



here are many options for the Town Car buyer with between £4000 and £4500 to spend. Ruling out the East European imports as cheap enough, but, in general, too unwieldy and inefficient, and the entry-level mass market hatches as too plain and stripped-out at the price the choice comes down to just a handful of cars. Two prime contenders are the Daihatsu Domino and the Fiat Panda 1000S which, at £4469 and £4294 respectively are cheap and cheer-

ful and far from basic. Though they are looking for the same buyers the two are quite different in their approach.

The Domino, launched over a year ago, is still a rare sight. Its bold, cheeky shape is Mini-sized but takes that car's excellent packaging a stage further. Its wheel-at-each-corner design allows 5-doors, even though it is 20 cm (8 in) shorter than the Metro, and offers seating for four full-size adults. Its body is narrower than it is tall, with a heavily sloped nose and sharply cut off

tail, and is quite good aerodynamically with a Cd of 0.36. There is just one version in the UK and no options are offered.

The Panda has been with us since 1981, but last year the original utility, yet chic, Guigiaro lines were altered for the second time and the interior and rear suspension revised too. More significantly, the range received new power units from the FIRE family. The Panda is slightly bigger-bodied and heavier than the Domino, and its "3-door only" form is as un-aerodynamic as

the flat, boxy shape suggests — its Cd is a poor 0.41. The 1000S model on test is top-of-the-range, apart from the 4x4.

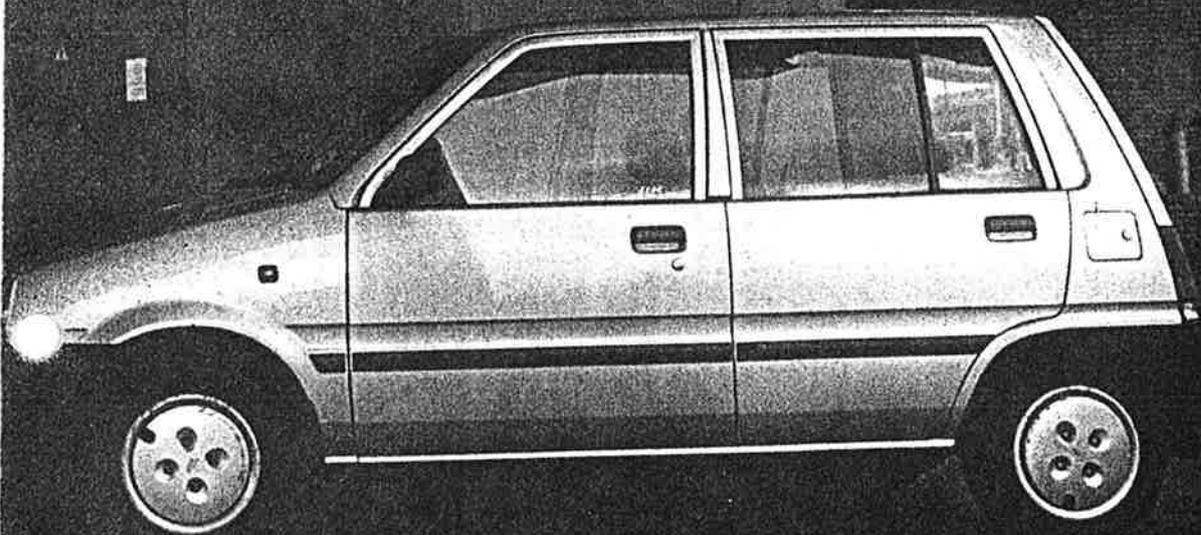
The Domino's engine is as unusual as its styling, the 846 cc being split between three cylinders operating on a compression ratio of 9.5:1. A belt-driven camshaft works two valves per cylinder and fuelling is by a single-choke downdraught carburettor. Its outputs are quite good; 43 bhp at 5500 rpm and 50 lb ft at 3200 rpm for power and torque.

