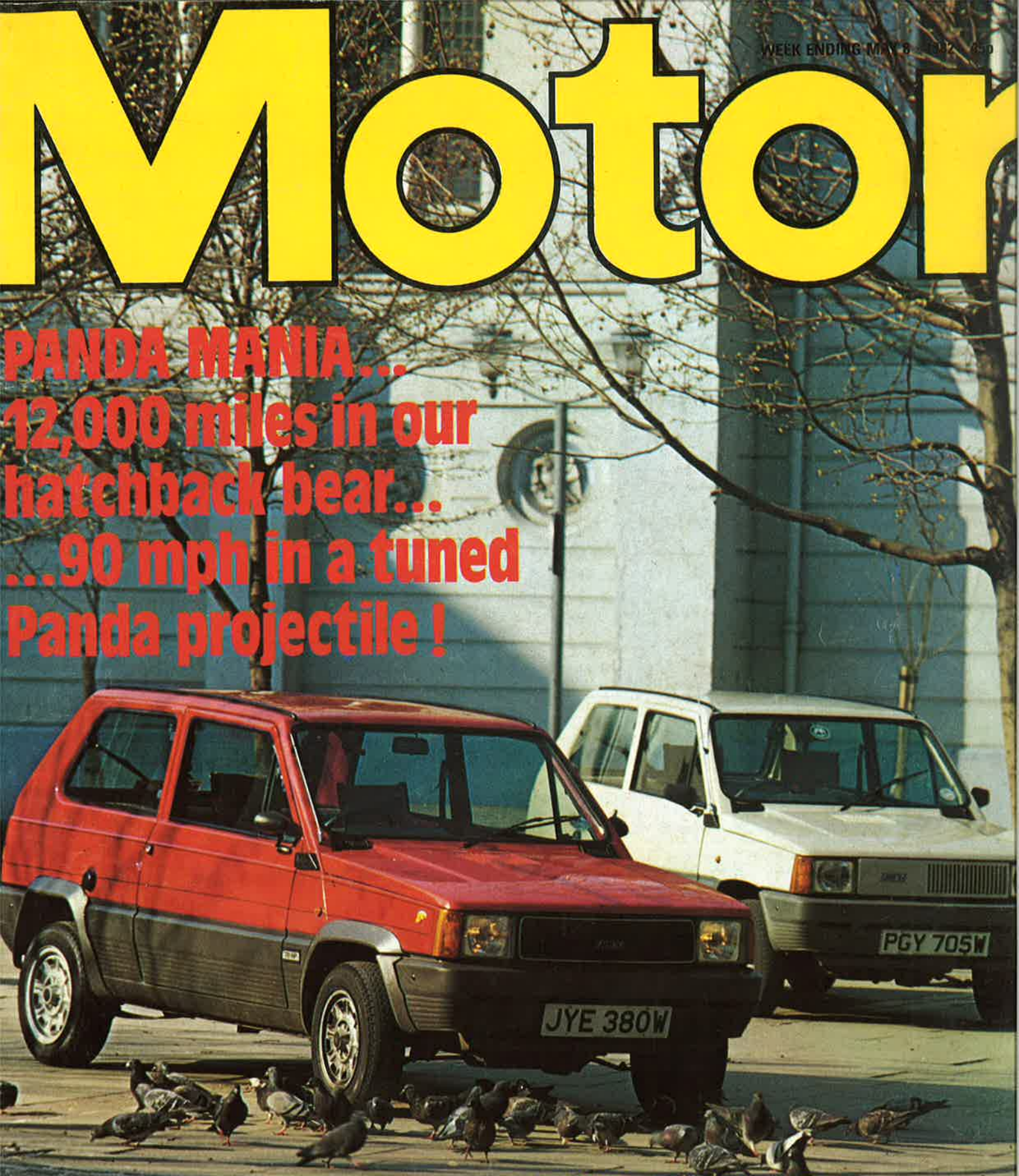
WEEK ENDING MAY 8 1982 65p

Motor

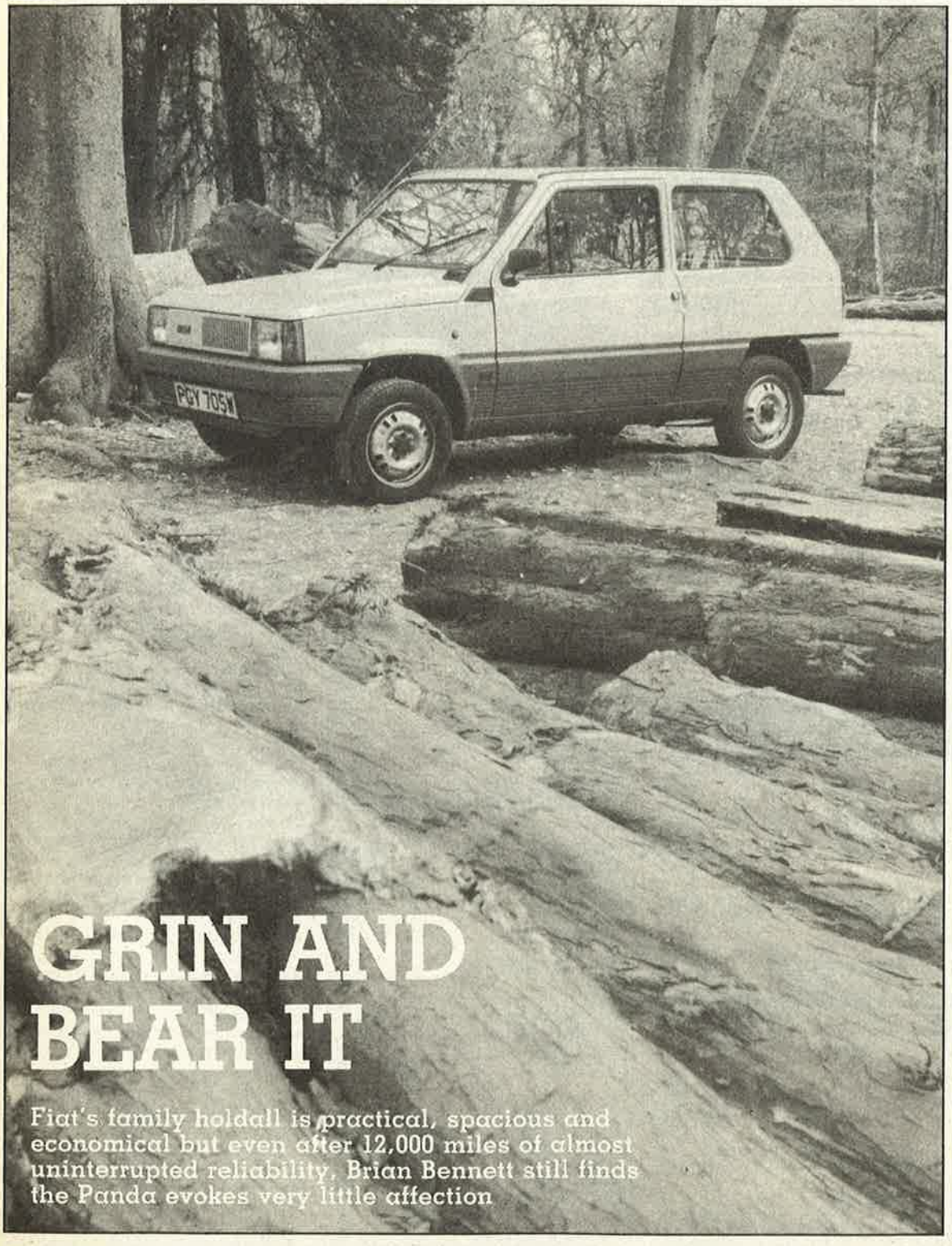
PANDA MANIA... 12,000 miles in our hatchback bear... ...90 mph in a tuned Panda projectile !



