

Rover Metro 1.4 Automatic



WHEN WE TESTED THE METRO Si Automatic last year (see report R9323), it had notched up just over 4000 miles. We had the chance to keep the car for longer term evaluation and to assess its reliability. What we didn't expect, however, was an improvement in both performance and economy as the miles mounted. We wondered if the reason was that the transmission's special belt had freed off, so reducing friction. Rover thought not, but couldn't come up with an explanation.

Anyway, the accompanying tables show that the CVT now gets closer than a gnat's whisker to the results we obtained on the 1.4 manual tested in 1990 (see R9063). It only serves to confirm the mechanical efficiency of this sort of transmission. We also confirmed that the tendency to snatch pullaways from rest, especially embarrassing when parking (and complained of so vociferously in some journals, including *Which?*), has been dealt with by a series of modifications to the 'box and its electronic control unit.

With a smoother gear selector and accelerator linkage, too, 1994 models no longer have to apologise for using a simple centrifugal clutch (similar to a Honda moped's). It's a pity that it wasn't sorted out before the CVT Metro's launch, two years ago.

Our tables show that merely pressing the accelerator to the floor in D is all that's required for a rapid standing start. On the move, selecting L in anticipation,

does give slightly better overtaking response, but in both situations we're only talking about half a second.

Some people object to the way that automatics (CVTs especially) sometimes seem to have a mind of their own, revving the engine when you don't really feel it's called for. The Metro's continuously variable gearing control is good in this respect; initial accelerator pressure after steady speed cruising allows the engine note and speed to remain steady – as if a lock-up clutch were operating. The other beauty of the CVT system is the delightfully low 2000–3000rpm rate the engine maintains when cruising in the mid-range up to 70mph – it's very restful.

Tyre talk

On the road, the only real disadvantage of the CVT Metro Si is its extra steering effort – this 'box weighs 75 lb more than the manual version. We found that manoeuvring effort is easier on the L model's 155/65 tyres on narrower rims (as reported before), but with the help of Goodyear, we took this one stage farther and tried 145/70 GTs on the test car, the sort found on some Fiestas and Corsas.

The result is a further reduction in steering effort, with no serious compromise to braking or cornering grip. Indeed, the progression and accompanying steering feel, as nose drift sets in on a wet roundabout, say, is a real asset. Within reason, earlier breakaway-with-gradualness,

Rover Metro 1.4 Automatic (5 door)

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration in Low/Drive time in seconds

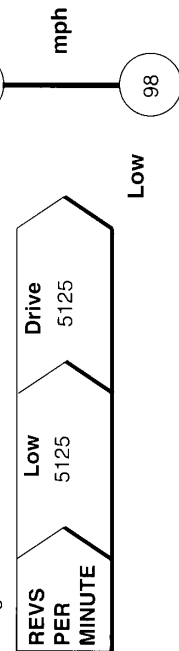
STANDING START	0-30mph 4.4/4.2	0-60mph 12.9/12.5	1/4 mile 19.3/19.2
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mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE RATIOS		2.2/2.6	4.8/5.2	8.3/8.7	13.1/13.5

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
SPEED RANGES USING KICKDOWN		-/3.6	4.8/5.2	6.1/6.4	8.3/8.5

Maximum speeds

using accelerator kickdown



FUEL CONSUMPTION

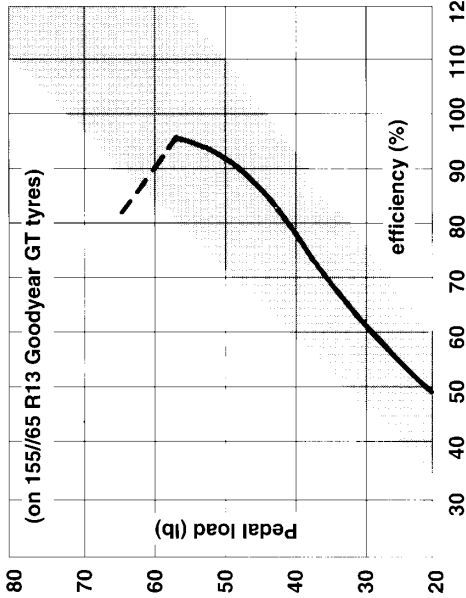
Fuel grade for tests: unleaded Premium, 95 octane

Normal range	mpg	29 1/2
Hard driving, heavy traffic		
Short journeys in the suburbs		32 1/2
Motorway - 70mph cruising		37 1/2
Brisk driving, mixed roads		41
Gentle driving, rural roads		46
Typical mpg overall		39
Realistic tank range*		28 litres/240 miles

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

SAFETY

Brakes (without ABS) How pedal loads affect braking



Braking efficiency shown as a percentage of gravity (ie 100% = 1.0g). Ideally the braking curve should be a gentle sweep and lie within the shaded zone of this graph. If it's above, the brakes are too heavy; if it's below, they are too light - although this is more acceptable on cars with ABS. When the curve becomes broken, the wheels are skidding.