The FIRE engine in the Panda

CITY SLICKERS

Natural rivals in the car-about-town sales stakes, the Domino and Panda attempt to knock spots off each other

Photographs by Peter Burn
Location courtesy of Docklands Light Railway



is bigger at 999 cc, and of conventional 4-cylinder design. It replaces the 903 cc pushrod unit which was originally fitted from the Fiat 127. The sohc unit has five main bearings, uses a 9.8:1 compression ratio and is fed by a single-choke Weber carburettor. It produces 45 bhp at 5000/rpm and 59 lb ft torque at 2750 rpm.

PERFORMANCE

Outright speed is not the most important requisite in a town car, but both of these cars will hold their own when the occasional

motorway run demands it. The more powerful, but less aerodynamic, Panda records the better top speed at 86.0 mph, in fifth gear, with the Domino trailing only slightly with 82.9 mph, but in fourth. The Fiat is also quicker to 60 mph recording a respectable 14.6 sec but the Daihatsu is not far behind, taking 14.9 sec. In practice, both cars have plentiful acceleration for the cut-and-thrust of city driving and enough zest to ensure that they can keep up on the open road. Both cars have reasonably good

fourth gear flexibility, the Domino and Panda recording 12.0 and 12.2 sec respectively to accelerate from 30 to 50 mph in fourth.

