

THE 3 MONTH TEST DRIVE

Owners reveal the highlights and low points of five new models of car

Facts and figures

DELIVERED PRICE

£15,807 to £22,437

SIZE (l x w)

4.23m x 1.76m

ENGINE SIZES (litres)

Petrol: 1.6, 2.0
Diesel: 2.0

FUEL USE (mpg)

Petrol: 35.8 to 38.7
Diesel: 42.8 to 50.4

CO₂ EMISSION (g/km)

Petrol: 176 to 190
Diesel: 150 to 176

Our ratings



BMW 1 series

STRENGTHS

- Reasonably good safety
- Holds value well

WEAKNESSES

- Poor brand reliability
- Expensive to run

BABY BEAMER

BMW, traditionally associated with large and luxury models, has made a foray into medium cars with the 1 series. It takes on premium models such as the Audi A3 and the A-Class Mercedes as well as higher-specification versions of top-selling medium cars like the Ford Focus and Renault Mégane. The 1 series certainly got off to a good start: 2,000 were sold in its first month of UK sales.

HANDLING THE POWER

The car's main strength, according to owners, is the way it behaves on the road – there's widespread praise for performance, handling, ride comfort and brakes.

Mike Allsop said: 'It's a completely different driving experience because of the rear wheel drive.' John Jeremy praised the handling: 'It's so accurate. [The car] goes just where you

BMW 1 Series

place it, giving you such control on corners.' Mike Wormwood agrees, saying his 1 series is 'a very precise car to drive'. Even Paul Caldrell's diesel model provoked enthusiasm. 'The shove these modern diesels can give is just fantastic,' he said.

Everyone is happy with the brakes. Robert Weston tried his 120i SE model on a test track and said it 'stops on a sixpence...brilliant'.

SIZE MATTERS

Space in the back is far from generous – those with family and luggage might have to cross the 1 series off their shortlist. John Jeremy told us: 'It's a bit cramped for four adults. For my circumstances,

that's fine, because we only ever carry our grandchildren in the back.' And Isobelle Lee, who is 5ft 3in, had seat-belt problems: 'If you have the seat a long way forward, the seat-belt cuts into you – you can't adjust its height.'



John Jeremy says space in the back is tight

VERDICT

A high-powered, quality medium car for people who put fun ahead of practicality – and are happy to pay for it.

jargon buster

DELIVERED PRICE

List price, VAT and delivery

BRAND RELIABILITY

Rating from our annual members' survey

CRASH TEST

Safety in front and side crash tests

OVERALL SAFETY

Safety in a wider range of accidents

THEFT OF CAR

Ease of stealing the car

THEFT FROM CAR

Ease of breaking into car

Facts and figures

DELIVERED PRICE
£15,115 to £26,215

SIZE (l x w)
4.47m x 1.77m

ENGINE SIZES (litres)
Petrol: 1.6, 1.8, 2.0, 2.4, 2.5
Diesel: 1.9, 2.0

FUEL USE (mpg)
Petrol: 27.7 to 39.2
Diesel: 49.6 to 57.6

CO₂ EMISSION (g/km)
Petrol: 171 to 224
Diesel: 129 to 152

Our ratings



Volvo S40 and V50

STRENGTHS

- Class-leading safety and security
- Low running costs and depreciation

WEAKNESSES

- Poor brand reliability
- Electrical problems reported

TOUGH FAMILY MARKET

The S40 saloon, which John Ritchie describes as 'safe, comfortable and well appointed', and the V50 estate model compete against premium large cars like the Audi A4, BMW 3 series and Honda Accord.

LONG DISTANCE

Owners are pleased with their car's performance but less so with the fuel economy of petrol-engined versions. John Ritchie told us the performance was 'excellent – it just seems to be very easy to handle'. And Keith Gibson said: 'It's so stable on the road. You could drive hard round bends before you'd feel the car start to let go.' However, Ian Wort complained: 'It's not economical. I can't get the fuel consumption they quote.'

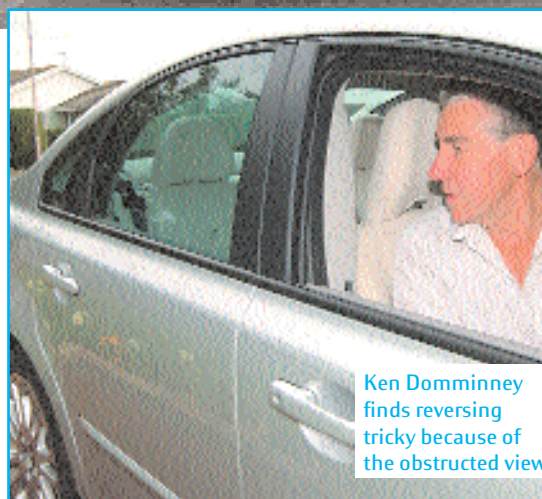
'It's not economical. I can't get the fuel consumption they quote'

Ian Wort

Half the owners are less than pleased with the rear visibility, and Ken Domminney is distinctly unhappy with his S40 saloon: 'The head restraints, C-pillars [the rearmost pillars] and mirrors all get in the way,' he told us.