OUR NEW-CAR DATABANK, PART 4

Colt's new Porsche chaser... turbo Starion Coupe tested

12,000MilesOn



GRIN AND BEAR IT

Fiat's family holdall is practical, spacious and economical but even after 12,000 miles of almost uninterrupted reliability, Brian Bennett still finds the Panda evokes very little affection

THE HUGE investment required design and engineer a new car for t mass market is in danger of begettin wealth of stereotyped Eurocars almo indistinguishable one from the oth Any car that deviates even slightly fro the mainstream comes as a breath fresh air and, if nothing else, t shoebox-like Fiat Panda stands out a refreshingly original design.

At the start of the Panda project ("Zero", as it was code-named) F gave Giorgio Guigiaro a fairly ope ended brief to produce a design whic while being simple and compa would still offer good interior space a versatility at the lowest possible co but without forfeiting style and aesth tic values. His radical approach h resulted in a distinctive car which h entirely flat glass areas and uses minimum number of separate bo pressings in order to simplify produ tion and save weight.

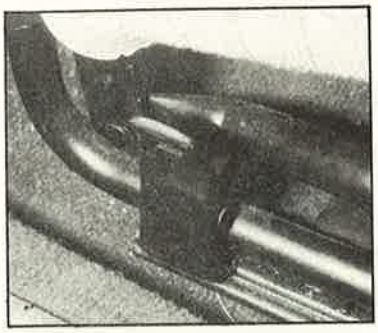
Inside, the Panda is just as novel. has slim seats which make maximu use of interior space and a rear se that can be arranged to fulfil a numb of different purposes. Emphasising t practical aspect of the design much the interior trim, including the se covers, is removable and washable.

If these solutions successfully me the design brief outlined above th Fiat should be commended for allo ing Giugiaro to work on a relatively lo leash. As cheap, basic transport t Panda is a qualified success, but some areas it is clear that it doesn meet the standards set by the best the current superminis.

As the instigator of the supermi boom with their 127 — which h forced every major European manufa turer of family cars to follow the sam formula — Fiat must be well aware these standards. Indeed, considerin the 127's record of being the bes selling car in Europe for six of the la 10 years it might be considered th Fiat set the standards that others ha had to match or exceed.

By dint of its transverse engin front-wheel drive configuration, over length of just over 11ft and three-do hatchback bodyshell, the Panda has the classic supermini credentials ar yet it is not a replacement for the 12 It fits into the Fiat range above t rear-engined 126 — which, in practic terms, is little more than an abou town runabout — and alongside t cheapest model in the 127 rang which, in the UK, sells for just £40 mo

Slim front seats are more comfortable than they look. The stiff, metal release catch (below right) is not so clever, though, while the bar adjustment for the recline mechanism needs to be used with care



than the Panda.

On the Continent there is a two-cylinder Panda using the 126 engine, but the only model imported into the UK is the Panda 45 fitted with the well-proven 903cc 127 drive-train. Unique for the British market is a higher final-drive ratio intended to improve economy and provide more refined high-speed cruising. In other respects the Panda is similar to its Continental stablemates, with MacPherson strut front suspension, a dead rear axle located and suspended by twin leaf springs, rack and pinion steering, and braking by a disc front/drum rear set up without servo-assistance but with a load-proportioning valve to inhibit rear wheel locking.

When first introduced to the UK market last June the Panda 45 was right down in the bargain basement, at £2,860 — which left it with few direct rivals in terms of price. Since then, its cost has soared to a much more substantial £3,230. Competitors costing less than the Panda are now numerous and include such notables as the Mini City (£2,999); a batch of two-cylinder Citroëns in the form of the 2CVs (£2,285-£2,745), the Dyane (£2,798) and the Visa Special (£2,995); the Daihatsu Domino (£2,799); the Suzuki Alto FX (£2,875) and SC100 (£2,899); the Talbot Samba 1.0 LE (£2,995); and the low-priced East European saloons such as FSOs, Ladas, Skodas, and Zastavas.

Some of the above, particularly the new Samba, provide the Panda with very stiff opposition and if the comparison is extended to include cars of similar price rather than type, then further, very capable, rivals are brought to light. These include the Metro City (£3,249), Daihatsu Charade (£3,299), Datsun Cherry (£3,280), Ford Fiesta Popular (£3,255), Hyundai Pony 1200 T (£3,117) Peugeot 104 ZL (£3,298) and the Renault 4 TL (£3,199).

ON DELIVERY

Before very few miles had been added to the 46 already logged on delivery, our beige Panda had been re-christened "Piggy", by virtue of its registration. As it turned out this was one of the more complimentary terms applied to our Panda, despite its faithful service as it plodded on towards the 12,000 mile mark.

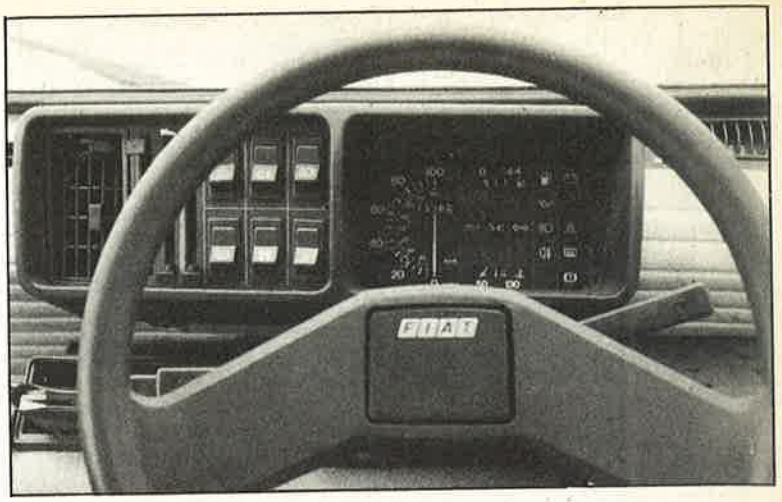
There were no specific problems that could be classed as delivery faults but a number of niggly points illustrated the Panda's mediocre finish and build quality. Slight dents on the roof and front wing (this looking as if it was caused by the passenger's door being opened too wide) were noticeable but not of sufficient significance for us to seek rectification. Underseal was beginning to peel off from inside one of the rear wheel arches and evidence of the clumsy application of rustproofing compound (from the Crylagard process given to Fiats imported into the UK which qualifies them for the six-year anti-corrosion guarantee) was provided by overspray on the rear wheel arches inside the car, and by a goodly deposition of gunge on the front windows when they were wound down (and up) for the first time.