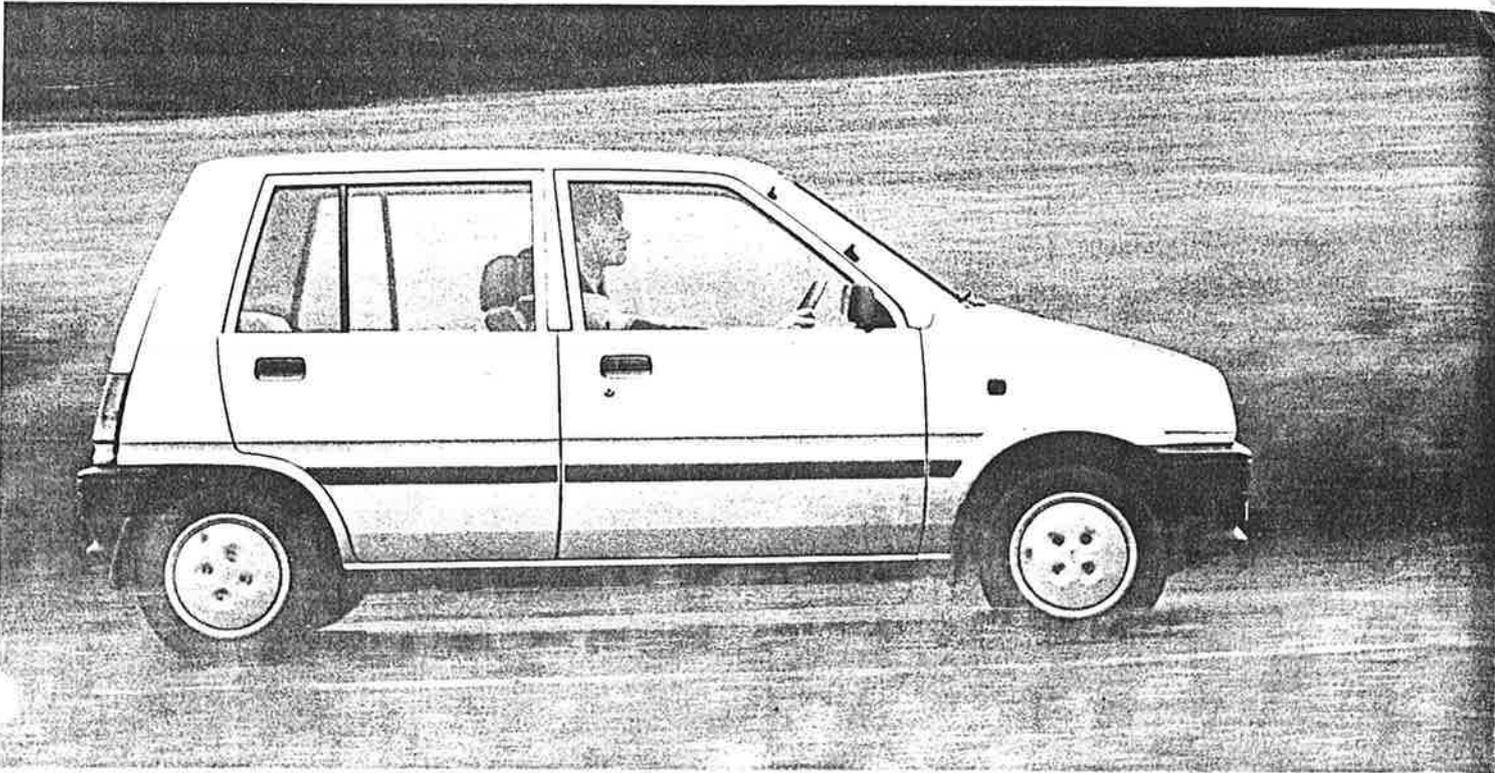
ECONOMY

The Domino and Panda do not have to be driven at full revs to flow with the traffic and thus return very good consumption figures. In mixed driving, the Panda has a slight edge, recording an overall figure of 40.5 mpg to the Daihatsu's 39.5. As an aside, Government testing

shows the Daihatsu to be better on the urban cycle - 48.7 mpg against 44.9 for the Fiat. Having a usefully bigger (40 litre-8.8 gall) fuel tank the Panda has a greater range despite the Domino having a superior touring consumption (53.2 v 48.6 mpg).

TRANSMISSION

Both cars have the luxury of five gears, but the Domino's change is lighter and easier to use; it is not as slick as some other Japanese cars though. Progress in the Daihatsu can be a



little jumpy because the throttle response is sharp, but the clutch is light and well damped. The Panda has a heavier change by comparison, but it works well with deliberation. It also has a smooth clutch action which aids steady progress in slow, heavy going.

HANDLING

The Domino's ability to nip in and out of gaps is unrivalled, its small dimensions and quick responses enable it to exploit the smallest openings. At town speeds, its steering is light and pleasantly direct – just what's needed for nimble progress through town – but on the open road it feels edgy to the point where it is difficult to steer a smooth cornering line. Speed is scrubbed off by understeer and the car does not roll a great deal, despite the Domino's tall stance. In the wet the handling remains safe, but the front wheels are apt to spin if too much power is fed to them. The Panda, too, can make good headway – especially on the open road, where it feels more balanced and confident. The revised rear suspension, with its Omega beam and coil springs instead of leaf type, plays its part in making the Panda track straight over bumpy roads, and the 155/65 Pirelli P8s provide a surprising amount of grip. Safe understeer is the chassis' trait when cornering hard and the steering is light and precise at all times. Parking poses no problems.

RIDE

By comparison with the venerable Mini both these cars ride

About town the Domino's combination of compact size, perky performance and light controls make it amazingly wieldy. Out of town it's less happy

Three-cylinder engine is distinctive and willing



well. On paper, there's nothing remarkable about the Domino's suspension but it endows the little car with a suppleness which belies its low weight. A succession of bumps can, however, "gang up" to reveal damping which is clearly optimised for when the car is lightly laden. The Panda's ride is firmer and the body tends to check sharply over severe undulations, but it remains acceptably supple otherwise, and is the more competent when it comes to tackling difficult surfaces.