UNDERCHARGED

Seven owners reported problems, mostly electrical. Three were left with flat batteries, due to charging problems. Ken Domminney was told his was due to 'short runs and power drain from the 16 on-board



Ken Domminney finds reversing tricky because of the obstructed view

computers. It's made me reluctant to turn the engine off for short times.' Keith Gibson's experience was similar: 'I had done about a 200-mile journey and put the car in the garage, went back the next day and the battery was completely flat.'

Owners reported several other faults, mostly minor, but Ian Wort, whose clutch failed and who also suffered electrical problems, told us: 'It's put me off a bit...the problem was the car, not the dealer.'

In the main, the dealers responded well to owners' concerns, but perhaps Volvo needs some coaching about reliability from its parent company Ford, which has managed to turn around its own build quality in recent years.

On a more positive note, Volvo has introduced something of a bargain servicing package on new S40s and V50s: all your servicing for three years, or 36,000 miles, for just £100. Unfortunately, this wasn't on offer when our owners bought their cars.

VERDICT

A good family car, which leads the field for safety and security. Most owners like the way it drives, but it's not without its teething troubles.

Mitsubishi Colt

STRENGTHS

- Good brand reliability
- Plenty of space for people, front and rear

WEAKNESSES

- Small boot
- Noisy at speed

STIFF COMPETITION

The main rivals are class-leading superminis, such as the Toyota Yaris and Honda Jazz, as well as cheaper budget models, such as the Hyundai Getz, Kia Picanto and Chevrolet Matiz.

NIPPY LITTLE NUMBER

Almost all owners were happy with the Colt's performance: 'It's just what I want. It handles well and it's quicker than most cars,' said Jayne Hamilton.

Most rate the car as suited to town and rural motoring – short trips rather than the long haul. Paul Ayett reckons: 'It probably rides a bit hard for long distance – I would not go on a holiday in it.'

Four owners criticise the noise levels. Peter Whiting found it could get noisy at speed: 'It's fine on the motorway if you keep it around 65mph, but if you start to move up to the legal speed limit, it makes a considerable difference.'

Ride comfort comes in for some criticism from others, too, like Geoffrey Barrell: 'It depends on the road. On a good road it is excellent; on a poorer surface it gets a lower rating.'

POOR VISIBILITY

Half the owners criticised the front screen pillars (A-pillars). According to Steven Farthing: 'It's a big windscreen and is very clear. The downside is where the A-pillars are – they are quite thick.'

LITTLE AND LARGE

Owners praise the space in the front and rear – Andy Cleland said: 'We have the rear seats in a mid setting

Folding the rear seats gives a decent amount of luggage space, according to Geoffrey Barrell



and we have acres of room for either adults or kids in the back.' And Steven Farthing says there is lots of room in the back: 'We've had two large people in the back and they had plenty of headroom.' But the

'It's just what I want. It handles well and it's quicker than most cars'

Jayne Hamilton

boot doesn't match up. Paul Hunt complains: 'Behind the back seat there is about a foot [of room]. You could fold the seats down, but I didn't really want to go to all that trouble.' Geoffrey Barrell doesn't mind: 'If you're not carrying four people, the seats fold down and there is more luggage space.'

VERDICT

A nippy city car with pretty good space, front and rear, but a small boot. Make sure you're happy with the noise and ride quality over a longer journey.

Facts and figures

DELIVERED PRICE

£8,106 to £12,836

SIZE (l x w)

3.87m x 1.70m

ENGINE SIZES (litres)

Petrol: 1.1, 1.3, 1.5

Diesel: 1.5

FUEL USE (mpg)

Petrol: 44.8 to 49.6

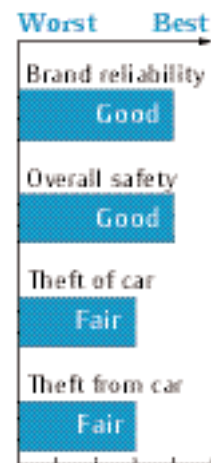
Diesel: 58.8 to 61.4

CO₂ EMISSION (g/km)

