



Key battleground for supermini buyers. Back row (left to right): Skoda Fabia, Nissan Micra. Middle row (left to right): Smart ForFour, Honda Jazz, Mitsubishi Colt, Ford Fiesta. Front row (left to right): Toyota Yaris, Renault Clio, Fiat Grande Punto

# Supermini supertest

Can the new Clio, Punto and Yaris knock our reigning Best Buy supermini off top spot?

It's a bumper year for car launches – a massive 120 all-new models are due to hit UK showrooms before the year is out. New superminis feature highly – but with so much choice, it's more important than ever to pick the right model.

We've selected three significant new superminis – the Fiat Grande Punto,

Renault Clio and Toyota Yaris – and put them up against six popular rivals. We've also looked at what other cars you can get for your money and the forthcoming models that could be worth waiting for.

In addition to there being more choice, superminis are growing in size, too. The new Grande Punto, for example, is just

**This year  
there will be  
120 new car  
models to  
choose from**

6cm shorter than its MPV big brother, the Multipla. The best superminis are no longer too cramped for everyday family use.

Whatever your priorities – space, safety, style, comfort or just trouble-free motoring – we've travelled the highways and byways and stripped out all the sales bluster to help you choose.

## How we test

### Driving

We drive each car for between 300 and 1,200 miles on various roads, as well as on test tracks for extreme handling and braking manoeuvres. Our professional road testers assess comfort, noise and a host of other aspects. They also measure combined fuel economy to see if it tallies with carmakers' claims.

Back in the lab we assess visibility, using lasers to mimic the driver's line of sight. Then we put the car in a big freezer

(at -10°C) to see how effective the heater is. Finally, we carry out numerous everyday tasks to rate comfort and practicality, from whether the cup holders will spill your coffee to whether your knees hit your chin in the back seat.

### Safety

The Which? safety rating system assesses how well the car will protect occupants in various types of crash. Scores have no upper limit, and can be compared across all car classes



### Security

It can take just three seconds to break into some superminis, according to our timed attacks. Our in-house 'thieves' also assess how easy it is to break in and drive the car away.

### Reliability and satisfaction

Our annual survey is the best in the business. It gathers owners' views on everything from performance and comfort to reliability and faults. In 2005, we had replies for 34,000 cars.

– so even the safest superminis are only average alongside large cars, for example. We also consider Euro NCAP crash test results, which complement our own inspections.



## 66% Honda Jazz

£8,795 to £13,095

The Jazz may be five years old, but this Best Buy still sets the benchmark for the supermini class – not least in terms of its superb reliability and clever, versatile cabin layout.

It is competent in most areas and the 1.4 semi-automatic provides ample power, a smooth drive, reasonable refinement and good fuel economy.

WHICH?  
BEST  
BUY

Our tests returned 43.5mpg, compared with Honda's claimed combined figure of 47.9mpg.

Overall stability is good, but the Jazz's suspension is stiff and jiggly over rough surfaces, and the steering feels imprecise, with poor feedback.

Inside, the controls are well positioned and intuitive to use, and the dials are large and clearly laid out. There's plenty of space in the front and there's room for two adults in the back, though taller people might struggle for legroom. There's a generous 353-litre boot, and the back seats are cleverly designed to fold completely flat – giving a low flat surface, although only a relatively modest 845 litres of space.

**WE LIKE** The rear seat-base flips up, allowing you to carry tall items, such as a bike, across the rear cabin instead of in the boot – a great touch.

**Engines** 1.2 and 1.4 petrol **Gearbox options** 5-speed manual or 7-speed semi-automatic (CVT) **Body styles** 5-door hatchback **Dimensions (lwxhxh)** 3.86m x 1.88m (inc mirrors) x 1.53m **Insurance groups** 3 to 4 **Which? safety rating** 8.5 (poor) **Which? security ratings** Theft from: 4/10; theft of: 8/10



## 65% Skoda Fabia

£7,570 to £12,565

The Fabia is a comfortable car that offers good value for money.

There's ample space in the front. In the rear, legroom is limited if there's someone tall in the front, but headroom is fine. The boot is about average but folding the seats expands it to a capacious 1,016 litres. There's also an estate version, which provides even more space – with the seats down you have 1,225 litres to play with.

The 1.9 diesel delivers strong performance through a smooth, well-matched six-speed gearbox. The 1.2 petrol is also quite smooth but it lacks punch. We managed an impressive 51.4mpg in the diesel (versus Skoda's claimed 53.3mpg) and a respectable 40.9mpg in the 1.2 petrol (compared with the official 47.1mpg).