50-0mph best stop

89% / 93ft

Handbrake only

36%

Fade test

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

Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)

At start of test

36

After constant use

38

After severe use

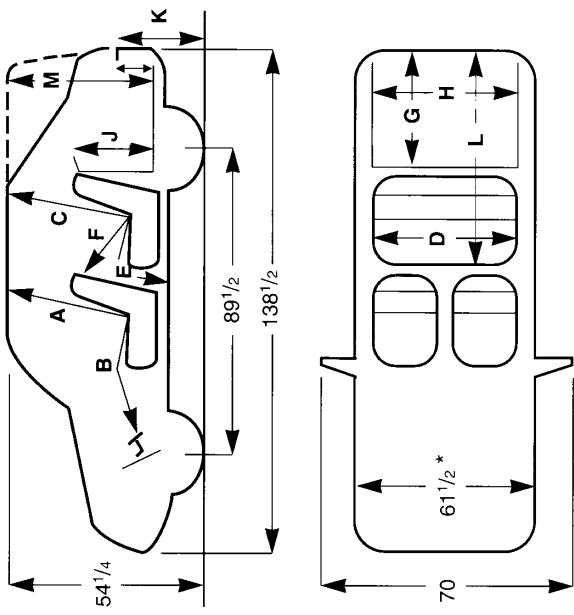
66

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	(5-door only) shielded filler?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	protected tank?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

MEASUREMENTS

Dimensions (inches)



* with mirrors folded

Inside (inches)

(Figures in brackets with front seat raised)

A Front headroom	38(36 1/4)	G Load length	20 1/4
B Front legroom (min - max)	32 1/2-41	H Load floor width (min - max)	40-48 1/2
C Rear headroom	35	J Load height	19
D Back seat width (between armrests)	46 (49 on 3-door)	K Sill height (inner/outer)	9 1/2/24 1/2
E Typical rear * legroom	37 1/2	L Load length	44 1/2
F Typical rear * kneeroom	24 1/2(25)	M Load height (to tailgate hinge)	35 3/4

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

1990

Today's model is a lot more complicated, but has proved totally reliable under the bonnet, and virtually fault-free on both delivery and in service. These are the milestones:

Date (1993)	Mileage	Problem	Remedy
February	800	Small paint blemishes including tailgate edge and bonnet. Headlamps set too low	Aim reset
March	2000	Boot lamp erratic Rain leak into offside rear door, top edge	New bulb fitted Closure of frame adjusted
June	5700	Brake pedal creak Wiper blades judder	Linkage lubricated Replaced with Bosch blades
August	6800	Washer jet aim low Driver's seat rake adjuster becoming stiff	Jet unblocked
September	7400	Rattles from tailgate Air cleaner intake spout misaligned Driver's seat cushion sagging Gear selector stiff	Latch reset, wiper motor wiring packed with foam and trim refitted Pawl lubricated
October	10,000	Carpet blocking heater footwell vents	Refitted properly

is safer than faster-with-abruptness – for non-rally drivers, at least!

Anyway, with some signs of additional improvement to the lower speed ride over broken surfaces, as well as those lighter steering inputs, petite or disabled drivers will find the tyre swap a real help, in the absence of a power-assisted Metro CVT.

How reliable?

Getting away from all this tyre talk, how reliable has the Metro been over a 12,000-mile year? In a word – very. How hard it is now to recall the problematic Metros of a decade ago. We started our Rover reliability evaluation (when the company was called something else) with a 1.0-litre A+ Series Metro – and had our fair share of troubles.

There's no doubt that Rover's reliability is far better than it was 10 years ago. This is actually more difficult to achieve in a then-and-now model like the Metro, than with a "new-systems" design such as the 600. Rover has managed it, however, and hopefully the current Metro will resist corrosion better in 8 to 10 years' time, as well. Oil consumption has been virtually negligible between the 6000-mile oil changes – another advance over the old A-Series Metro. In spite of its unremarkable fuel efficiency, this eight-valve K-Series unit is a gem to drive. How Ford must covet this Rover asset for its small-car range!

In daily use, the remote-control central locking/ alarm is another Metro asset. It's so powerful that it will operate in your pocket; be careful you don't unlock the doors again unwittingly as you walk away! Current Metros aren't cheap in terms of interior space for the price asked, but they do have these extra equipment items, combined with that undeniable aura of interior good taste that even painted door pillars

can't undermine. Deeper front seats are popular, especially with those with sensitive backs, and we'll remind you again that they can be raised or the cushion-tilt altered by adding spacing washers on the runners – shorter drivers can find the seats rather low, with too much thigh support, otherwise. Si details include the tactile steering wheel and a tachometer that proves particularly useful on the CVT, to monitor what the transmission is up to.

Where the Metro lags behind, is in having no airbag option or door beams, and no adjustable-height seatbelts or pretensioners. It loses in injury prevention what it gains in terms of vehicle security, compared with some later arrivals on the small-car scene.

VERDICT

Dated though it may be in some respects, this Metro Automatic remains a trendsetter in matters of mechanical design and road manners. Both in terms of power train and suspension, the Metro CVT is a revelation in small-car refinement, with more smoothness and hush than anything else in this market sector. This makes it ideal in town or over longer distances for two plus luggage.

There's no denying that newcomers like the Corsa and Punto offer more space, but one could argue that the externally smaller Metro isn't really competing with these. Instead, it's located as the precursor of that now sub-compact group of cars already joined by the Fiat Cinquecento and Renault Twingo, as well as the Mira/Vivio sisters from the Orient – and there are more to come.

If you want your quality to come in a really small parcel, there's an awful lot to be said for the Metro. With looks to match its ways, no one would be writing it off as a has-been.