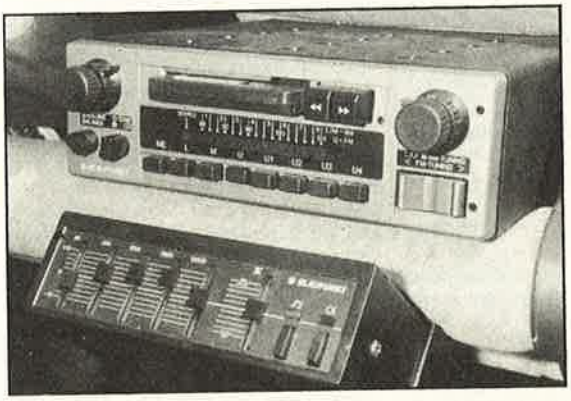
Cost-concious, or eccentric, design also played a part in creating a less than favourable first impression. The catches on the front quarter-lights are stiff enough to defy the attentions of a Rugby Union prop forward and they are matched by similarly stiff front seat release catches which do, however, have the saving grace that they can be operated by a skilfully-applied foot.

Panda owners who have just destroyed their manicure on the front quarter-lights are no doubt delighted to find that the oil dipstick is hidden *behind* the engine and although it is reasonably easy to extract, replacing it is akin to a game of Blind Man's Buff, so that by the time the dipstick's invisible little hole has been found it is inevitable that some of the engine bay muck has found its way on to the Panda user. To cap it all, if it is then in need of oil the appropriate orifice is found to be *underneath* the ignition leads emanating from the distributor cap, and spill-free topping up can only be accomplished successfully by either removing the distributor cap with its associated leads or removing each lead individually.

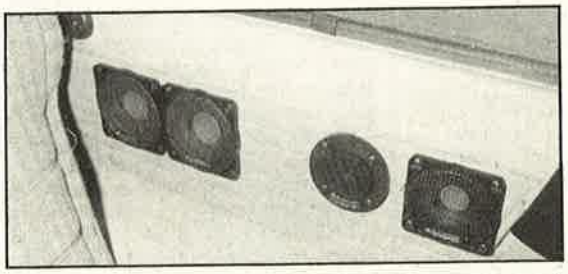
Other reactions noted down on initial acquaintance with our Panda refer to the haphazard appearance of the group of six rocker switches and their lack of night-time illumination which — even in the later stages of Panda possession — caused rear fog lamps to be operated instead of the heater blower and other unfortunate combinations. Squeaks and rattles from the seat trim and the rear shelf, respectively, were to become increasingly tiresome and only exceeded by the high levels of

continued over

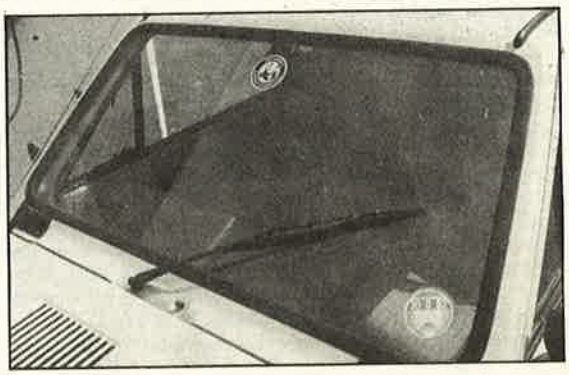




Functional control layout is let down by the lack of illumination for the array of switches. Vent next to switches can be used to supplement the fresh air vents when the heater isn't in use



Blaupunkt's superb stereo system has helped to make the Panda more bearable



Single wiper is set up for right-hand drive but still leaves a significant unwiped area in the upper corners of the screen

MOTOR LONG TERM TEST
FIAT PANDA 45

Total mileage: 12,950
When bought: June 1981
Price when bought: £2,860
Value now: £2,400

Overall mpg: 37.5
Touring mpg: 41.9
Days off road: 0
Extra visits to dealer: 0

Make: Fiat
Model: Panda 45
Maker: Fiat SpA, Corso Marconi 10, 10125 Turin, Italy
UK Concessionaires: Fiat Auto (UK) Ltd, Great West Road, Brentford, Middx TW8 9DJ Tel: 01-568 8822
Price: £2484.00 basic plus £207.00 Car Tax and £403.65 VAT equals £3094.65

★★★ **excellent** ★★ **good** ★★ **average** ★ **poor** ★ **bad**

engine, wind and road noise which seem to be an inherent feature of the Panda's design.

LIFE WITH THE PANDA

★★ As might have been gleaned from the running report already published and the first impressions noted above, "Piggy Panda" is very far from being *Motor*'s favourite long-term test car. Nevertheless, our Panda has impressed us with its reliability (a record shared, interestingly enough, by our previous long term Fiat, a Strada 75 CL) which has resulted in it having no unscheduled visits to the local Fiat zoo-keeper and (almost) never letting down whoever happened to be reluctantly using it.

The most common of feelings expressed by people driving, or just looking at, a Panda is that it has been designed and built to provide cheap, basic motoring. This is all well and good, but nowadays even cars at the bottom of the price scale are expected to attain certain basic standards and although the Panda is clearly superior to some lower-priced rivals, there are other recently-designed competitors — such as the Metro, Fiesta, Visa and the Samba — which show the Panda to be disappointingly deficient in areas such as roadholding/handling, ride, ventilation, gearchange and refinement.

In fact if Fiat really set their minds to curing these shortcomings they would be well on the way to a very competitive car, since in other (equally important) areas the Panda is as good as, or better than, its contemporaries.

Accommodation, for example, is remarkably spacious for such tiny overall dimensions, if achieved at the expense of what looks like excessively spartan seating arrangements. To put the Panda's packaging in perspective it has only 0.8 in less combined front/rear legroom than the standard-setting (and one inch longer) Austin Metro and only 1.4 cu ft less boot space as measured with *Motor*'s standard set of test luggage. This interior space is similar to many supermini rivals with an extra four to 10 in of overall length.

The much-vaunted versatility of the rear seat is not such a success, however; the poles on which the seat is hung are difficult to remove and put back in their respective slots and unless you are blessed with inordinately long (and strong) arms it is actually necessary to clamber inside the boot in order to move them about. Then it is possible to achieve the different configurations of seat, bed, hammock, front seat protection — or to remove them altogether — but after a bout with the poles most Pandaphiles will be crying out for the more usual folding rear seat arrangement found in hatchbacks. As one of our readers so succinctly put it in his reply to our owner survey: "Basic idea — good; detailed design — rotten."

Despite their emaciated appearance the seats are comfortable, even over long distances, and with the aid of the adequate fore-aft adjustment and the recline mechanism most drivers are able to find a reasonable driving position. Some care must be taken when adjusting the recline of the front seats, though, because unless the adjustment bar (mounted underneath the seat) is put firmly back in position there is a danger of the seat swinging back under pressure and unless the driver is hanging on firmly to the steering wheel he/she can quite feasibly disappear from the sight of the outside world.