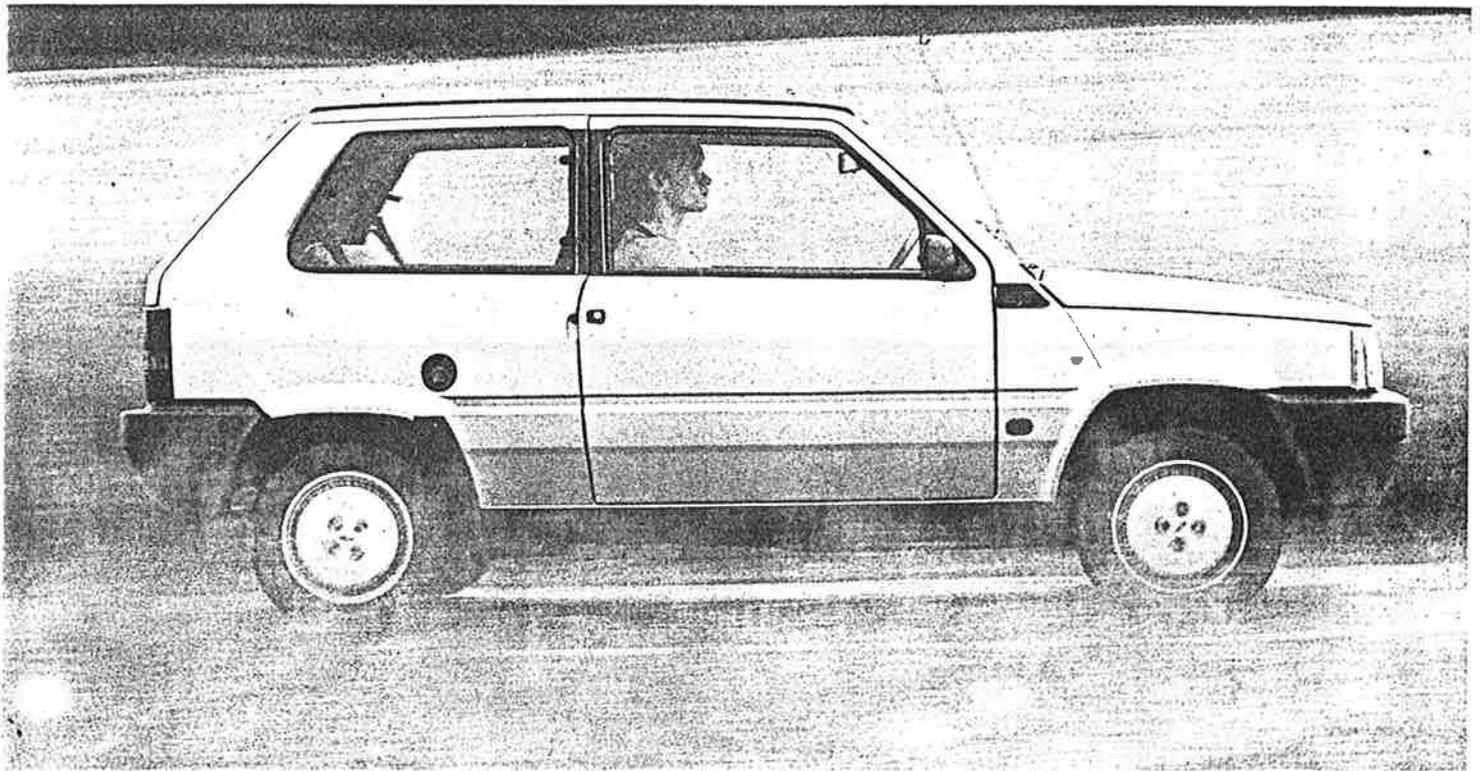


BRAKES

Neither car is short of stopping power, but their disc/drum braking systems feel quite different. The Domino boasts a servo and has a well-weighted, short travel pedal but the low weight of the car can make it feel less stable than the Panda in panic stops. After the Daihatsu the Fiat's unassisted set-up seems less responsive, but one becomes accustomed to their heavier feel. Despite some free play at the top of the pedal they are as good as the Domino's.

NOISE

It is the engine note which dominates most in these cars. The odd, off-beat gruffness of the Daihatsu's 3-cylinder engine is matched by the frantic howl of the Fiat's "four", but it's the Domino which is louder against the noise meter. At idle, though, they both lapse into quietness and one could be forgiven for thinking that they have stalled. The Panda suffers from some background mechanical clatter. When cruising on the motorway the Domino never



Easy to conduct in traffic, the Panda is able to make good headway on the open road too – its chassis is the more capable

Panda's new FIRE 4-cylinder is a decent performer but lacks some refinement



INSTRUMENTS

The Daihatsu displays a clear and surprisingly comprehensive instrument pack. There is even a rev counter – and the small dials are easily read. By contrast, the Fiat's corporate-style gauges, which are simple and clear, are fewer in number (there's no rev counter) and more reliance is placed on a selection of warning lights arranged around a plan view of the car. The Panda has the benefit of an analogue clock.

HEATING AND VENTILATION

The Domino boasts an air blending heater, separate ventilation, and a 3-speed fan. It does allow a warm feet/cool face combination, but throughput is weak and the heated air poorly diffused. The Panda, though, has a very effective system, the heater drawing ram air from the base of the screen. Cool air from the same source is available independently from the fascia end vents. Both cars have heated rear windows as standard, while the Panda's rear quarter lights are hinged.