Petrol: 135 to 149

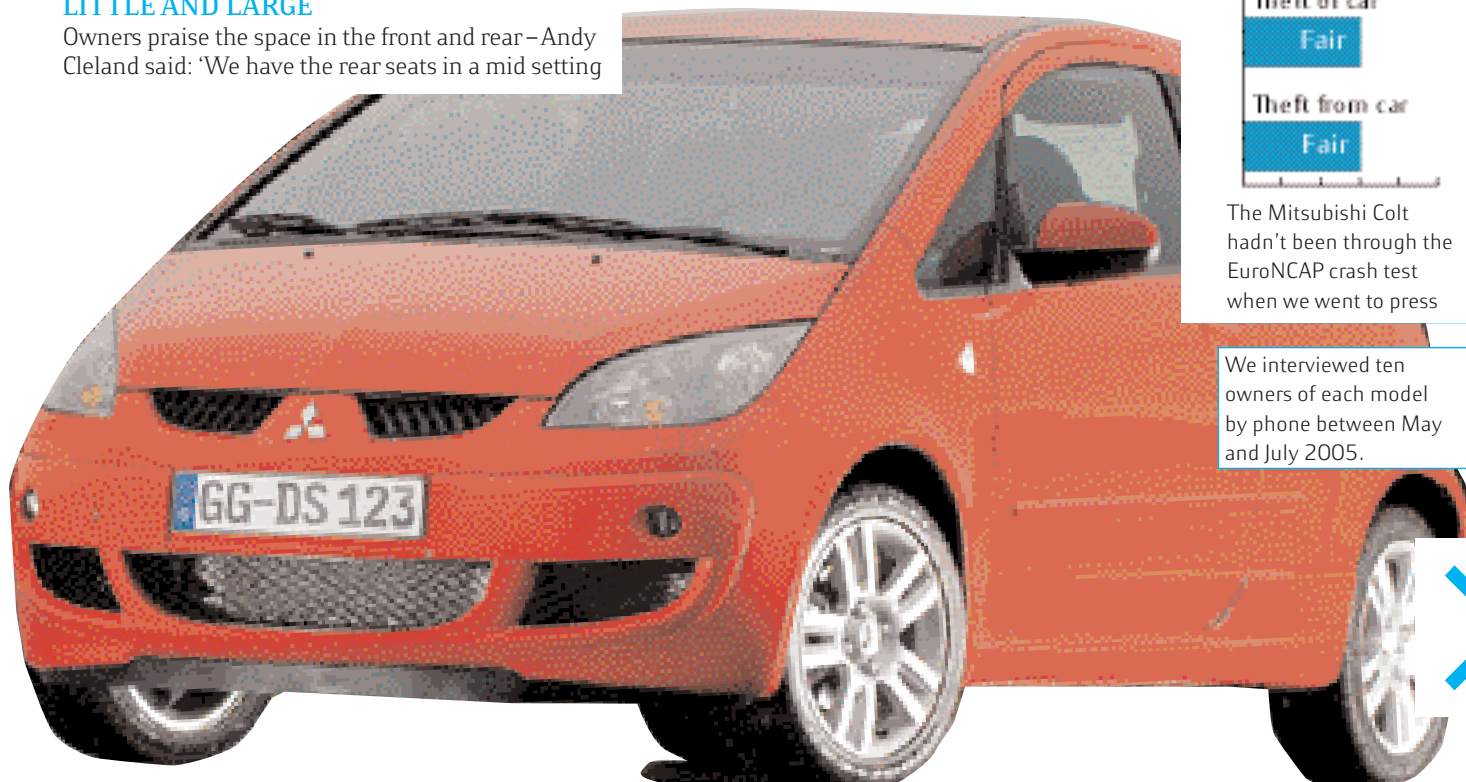
Diesel: 121 to 126

Our ratings



The Mitsubishi Colt hadn't been through the EuroNCAP crash test when we went to press

We interviewed ten owners of each model by phone between May and July 2005.



Facts and figures

DELIVERED PRICE

£5,352 to £7,182

SIZE (l x w)

3.50m x 1.60m

ENGINE SIZES (litres)

Petrol: 1.0, 1.1

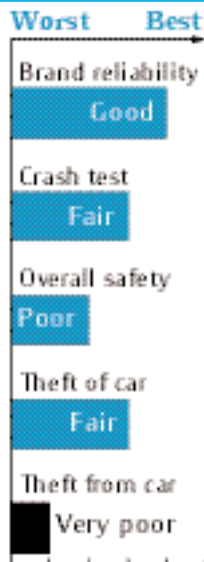
FUEL USE (mpg)

Petrol: 48.7 to 57.6

CO₂ EMISSION (g/km)

Petrol: 119 to 138

Our ratings



Kia Picanto

STRENGTHS

- Good brand reliability
- Cheap to buy
- Pretty good space in the front

WEAKNESSES

- Poor safety and security
- Small boot

PEPPY PICANTO

Kia claims the Picanto has 'peppy performance and class-leading interior dimensions'. But it's up against some sharp competition, including our Best Buy superminis, the Toyota Yaris and Honda Jazz, as well as the Daihatsu Charade, and the Mitsubishi Colt (reviewed on p27).