When positioned correctly in his seat, however, the driver finds that all the controls fall easily to hand, or foot, with the already-mentioned proviso that the group of six rocker switches are impossible to tell apart at night. Instrumentation is basic, but provides all the necessary information and is not unattractive.

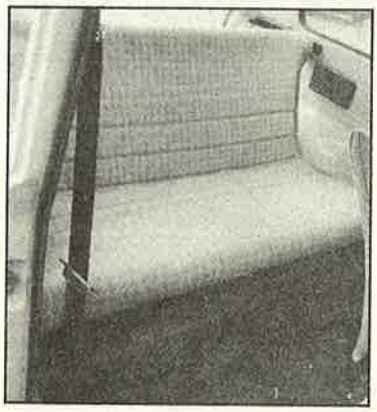
Economy is another vital area where the Panda scores high marks. Although our overall fuel consumption of 37.5 mpg merely matches that achieved with the road test Panda, and steady speed fuel consumption has deteriorated so that our long-term Panda has a touring consumption of 41.9 mpg — well down on the 45.3 mpg recorded by the test car — it is still very economical. The consumption of 37.5 mpg is in fact just midway between the two extremes so far recorded, with 34 mpg representing the nadir when the car was being used very hard and 42 mpg the fairly easily achievable zenith which less leaden-footed *Motor* staff have logged over significant mileages without resorting to exceptional driving techniques.

This level of economy is all the more creditable when it is achieved without the excessively long gearing currently in vogue. The ratios of the 4-speed gearbox are well-matched to the revvy characteristics of the 903 cc engine and help to give the Panda adequate performance when accelerating through the gears but rather leisurely acceleration in top gear (0-60 mph in 17.5 sec; 30-50 mph in top, 15.6 sec). At higher speeds the excessive noise levels make the Panda a less than pleasant car to drive in and although it can still notch up an 80+ mph maximum speed (in unfavourable testing conditions) around MIRA's banked circuit it is dispiriting to watch the speedometer needle drop as "Piggy" clambers up only moderate motorway gradients against a head wind.

A combination of factors conspire to relegate the Panda to no more than a capable town car, the main drawback to its use around town only being the poor gearchange. It is rubbery, vague and notchy. A common occurrence for drivers not used to the Panda's gearbox is to select third rather than first (and not be aware of this until actually trying to move away from rest) while for all drivers the selection of reverse is often a procedure involving a good deal of energy and not a little faith and hope.

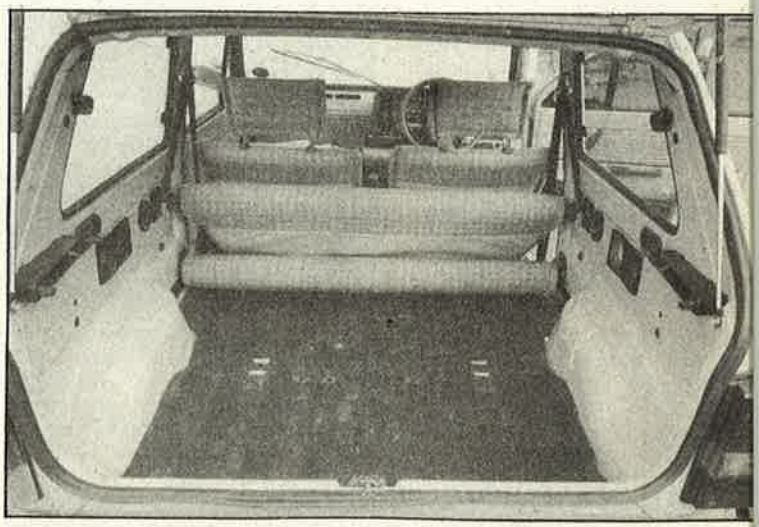
Around town the Panda's boxy shape and generous glazed areas make it easy to see out of, and place, in traffic and its nippy low-speed handling and reasonably tight turning circle give it a pronounced advantage over larger more ponderous vehicles. At higher speeds along bumpy country roads it is much less secure, however, displaying only mediocre grip combined with strong understeer and giving a generally unsettled feeling exemplified by its tendency to be thrown off line by road irregularities. This feeling is reinforced by the poor ride quality, which is obviously not helped by the firmish seating, and on all but well-made surfaces the Panda's occupants are given what can be best described as a good shaking up.

At speeds encountered around town this characteristic is not too upsetting.



Neither are the levels of road, engi and wind noise as intrusive as they a at higher speeds, when they can ma the Panda almost unbearably tiresor to drive in — especially for a extended period. It is also feasible use the vents mounted just below t bottom corners of the windscreen town speeds to provide a use throughput of fresh air (although it impossible to actually direct this flo towards the Panda's occupant whereas at higher speeds the noi they create effectively precludes th use.

With the fresh air vents closed t only means of face-level ventilation



Whichever way you approach it the rear seat is awkward to manhandle into its various configurations which four are illustrated: seat protective barri for the front seats, (bumpy) bed and remov altogether

e single, heater-linked vent mounted ntrally in the car to the left of the ntre console. With the heater off it n provide a refreshing, and direct- le, flow of air but inevitably provokes considerable amount of dispute bet- een the driver and front seat pas- enger as to who should have the enefit of it. The heater itself works fficiently enough and on its lower mperature settings, with the distribu- on slider adjusted for feet only, pro- des a virtually ideal bi-level setting, ith coolish air in the upper part of the ar but warm air for the feet. Unfortu- ately the heater settings do have to e varied with the car's speed to obtain constant temperature.

At first sight the Panda's list of stan- ard equipment appears very gener- us, with items such as cloth trim, ead restraints, heated rear window, ntermittent wipe, laminated indscreen, twin door mirrors, rear ipe and tinted glass all being wel- ome inclusions in a low-priced car. Other items do seem to have been ffected by rather miserly cost-cutting, owever, such as the lack of a wash acility to go with the rear wiper; man- al wash for the front screen; single- peed for the solitary front wiper; and ingle speed for the noisy heater lower fan.

The only addition to the standard ittings has been the very welcome ne of a Blaupunkt Montreal stereo adio/cassette linked to a Blaupunkt Graphic Equaliser and the Blaupunkt component speaker system which ssigns four separate speakers (one weeter, one mid-range and two woof- rs) to each channel. The details of this system will be dealt with more com- prehensively in a forthcoming in-car entertainment supplement, but suffice o say here that its clarity of reproduc-

tion, utter reliability and abundant reserves of power have gone some way to mitigating the less pleasant aspects of the Panda.

RELIABILITY

★★ ★★ Over the 12,000 mile period the Panda has been generally reliable, both mechanically and otherwise, and has never had to pay an unscheduled visit to a Fiat dealer for rectification work. There have been just two occasions when the Panda has failed to start — in very damp conditions just before its 12,000 mile service — but each time the Panda sprang into life after it had been left for an hour or so. Curiously the person who experienced the non-starting, our resident artist, Graham Cooke, was also the only person who has had the front wiper spring off — three times in all: a fault which has never subsequently recurred.