EQUIPMENT

The one-model Domino is well appointed with 2-speed and intermittent wipers, rear wash/wipe and front head restraints. The Panda also has these, but not the Domino's radio, remote hatch release and a locking fuel flap. They are well matched, though, the Fiat having the practical addition of twin internally adjustable door mirrors and a dipping interior mirror. There's lightly tinted glass too.

sounds strained and its moderate wind noise makes it equally as quiet as the less sleek Panda.

AT THE WHEEL

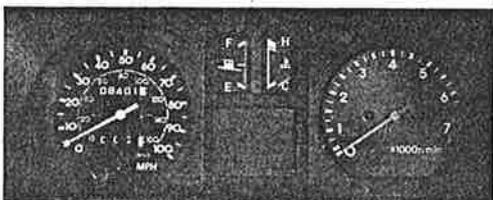
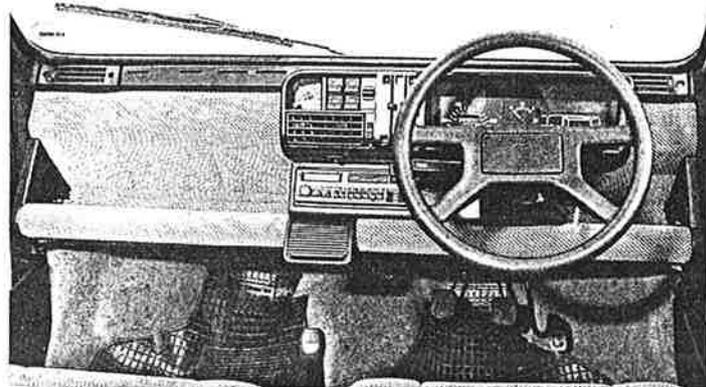
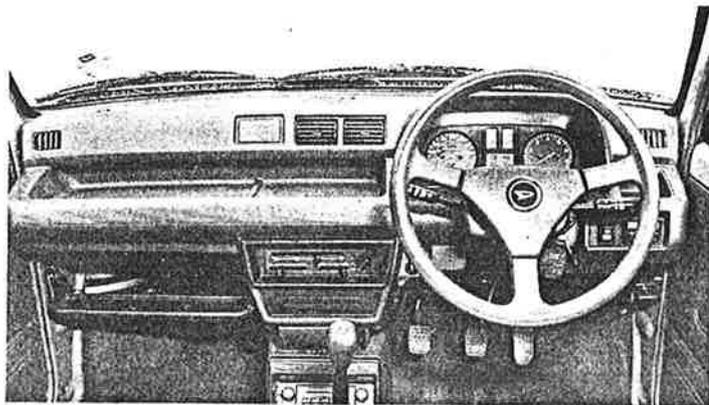
The Panda lacks enough seat travel to take drivers of 6 ft or over, but the driving position in both is comfortable enough. A generous glass area enables either to be manoeuvred with confidence in traffic, but the Panda comes with two internally adjustable door mirrors to the Domino's externally-set one. When parking, the Panda's flat

bonnet helps with positioning but its single wiper leaves unswept patches. The practical addition of rear window wash/wipe features on both cars.

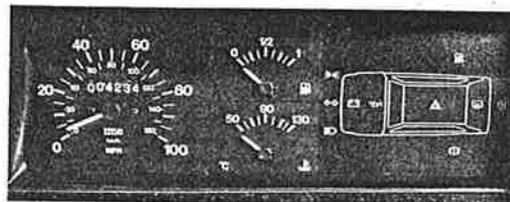
ACCOMMODATION

Here the Domino demonstrates how small a car can be whilst still accommodating four adults in reasonable comfort. Even in the rear, passengers will find ample head and leg room and getting in is not a problem with five doors. The Panda has less headroom and foot space in the

back, but a more usefully sized boot; its rear seat will fold fully forward (and can be removed completely) to take unusual loads. The Domino has a 50/50 split, but less versatile, tilt-only rear squab, and both have a rear parcel shelf to hide away the valuables. Neither car has a proper glove box, but the trough shape of the Panda's fascia makes a very effective oddments carrier. The Domino has a fascia top shelf and under-tray, but no door pockets.