THE BOTTOM LINE

With prices starting at under £5,500, it isn't surprising that half the owners we spoke to referred to price and value for money as one of their main reasons for buying. As Alan Fowler said: 'Cost – in blunt terms, something cheap and reliable to get me from A to B without any problems.'

Three also referred to its size – they were looking for easy driving. Peter Dearden told us: 'I wanted [a car] that would be small and easy to manoeuvre, with economical fuel consumption and cheap insurance...and that is tolerably comfortable for

'The engine is noisy and clearly it's working hard at high speeds'

Peter Dearden

sitting in the whole day.'

For other reasons, size was also an issue for Linda Husband: 'I'm only five foot – I needed a vehicle I can reach the pedals safely in. It's the main criterion with me.'

For nine of our owners, this was their first experience of a Kia – which is not surprising since Kia is a relative newcomer to the UK. All owners agree that the Picanto is suited to singles and



Linda has trouble reaching the pedals in some cars, but has no problems with the Picanto

couples, and to newly qualified drivers, with its small-car manoeuvrability cited by three of the owners. And most thought the car was OK for both tall and short people.

A few owners have doubts about using the Picanto for longer trips, and half reckon it's not suited to carrying children – it's just too small and has limited boot space. Peter Dearden told us: 'It wouldn't be good for long trips. The space is cramped and the engine is noisy and clearly it's working hard when driven at high speeds.'

SHORT ON PROBLEMS

Only two owners reported problems with their cars – both minor. One broke the petrol filler flap and the other had a rattle on cobbled roads. Both problems were readily sorted out.

VERDICT

The Picanto has fairly disappointing safety and security ratings. However, it is a low-priced, fairly competent city car, though not so well suited to family travel or longer journeys.

Citroën C4

STRENGTHS

- Reasonably good safety
- Well equipped

WEAKNESSES

- Poor brand reliability
- A bit small for family use

STRONG OPPOSITION

The C4 goes into probably the toughest fought market, head to head with big hitters like the Ford Focus, Vauxhall Astra and Toyota Corolla. It needs to be able to carry a family safely and reliably, in comfort and at a family-friendly price.

All the owners we spoke to agreed that the C4 is well suited to all types of journey, though there are reservations about who could sensibly come along. Andrew Freeston told us: 'Two adults and one child in the back seat found it a bit uncomfortable.' John Gwinnell agreed: 'With children, it may not be quite big enough.'

All owners are happy with the C4's road performance. According to Tanya Castle: 'We do use a lot of country lanes, and it handles very nicely.'

STYLE OVER PRACTICALITY

The C4's striking styling, inside and out, is a winner. Tanya Castle told us what she liked: 'The looks, its comfort, the overall drive and all the features – all the gadgetry in the car.' Andrew Freeston said the design was 'a bit quirky, a bit eye-catching, and a bit something out of the ordinary'.

However, several owners identified poor visibility as a weakness. 'The bonnet is sloping, so you cannot

The Freeston family find the C4 a bit short of space in the back



see the front if you are parking,' according to James Leighton. Citroën offers optional front parking sensors, but none of our owners opted for them.

Andrew Freeston added: 'The front pillars get in the way when you're looking at things like traffic lights.'

Tom McCollam had a minor gripe about the CD player, which he said was 'awkward [to use] when you're driving'.

QUESTIONABLE QUALITY

Eight owners reported problems with their C4, but dealers were able to sort out most of them. Andrea Wilson had problems with the fabric on the seats: 'It stains very badly,' she told us.

VERDICT

The C4 is quite an exciting package. It wins on comfort and style but loses on space for families.

Facts and figures

DELIVERED PRICE

£10,387 to £16,847

SIZE (l x w)

4.26m x 1.81m

ENGINE SIZES (litres)

Petrol: 1.4, 1.6

Diesel: 1.6, 2.0

FUEL USE (mpg)

Petrol: 34.9 to 44.1

Diesel: 52.3 to 60.1

CO₂ EMISSION (g/km)

Petrol: 153 to 200

Diesel: 125 to 142

Our ratings



YOUR OPINIONS

If you own any of the following cars, we'd like to hear from you:

New BMW 3 series (from Mar 2005), BMW X3, Citroën C1, new Fiat Multipla (from Sep 2004),

Honda FR-V, new Lexus GS (from May 2005), new Mercedes A-class (from Feb 2005), Mitsubishi Grandis, Peugeot 1007, Smart ForFour, new Subaru Legacy (from Nov 2004),

new Vauxhall Tigra (from Sep 2004), new Vauxhall Zafira (from Aug 2005).

Write to Nikki Lewrey with full contact details (plus phone number), and the

exact model, the age of car and exactly when you bought it – see 'Contact us' on p56 for the address. We'll select ten owners of each model and conduct phone interviews.



The Jeremys were happy to share their experience of their new BMW