The only warranty work required at the first "free" service (it cost £7.61) was to clean off the rustproofing compound which was constantly deposited on the front windows and to refit seals which had become dislodged on the driver's and passenger's doors due to the build up of gunge. This was successfully accomplished, and although the rustproofing compound continued to be deposited on the windows for some while (it was quickly removed with the help of household cleaner) the seals remained solidly in place.

No further fault appeared before the 6000-mile service but it was requested that the cooling system be checked for leaks (because coolant had apparently escaped after a high-speed run), and that the rattle from the rear shelf be cured. No fault was found in the cooling (and there have been no further escapes of coolant) and, as expected, the rattly rear shelf was diagnosed as a design fault. Since then the shelf has been quietened somewhat by the application of self-adhesive towelling to its locating lugs.

Almost immediately before the 12,000 mile service was due a potentially disastrous fault — an engine oil leak — manifested itself but was dealt with during the service. Other, mainly niggly, items requiring attention at the service included an intermittently-working fuel gauge; loose passenger sun visor; stiff choke control; clutch engaging only at the end of its travel; stiff lock/catch on the rear hatch; and difficult starting in damp conditions. Most of these problems were cured as a matter of course during the service, but the sun visor was not found to be amenable to adjustment (another design fault) and the fuel gauge, although operational when it left the garage, has now virtually ceased to function altogether. This remains the only outstanding fault on the car (apart from the inherent design faults) and is awaiting the arrival of the relevant part at the garage.

SERVICING

★★ ★★ All the Panda's servicing requirements have been competently and efficiently dealt with by Godfreys (Sutton & Cheam) Ltd. There has never been a problem booking the car in for service, it usually being possible to book the car in just a couple of days before the service is required, and Godfreys service staff have been pleasant and helpful. The only slight hiccup has been the delay in obtaining the part for the fuel gauge.

COSTS

★★ ★★ One of the Panda's chief selling points is its reputedly low running costs and to a large extent this has been borne out in practice. At an overall consumption of 37.5 mpg petrol has cost £518.40 over the 12,000 mile period (assuming a pump price of £1.62) and, apart from one litre of oil which had to be added when the engine oil leak occurred, oil consumption has been negligible.

COSTS

PETROL	320 gallons at £1.62 per gallon	£518.40
OIL	between services: 1 litre	1.50
SERVICING	at 600 miles	7.61
	at 6,000 miles	48.05
	at 12,000 miles	56.17
TYRES	30 per cent worn: £19.55 per tyre	23.46
ROAD FUND LICENCE	for 12 months	80.00
TOTAL	for 12,000 miles	735.19
BASIC COST PER MILE		6.1p

PERFORMANCE

WEATHER CONDITIONS

Wind	10-30 mph
Temperature	46°F/8°C
Barometer	1002 mb
Surface	Dry tarmacadam

MAXIMUM SPEEDS

	Staff car mph	RT car mph
Banked Circuit	80.7	84.6
Best ¼ mile	87.3	87.8
Terminal Speeds:		
at ¼ mile	64	63
at kilometre	74	77
Speeds in gears (at 6500 rpm):		
1st	23	
2nd	44	
3rd	68	

ACCELERATION FROM REST

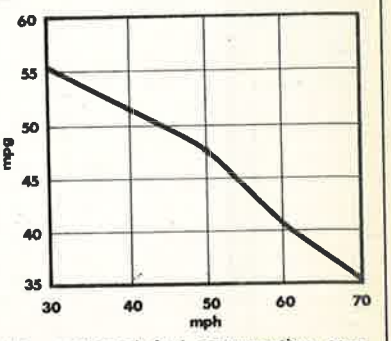
mph	sec	sec
0-30	4.7	4.9
0-40	7.8	7.8
0-50	11.8	12.4
0-60	17.5	18.4
0-70	28.2	26.1
0-80	—	50.3
Standing ¼	21.0	21.0
Standing km	39.9	39.7

ACCELERATION IN TOP

mph	sec	sec
20-40	15.4	14.5
30-50	15.6	14.6
40-60	18.7	16.8
50-70	22.7	21.4

FUEL CONSUMPTION

	Staff car	RT car
Touring*	41.9 mpg	45.3
	6.7 litres/100 km	6.2
Overall	37.5 mpg	37.9
	7.5 litres/100km	7.4
Govt tests	35.3 mpg (urban)	
	55.4 mpg (56 mph)	
	40.1 mpg (75 mph)	
Fuel grade	97 octane	
	4 star rating	
Tank capacity	7.75 galls	
	35.2 litres	
Max range	325 miles	
	523 km	
Test distance	12,000 miles	
	19,308 km	



*An estimated fuel consumption computed from the theoretical consumption at a steady speed midway between 30 mph and the car's maximum, less a 5 per cent allowance for acceleration.

NOISE

	dBA	Motor rating*
30 mph	69 (68)	15 (14)
50 mph	76 (75)	24 (23)
70 mph	82 (80	36 (32)
Max revs in 2nd†	85 (84)	44 (41)

*A rating where 1 = 30 dBA and 100 = 96 dBA, and where double the number means double the loudness. RT car in brackets.
† Peak noise level under full-throttle acceleration in first gear

SPEEDOMETER (mph)

Speedo	30	40	50	60	70	80
True mph	30	40	50	59	68	77

Distance recorder: 6.2 per cent fast

WEIGHT

	cwt	kg
Unladen weight*	13.1	665
Weight as tested	16.8	853

*with fuel for approx 50 miles

Performance tests carried out by Motor's staff at the Motor Industry Research Association proving ground, Lindley.

THE RIVALS

Included below is comparative information on the Fiat Panda 45, the Austin mini Metro City, the Citroën Visa Special, the Daihatsu Domino, the Ford Fiesta Popular and the Suzuki Alto.

PERFORMANCE	Fiat	Austin	Citroën	Daihatsu	Ford	Suzuki
Max speed, mph	**84.6**	85.5	75.8	69.2	82.3	79.4
Max in 3rd	**68**	68	55	51	65	59
2nd	**44**	44	36	36	43	37
1st	**23**	28	20	20	24	22
0-60 mph, secs	**18.4**	17.5	26.1	27.5	16.9	17.6
30-50 mph in 4th, secs	**14.6**	12.9	18.3	15.5	13.6	11.8
50-70 mph in top, secs	**21.4**	18.7	—	—	20.3*	19.6
Weight, cwt	**13.1**	14.7	14.5	10.7	14.0	11.8
Turning circle, ft*	**29.9**	31.1	28.4	29.0	29.7	27.9
50ft circle, turns	**1.0**	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.0
Boot capacity, cu.ft.	**7.0**	8.4	8.0	3.5	7.0	4.3

*mean of left and right

COSTS AND SERVICE	Fiat	Austin	Citroën	Daihatsu	Ford	Suzuki
Price, inc VAT & tax, £	**3230**	3249	2995	2799	3255	2875
Insurance group	**1**	1	2	1	1	2
Overall mpg	**37.9**	37.6	34.4	39.3	31.2	39.6
Touring mpg	**45.3**	46.2	45.7	48.6	40.4	48.3
Fuel grade (stars)	**4**	4	4	2	4	2
Tank capacity, gals	**7.75**	7.0	8.8	5.7	7.5	5.9
Service interval, miles	**6000**	12000	5000	3000	6000	6000
No of dealers	**400**	1900	260	118	1241	47

There have been no extraneous expenses apart from the costs for the scheduled services. The "free" service carried out at 600 miles cost £7.61 for "sundry items and oil" while the subsequent services at 6,000 and 12,000 miles came to £48.05 and £56.17, respectively, giving a total over the 12,000 mile period of £111.83.