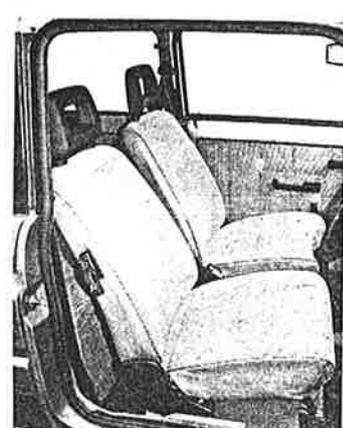
Above, left: Plasticky finish and typical Japanese styling for Domino. Instruments clear, rev counter a bonus



Above, left: Trough-style facia of Panda is simple and useful. Binnacle carries regular issue Fiat gauges



Domino provides ample room for four, access to the rear is made easy by back doors



Panda looks more inviting, accommodates well in the front but can't match the Domino's rear seat space

FINISH

Paint and panel fit on both cars is to a good standard. It's worth picking a body colour which matches the trim, though, be-

cause there's plenty of painted metal in both their cabins. The Domino's trim is a mixture of cloth for seat facings and vinyl for the rest in an obviously Japanese style. The Panda, with

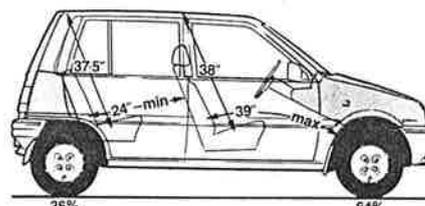
its new interior, is not as basic as the original design but it is still unconventional, and tastefully decked out in good-quality cloth throughout. Both cars are quite starkly trimmed with visible

grommets, screw heads and other fixings in evidence. Essentially they are low-cost utility vehicles, and don't rely on expensive trimmings to enhance their appeal.

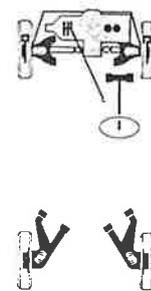
DAIHATSU

£4469

Make: Daihatsu **Model:** Domino **Country of Origin:** Japan **Maker:** Daihatsu Motor Co Ltd, Daihatsucho, Ikeda City, Osaka, Japan **UK Concessionaire:** Daihatsu (UK) Limited, Poulton Close, Dover CT17 0HP **Tel:** 0304 213030 **Total price:** £4469 **Extras fitted to test car:** None **Other options:** None **Price as tested:** £4469



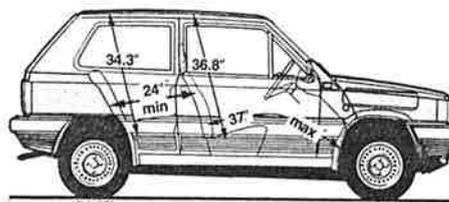
Length 3.19m (125.8") Width 1.39m (54.9") Front track 1.21m (47.8")
Wheelbase 2.25m (88.6") Height 1.41m (55.5") Rear track 1.20m (47.4")



