches)





*with mirrors folded

Inside (inches)

(figures in brackets with front seat raised)

Kerb weight in lb (full of fuel): 2000

A Front headroom	38(36¼)	**G** Load length	20½
B Front legroom (min - max)	32½-41	**H** Load floor width	40-48½
C Rear headroom	35	**J** Load height	19
D Back seat width (between armrests)	46	**K** Sill height (inner/outer)	9½/24½
E Typical rear * legroom	37½	**L** Load length	44½
F Typical rear * kneeroom	24½(25)	**M** Load height (to tailgate hinge)	35¾

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

would-be buyers should know about it. Something harder to remedy is radio interference. We suspect that the aerial is inadequate on Metros, as we've met this problem on several test cars.

In view of the vastly improved acceleration, a 6 per cent loss of fuel economy is a modest price to pay, especially as it's unleaded-only on the environmentally friendly GTa. Getting the stuff in isn't too easy, however, and the limited tank range and omission of a low level lamp only add fuel to the fire, so to speak.

We like the Metro. It's not the best small car for tall families, and the asking price of this version (which is nearly twice as much as the cheapest Metro currently on offer) is a bit steep. Nevertheless, if its accommodation fits your needs, the GTa offers a subtle combination of added dynamic zest without any discernible sacrifice to the commendable comfort and refinement of the "non-sporting" versions. You can't say that about the GTi, so we think this GTa offers the best of both worlds.

HOW IT COMPARES

Catalysers fitted to all test cars

	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 Metro 1.4GTa 16v	**1396/90**	**107**	**10.5**	**23.8/16.8**	**39**	**97/70**	**41**	**37½/24½**	**3.4/35**	**138¾**
Honda Civic VEi	1493/89	110	11.5	32.3/23.0	44	102/35	44	36¾/26	3.5/33¾ (p)	160½
Citroën AX GTi	1360/97	115	8.7	23.7/16.2	37	89/50*	41	36½/27	3.7/34	138½
VW Polo GT	1272/74	107	10.9	23.1/16.0	42½	94/45	41	37½/27	3.6/31	148¼
Rover 214Si	1396/90	102	13.0	30.9/21.4	36	90/35	42½	38½/27¼	3.5/34½ (p)	166¼

*ABS fitted (p) = power-assisted

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, transverse 4 in line; water-cooled. 75mm bore x 79mm stroke = 1396cc. Aluminium alloy block and head; 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 9.5:1

Valve gear belt-driven double overhead camshafts actuating four valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel system electronic single-point fuel injection, 3-way regulated catalyser, lambda sensor. 35½-litre (7¾-gallon) tank; no low level lamp. Fuel required: unleaded only, 95 octane minimum

Ignition system fully programmed electronic, integrated with fuel injection via coil and contactless distributor

Maximum power (DIN-net) 90bhp at 6250rpm

Maximum torque (DIN-net) 88 lb ft at 4000rpm

TRANSMISSION

Clutch 7½in dry plate, diaphragm-spring; cable operated. Pedal load/travel 23 lb/5¼in

Gearbox 5-speed (all synchromesh) and reverse. Ratios: first 3.42, second 1.95, third 1.33, fourth 1.05, fifth 0.85 and reverse 3.58:1

Final drive 3.76:1, to front wheels

Mph per 1000rpm 18.8 in top, 15.2 in 4th

Rpm at 70mph 3730 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent wishbones with Hydragas displacers (front to rear interconnection) and an anti-roll bar. Rear: independent trailing arms with Hydragas displacers – no anti-roll bar. Dampers: telescopic all round

Steering unassisted rack and pinion with 3.4 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 35ft between kerbs, with 57ft circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5½in steel, optional alloys on test car with 185/55R13H tyres (Pirelli P600 on test car)

Brakes 9½in solid discs front, 7in drums rear, with vacuum servo