Despite fairly hard use the Panda's standard-issue Ceat 135SR13 tyres still have a good deal of life left in them after 12,000 miles. The heavily-laden front wheels which have to take the brunt of the Panda's predilection for understeer have almost 60 per cent of their tread left, while the rear tyres still have 85 per cent of the original tread depth. On all four wheels the tread wear is evenly spread over the tyre's width so, assuming the spare is left unused, the front tyres should last for a further 12,000 miles while the rear tyres should be good for at least another 60,000 miles.

The Panda's generally low running costs are reinforced by its Group 1 insurance rating.

READER FEEDBACK

The 27 readers who helpfully responded to our questionnaire demonstrated a wide spread of opinion; the two extremes being represented by one Panda owner who felt that certain aspects of the car deserved a rating above "excellent", and another who is so unhappy with his car — in particular with a rust problem — that he is currently taking legal action.

Rusting was mentioned by only one other respondent (as a minor problem), however — which should be expected in a survey in which only nine of the cars had covered more than 6,000 miles, while 13 had covered between 2,000 and 6,000 miles and five less than 2,000 miles. The average mileage covered when the replies were submitted was 5,241 miles. All of the cars were bought new and privately owned and 11 were less than six months old. Of the purchasers 14 had paid the full price (although one did mention that he obtained interest-free credit) while 13 obtained a discount. All but two of the cars were serviced by a Fiat agent and of those, five said the agents were only fair, while three described them as bad. Six respondents described the spares service as only fair, or bad.

Owner's ratings*

Acceleration	5.6
Cruising	6.1
Steering	6.2
Roadholding	5.8
Handling	5.7
Braking	5.4
Gearchange	4.4
Clutch	6.7
Gear ratios	6.4
Ride comfort	4.3
Seat comfort	5.8
Driving position	6.4
Heating	5.6
Ventilation	5.3
Noise at 70 mph	2.9
Instruments	5.7
Minor controls	4.1
Fuel consumption	8.9
Tyre wear	5.7
Visibility	8.0
Lights	5.8
Boot space	7.4
Reliability	7.7
Paintwork	6.4
Rusting	6.5
Styling	6.6

* Owners were asked to rate from "Excellent" to "Bad". The scores are based on giving "Excellent" 10, "Good" 7, "Average" 4, "Poor" 2 and "Bad" 0.

Faults

Owners having at least one with:

Engine	11
Transmission	15
Steering, suspension	7
Brakes	8
Electrical	12
Body, paint, trim	9
Interior fittings	16
Instruments	6
Others	8

It would be misleading to deduce any broad trends from what is, by statistical analysis standards, a very small sample, but the most commonly mentioned faults included paintwork blemishes; flimsy interior trim; gearchange; fast idle speed and problems connected with the rustproofing process.

Time off the road

None	17
1 day	5
2 days	4
8 days	1
Average (days)	0.8

Servicing by manufacturer's agent

Good	17
Fair	5
Bad	3

Warranty work

None	3
At least some	24

Satisfied with warranty work?

Yes	20
No/not sure	7

Would you buy another Panda?

Yes	17
No/not sure	10

SECOND OPINION

MEMORY CAN play tricks, and I'm not prepared to say flatfootedly that the Panda is the worst-handling car I've ever driven. There was, for example, the atrocious Bond 375 threewheeler, with a single wheel at the front and an Imp engine in the tail, that far from steering to the nearest inch could (if you were lucky) be guided to the nearest yard — preferably a breakers! There were the whole family of Wartburgs — stiff unresponsive *Personenwagen* that would tell you all you ever needed to know about East Germany without the hassle of actually going there. And there was the coupé version of the rear-engined Skoda that performed the near-impossible by being even more hazardous to drive than the saloon itself.

By comparison, the Panda is an immaculate concept: but these were cars that were outdated on the day they were first built, and which were largely intended for the delectation of captive markets that had no other choice than to walk. They were not the definitive thoughts of one of the world's oldest and largest motor manufacturers. The Panda is: and it has to be judged on that basis.

First, the good news. The Panda is a reasonable hold-all in the Continental "utility" tradition. That means that it has a versatility which still seems to elude designers elsewhere. The accommodation may not be the epitome of comfort, nor the internal decor the sort one would wish to find in one's own front parlour, but its load-carrying ability is on a par with that of the slightly larger Austin mini Metro. And, it will cruise easily enough at an indicated 85mph on a motorway, with the ability to better 90mph on downhill stretches.

It is, in fact, very much in the Italian tradition here — it is not difficult to visualise it bowling along the *autostrada,* laden with Papa, Mama, the *bambini,* and a huge wicker basket filled with salami, loaves, and bottles of wine. In such a setting the Panda might excel.

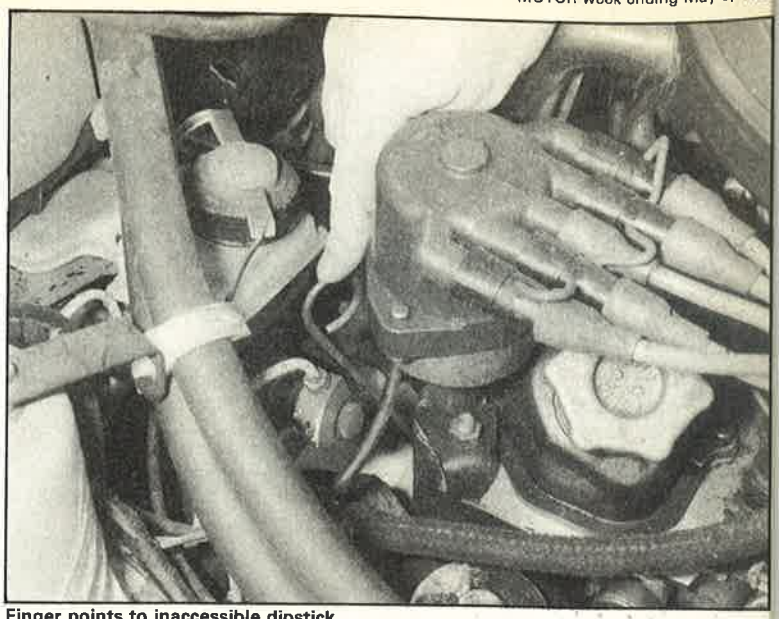
And now the bad! Get it off the straight and narrow and the car's dynamic limitations become painfully obvious.