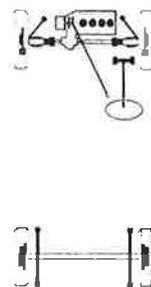
FIAT

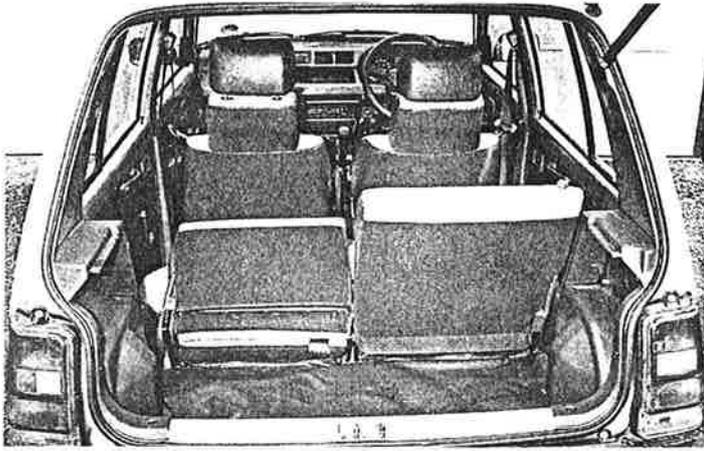
£4294

Make: Fiat **Model:** Panda 1000 S **Country of Origin:** Italy **Maker:** Fiat SpA, Turin, Italy **UK Concessionaire:** Fiat Auto (UK) Ltd, Bakers Court, Bakers Road, Uxbridge UB8 1RG **Tel:** 0895 51212 **Total price:** £4294 **Extras fitted to test car:** Metallic paint £66 **Other options:** Fabric sunroof £156 **Price as tested:** £4360

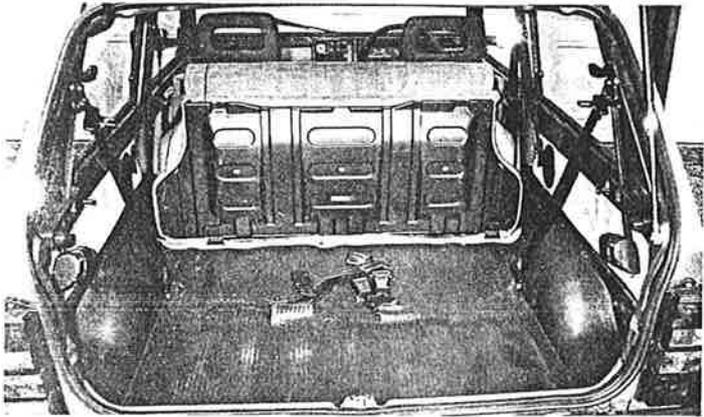


Length 3.38m (133") Width 1.46m (57.5") Front track 1.25m (49.3")
Wheelbase 2.16m (85") Height 1.44m (56.8") Rear track 1.24m (49")





Domino's seat splits but only its backrest folds (above); Panda's bigger capacity can be further improved with a fully folding seat arrangement (below)



CONCLUSIONS

The Domino and Panda admirably fit the city-car criteria; they are cheap to buy and run, easy to drive and nippy. The Domino is the better people carrier and its narrowness makes it a little more wieldy in traffic, but the Panda is a more versatile load carrier. Both are economical and possess enough performance for cross-country driving, though the Panda has the edge

over the Domino for driveability out of town.

"Practical, characterful and fun" describes either, so the choice is difficult. For pure city work and packaging excellence the Domino is hard to beat, but we'd go for the Panda because of its better interior and superior combination of town and country ability.

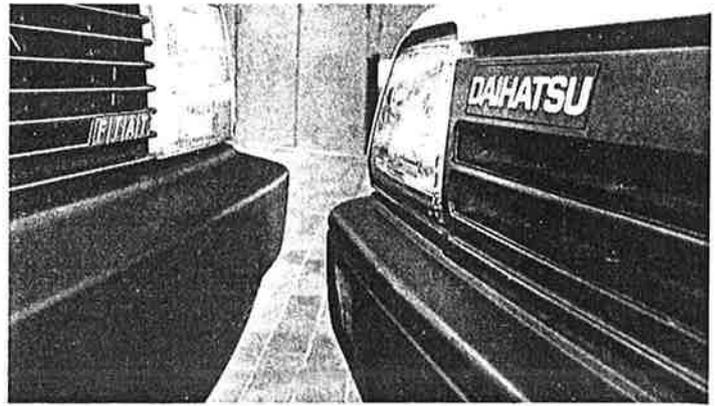
● See next week's *Motor* for a personal opinion from two female staffers. **M**

Capacity, cc	846
Power bhp/rpm	43/5500
Torque lb ft/rpm	50/3200
Max speed, mph	82.9
0-60 mph, sec	14.9
30-50 mph in 4th, sec	12.0
mph/1000 rpm	17.9
Overall mpg	39.5
Touring mpg	53.2
Weight kg	608
Drag coefficient Cd	0.36
Boot capacity m ³	0.12