On all corners, it responds with a curious mixture of strong initial understeer followed by a quick dart into the inside of the turn: and on *bumpy corners the stiffness of the suspension adds to the general unpredictability of the handling. And the steering is heavy, too, so country-road driving can become very hard work.*

The bad news doesn't stop there. The gearchange is rubbery and imprecise: the brakes require disconcertingly heavy pedal pressures to get results, and the clutch is "sudden". The flexibility of the ex-127 903cc engine (by featherfooting the accelerator, you can get the Panda to pull from 15mph in top gear) is the one saving grace: but I was left reflecting that the unit does a much better job in the 127 anyway . . .

Luckily, I don't have to make the choice between the Panda and my local bus. I *think* the Panda would win, but only just. It would all depend if I thought I could bear it!

John Thorpe



Finger points to inaccessible dipstick

Rattly rear shelf is infuriating but has been partially cured by the application of self-adhesive towelling to the poorly-fitting locating lugs

MANUFACTURER'S COMMENT

Yes *Motor,* we agree that the Panda and the Strada are reliable, easy to service, and economic to run. We were also pleased to see your acknowledgement of Fiat as an innovator of imaginative, practical cars.

Of course, there are details in your report with which we disagree. Why "Piggy?" We are sure that the car would prefer its proper name; failing that, perhaps "Peggy" would have been a shade more diplomatic.

Agreed it is annoying to see anti-corrosion material on the window, but it does give ample evidence of the thoroughness of the treatment. Are we applying too much anti-corrosion protection?

The Panda has been a huge success in its many markets, not least the UK, and we are gratified to see it acknowledged as an imaginative, practical, economic and reliable motor car.

CONCLUSIONS

When the Panda was first released in the UK last June, priced at £2,860, it made a good deal of sense. Its accommodation and fuel economy were excellent features and overall it compared well with many similarly-priced rivals. Now, less than a year later, its price has risen to £3230 and it competes directly with the lowest-priced Metro and a number of other highly capable cars such as the Citroën Visa, Ford Fiesta and Talbot Samba. Against these rivals the Panda stands out as distinctly poor value, being particularly lacking in the areas of roadholding/handling, ride comfort and refinement.

Despite these criticisms the Panda is, without doubt, a car of considerable character and clever design. With intensive development its present shortcomings should be cured and its current strong points emphasised — a more practical arrangement for the rear seats, for example, would further enhance the efficient packaging. It is too early to make any definite judgements on what the Panda's long-term relibility record will be like, but if our own initial experiences and those of our readers are anything to go by this is not likely to present any problems.

TunedCarTest

RADBOURNE FIAT PANDA

Radbourne's engine conversion gives the Panda lots more performance without dramatically affecting fuel consumption but it does have some drawbacks . . .

A FIAT Panda seems an unlikely candidate for the high performance treatment and seeds of doubt were sown in our minds when it was noticed that the 70 bhp Radbourne Panda test car was scheduled to arrive on April 1. In fact Radbourne readily admit that the Panda's chassis is not really adequate for spirited driving along twisty country lanes but, apparently, the suspension modifications that would keep it more securely attached to the road are too extensive (and expensive!) to contemplate.

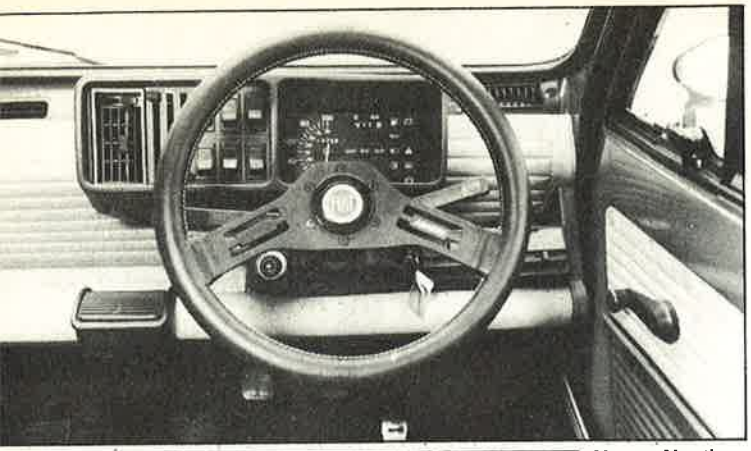
What Radbourne have achieved with their highly professional and competent conversion is a rorty little "Q" car with vastly improved straight-line performance, compared to the standard article, and consequently greatly enhanced overtaking ability. So although Radbourne's Panda is, to say the least, a handful on twisty, bumpy roads, its performance can be fully exploited on the better-surfaced A-class routes — much to the chagrin of some drivers, it appears, who do not much like being overtaken by Fiat's mundane little saloon, and then being unable to retrieve the situation.

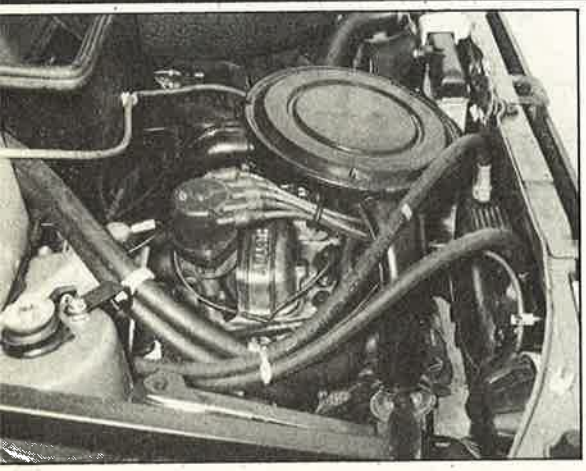
There are quite substantial clues as to this Panda's more purposeful nature thanks to the flared wheel arches and the more aggressive-looking radiator grille which replaces the normal sheet metal job. The grille is more than just added tinsel, though, since it provides air for the oil cooler (which would be masked by the standard grille) mounted next to the Panda's standard radiator in the engine bay. Other distinguishing external features of the Radbourne Panda are subtle coachlining; "Abarth" and "70 hp" badges, sporty (but impractical) door mirrors and, most important of all, Cromodora alloy wheels fitted with 155/70 SR 13 tyres instead of the standard 135 SR 13 skinnies. The tyres and wheels are the only attempt at any form of suspension modification.

The vital feature of the conversion is, of course, underneath the bonnet where there lurks a Radbourne-modified version of the 70 bhp Fiat Abarth engine. The major part of the engine is pure Abarth but its cylinder head is taken from the standard Panda engine and modified by Radbourne. The standard rocker cover is thrown away and replaced by an alloy one with "Abarth" cast into its upper surface. A twin-choke downdraught Webe carburetter completes the conversio and from 1050 cc with a 10.4:1 com pression ratio it is claimed to produc 70 bhp at 6600 rpm and 58 lb ft o torque at 4200 rpm. All the engin ancillaries (apart from the oil coole already mentioned) are retained fro the standard Panda, although, as i audibly very evident, there is a entirely new through-flow exhaust sys tem.

An Abarth sports steering wheel i the only modified item of interior trim and comes as part and parcel of th total conversion which costs aroun £1,500. For people looking for mor performance from their Panda fo rather less outlay Radbourne will pro vide an engine conversion, whic retains the engine's original capacit but uses the modified cylinder head for about £450.

With a 55 per cent increase in maxi mum power and a 23 per cent increas in torque the full Radbourne/Abarth conversion, not surprisingly, offer substantially improved performanc compared with a normal Panda. Th maximum average speed for a full la





Above: Abarth steering wheel is the only change inside — a rev counter is really needed. Left: the Radbourne/Abarth engine fits neatly into the Panda's engine bay, note the oil cooler mounted next to the standard radiator

of MIRA's banked circuit has gone up by more than 10 mph to an impressive 95.1 mph while the time for the sprint from 0-60 mph has been slashed by almost six seconds to 12.5 sec. In top gear the Radbourne Panda is just as capable, notching up times of 11.5, 12.0 and 13.4 sec for the 30-50, 40-60 and 50-70 mph increments, respectively — all significant improvements over the standard model.

On the road these figures translate into performance which, while not stunningly quick in absolute terms, is quite startling compared to the standard car. For such a highly-tuned engine the Radbourne/Abarth unit is surprisingly untemperamental, starting easily from cold and pulling cleanly even from low revs. At low speeds a jerky throttle action makes smooth driving difficult but otherwise the engine responds willingly, revving so freely, in fact, that a rev counter is really needed as a safeguard for the power unit's long-term health.

A factor that does inhibit use of the engine's full rev range, though, is the almost deafening engine noise. The standard Panda is by no means a quiet car but as can be seen from the figures taken with our noise level meter the Radbourne Panda is noisier in every respect — noisier, in fact, than almost any other car ever tested by *Motor*. At low speeds the throaty roar made by the engine is bearable, perhaps even quite pleasant if your aural senses are sufficiently perverted, but prolonged high speed cruising in the Radbourne Panda borders on the painful and should not be attempted without an extensive stock of headache pills.

Most of our testers are sufficiently masochistic to choose speed and noise rather than relax their throttle feet, however, and bearing this in mind it is quite remarkable that the Radbourne Panda should record an overall fuel consumption of 36.7 mpg over the road test mileage of just under 1000 miles. This is only 1.2 mpg down on the figure achieved with the standard road test Panda — an appreciably slower car — and really underlines the thoroughness and competence of the Radbourne engine conversion.

As already mentioned the Radbourne Panda has no suspension modifications apart from the wider 155/70 Pirelli P3 tyres and alloy wheels. These do at least endow the car with a respectable amount of roadholding on well-surfaced roads even if they can do little to improve its unsettled handling on secondary roads which is somewhat exacerbated by the extra power being fed through the front wheels.

The brakes are also retained predominantly as standard with the disc front/drum rear unassisted set up benefiting from the fitment of brake pads from the X1/9 mid-engined sports car. Although the brakes didn't inspire a great deal of confidence they provided adequate and progressive stopping power and showed little tendency to fade, even during performance testing at MIRA.

Radbourne use the standard Panda gearbox with the same internal and final drive ratios. They do carry out a modification which involves removing some of the compliance in the linkage but the gearchange is still poor, being excessively vague and notchy and, on occasions it proved very difficult to select first or reverse.

In most other respects the Radbourne Panda is identical to the one described elsewhere in this issue, and in our previous road test. Accommodation is spacious for such a small car and the seats are reasonably comfortable, although the improved roadholding of the Radbourne Panda does emphasise the lack of lateral support. Ride comfort remains poor and is not helped by the uprated wheels and tyres. Instrumentation provides the minimum necessary information and would be usefully supplemented by a rev counter in this performance version.

To some extent the Radbourne Panda highlights some of the standard car's weaknesses (noise and handling, for example) and it is difficult to regard it as practical everyday transport. For someone wanting a Panda *with* performance, however, there is no doubt that the Radbourne conversion provides the answer — and without having to pay a significant penalty in terms of fuel consumption, either.

PERFORMANCE

MAXIMUM SPEED	Radbourne mph	Standard mph
Lap	95.1	84.6
Best ¼ mile	96.8	87.8
ACCELERATION FROM REST		
mph	sec	sec
0-30	3.5	4.9
0-40	5.8	7.8
0-50	8.5	12.4
0-60	12.5	18.4
0-70	17.1	26.1
0-80	28.2	50.3
0-90	49.4	—
Standing ¼ mile	18.4	21.0
Standing Km	35.0	39.7
ACCELERATION IN TOP		
mph	sec	sec
20-40	11.2	14.5
30-50	11.5	14.6
40-60	12.0	16.8
50-70	13.4	21.4
60-80	18.3	—
FUEL CONSUMPTION	mpg	mpg
Overall	36.7	37.9
NOISE	dBA	dBA
30 mph	72	68
50 mph	79	75
70 mph	85	80
Max revs in 2nd	92	84

Performance tests carried out by Motor's staff at the Motor Industry Research Association proving ground, Lindley.

GENERAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE	
Cylinders	4 in line
Capacity	1050 cc (64.0 cu in)
Bore/stoke	76.2/58 mm (2.99/2.27 in)
Cooling	Water
Block	Cast iron
Head	Aluminium alloy
Valves	Sohc
Cam drive	Toothed belt
Compression	10.4:1
Carburetter	Weber 32 DMTR
Bearings	5 main
Max power	70 bhp (DIN) at 6600 rpm
Max torque	58 lb ft (DIN) at 4200 rpm
TRANSMISSION	
Type	4-speed manual
Clutch	6.68 in dia
Actuation	Cable
Internal ratios and mph/1000 rpm	
4th	0.963:1/15.9
3rd	1.348:1/11.4
2nd	2.005:1/7.4
1st	3.910:1/3.9
Rev	3.615:1
Final drive	4.071:1
BODY/CHASSIS	
Construction	Unitary, all-steel
Protection	Electrophoretic primer; anti-chip protection to sills; Crylogard rustproofing.
SUSPENSION	
Front	Independent by MacPherson struts; lower forward link; anti-roll bar; coil springs; telescopic dampers.
Rear	Dead axle located by semi-elliptic leaf springs; telescopic dampers.
STEERING	
Type	Rack and pinion
Assistance	None
BRAKES	
Front	8.9 in dia discs
Rear	7.3 in dia drums
Park	On rear wheels
Servo	No
Circuit	Split front/rear
Rear valve	Yes
Adjustment	Automatic
WHEELS/TYRES	
Type	Cromodora light alloy, 5J x 13
Tyres	155/70 SR 13, Pirelli P3
Pressures	26/29 psi F/R
ELECTRICAL	
Battery	12V, 34 Ah
Earth	Negative
Generator	45A Alternator
Fuses	10
Headlights	
type	Tungsten filament bulb
dip	80 W total
main	90 W total

Make: Fiat. **Model:** Panda 45
Conversion: Radbourne Racing Ltd, 1a Clarendon Road, Holland Park Avenue, London W11. Tel: 01-727 5066
Price: Approximately £1,500 — includes Radbourne/Abarth engine; new exhaust system; 155/70 SR 13 Pirelli P3 tyres; Cromodora 5J×13 alloy wheels; wheel arch extensions; and Abarth sports steering wheel.