FRONT SUSPENSION	MacPherson struts, lower track control arms, coil springs and anti-roll bar
REAR SUSPENSION	Semi-trailing arms, coil springs
STEERING	Rack and pinion
BRAKES	Front discs, rear drums, servo assistance
WHEELS	Steel, 4x12 in dia
TYRES	145/70 SR12 Dunlop

Capacity, cc	999
Power bhp/rpm	45/5000
Torque lb ft/rpm	59/2750
Max speed, mph	86.0
0-60 mph, sec	14.6
30-50 mph in 4th, sec	12.2
mph/1000 rpm	19.2
Overall mpg	40.5
Touring mpg	48.6
Weight kg	690
Drag coefficient Cd	0.41
Boot capacity m ³	0.20

FRONT SUSPENSION	MacPherson struts, lower transverse links and angled radius rods
REAR SUSPENSION	Centre pivoted Omega beam axle with trailing arms and coil springs
STEERING	Rack and pinion
BRAKES	Front discs, rear drums
WHEELS	Steel, 4x13 in dia
TYRES	155/65 SR13 Pirelli P8



MOTOR TWIN TEST DAIHATSU v FIAT

COMPARISONS

PERFORMANCE

	Daihatsu Domino	Fiat Panda
Max speed mph	82.9	86.0
Max in 3rd	68	72
2nd	45	47
1st	27	25
0-60 mph secs	14.9	14.6
30-50 mph in 4th, secs	12.0	12.2
50-70 mph in top, secs	22.5	18.4
Weight, kg	608	690
Turning circle, m/	9.4	9.5
Turns lock to lock	3.6	3.8
Boot, m ³ **	0.12	0.20

** as measured by *Motor*

COSTS AND SERVICE

	Domino	Panda
Price, inc VAT and Tax, £	4469	4294
Insurance group	2	2
Fuel grade (stars)	4	4
Tank capacity, litres	28	40
Major service interval, miles	24,000	24,000
Intermediate, miles	6000	6000
No. of dealers	131	321
Set brake pads (front) £*	20.17	19.98
Complete clutch £*	89.14	84.26
Complete exhaust £*	123.63	104.24
Front wing panel £*	60.41	20.19
Oil filter £*	4.82	5.37
Starter motor £*	85.58	60.61
Windscreen £*	66.70	69.96
Service time, hrs change clutch	3.7	3.1
change water pump	1.1	1.2
major service	4.5	2.6
Guarantee, Domino	12 months unlim. mileage. 8 year rust warranty	
Panda		12 months unlim. mileage. 6 year limited rust warranty

* inc VAT but not labour costs

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

	Domino	Panda
Door bins		●
Lockable glovebox		●
Rear parcel shelf	●	●
Split folding rear seat	●	
Coin tray	●	

Courtesy light delay	
Map reading light	
Boot light	
Instrument light rheostat	
Remote boot/hatch release	●
Remote fuel flap release	
Locking filler cap	●
Passenger door mirror	●
Remote mirror adjustment	●
Dipping interior mirror	●
Flick wipe	
Intermittent wipe	● ●
Programmed wash/wipe	
Rear wash/wipe	● ●
Headlamp wash/wipe	
Internal headlamp levelling	
Laminated screen	● ●
Radio	●
Tape player	
Stereo radio	
Clock	●
Cigar lighter	● ●
Sunroof	○
Seat height adjustment (driver)	●
Seat tilt adjustment (driver)	
Head restraints	● ●
Adjustable upper seatbelt mounting	
Rear compartment heating	
Tinted glass	●
○ Option	

RATING

	Domino	Panda
Performance	●●●	●●●
Economy	●●●●●	●●●●●
Transmission	●●●●	●●●
Handling	●●●	●●●●
Brakes	●●●●	●●●
Ride comfort	●●	●●●
Accommodation	●●●●	●●●
Boot/storage	●	●●
At the wheel	●●●●	●●●●
Visibility	●●●●	●●●●
Instruments	●●●●	●●●
Heating	●●●	●●●
Ventilation	●●●	●●●●
Noise	●●	●●
Finish	●●●	●●●
Equipment	●●●	●●
Excellent	●●●●●	Good ●●●●
Average	●●●●	Poor ●● Bad ●