Fabias are a mixed bag when it comes to reliability – petrol versions have a reputation for problems with the cooling unit and engine management system, while diesel versions offer average reliability overall.

**WORTH KNOWING** The Fabia shares some engines and underpinnings with the VW Polo. Badge snobbery aside, the Fabia is much better value.

**Engines** 1.2, 1.4 and 2.0 petrol; 1.4 and 1.9 diesel **Gearbox options** 5- or 6-speed manual or 4-speed auto (petrol), 5- or 6-speed manual (diesel) **Body styles** 5-door hatch, 5-door estate or 4-door saloon **Dimensions (lwxhxh)** 3.97m x 1.89m (inc mirrors) x 1.45m **Insurance groups** 1 to 7 **Which? safety rating** 9.5 (fair) **Which? security ratings** Theft from: 3/10; theft of: 8/10



## 62% Renault Clio

£9,145 to £15,350

The new, bigger Clio combines some powerful engines with confident brakes, ride and handling.

Driving stability and cornering are good but although the electric power steering responds quickly, its self-centring action is quite aggressive and can feel jerky if you're not used to it.

The 1.6 petrol engine is responsive and smooth if a little thirsty. We managed only 37.2mpg in our tests, compared with Renault's claimed 42.8mpg combined figure. It's not a particularly refined engine – it drones at high revs, which can be wearing on long motorway journeys. In contrast, we found the 106bhp 1.5 diesel very smooth, responsive and quiet. Renault claims an impressive 64.2mpg (combined), and while we couldn't match this in real life, it still returned 57.6mpg – good news at the pumps.

The cabin is well laid out, and front space is particularly impressive. The boot is also a decent size and shape and expands to 1,028 litres with the rear seats folded down.

**WORTH KNOWING** The old Clio has an undistinguished reliability record – if the new car proves more reliable, it will be a strong contender.

**Engines** 1.2, 1.4 or 1.6 petrol; 1.5 diesel **Gearbox options** 5-speed manual or 4-speed auto (petrol); 5- or 6-speed manual (diesel) **Body styles** 3- or 5-door hatchback **Dimensions (lwxhxh)** 3.99m x 2.03m (inc mirrors) x 1.50m **Insurance groups** 2 to 6 **Which? safety rating** To be assessed **Which? security ratings** To be assessed

The five-year old Jazz still sets the benchmark for the supermini class

## Jargon explained

Don't be bamboozled by salespeople and petrol-heads

■ **BODY ROLL** When cornering, some cars lean over noticeably. This causes the tyres on one side to have less contact with the road, reducing control.

■ **COMBINED FUEL CONSUMPTION** Manufacturers'

combined fuel consumption figures are an average of the 'urban' and 'extra urban' (out-of-town) figures from tests done according to EU rules. Our own test figures blend real-life urban and out-of-town driving.

■ **CVT (CONTINUOUSLY VARIABLE TRANSMISSION)** An automatic transmission with one variable 'gear'. It is meant to ensure the engine operates in its most efficient rev-range.

■ **DRIVING STABILITY** The car's ability to maintain direction (even in cross-winds) without needing repeated steering adjustments.

■ **LOW-PROFILE TYRES** These

have a small sidewall height relative to their width. They offer good handling but a poorer ride.

■ **WELL-SPACED GEARS** The gear ratios match the engine performance so that it operates within its most efficient range.

■ **UNDERSTEER** In a corner, the front wheels start to lose grip, forcing the car to take a wider radius than intended.



## 62% Toyota Yaris

£8,990 to £13,260

The new Yaris looks cute, but it needs more than cheeky looks to beat its predecessor. Power from the 1.3 petrol engine is adequate for most needs. The three-cylinder 1.0 model is nippy enough around town but lacks punch for motorways and overtaking. Driving stability and cornering is good in the 1.3 petrol, but the 1.0 has more body roll than we'd like and it's sensitive to cross-winds. But the brakes are first-rate. The 1.3 returns a decent 41.5mpg.

The Yaris is spacious up front, while clever sliding rear seats give a choice of more legroom or extra boot space. Even so, luggage space is tight: with the seats folded it is only 737 litres – no match for the Grande Punto or Clio.

Toyota's world-leading reliability means the Yaris shouldn't let you down. **WE FOUND** Forward visibility is OK, but obstructive rear pillars make reverse parking quite awkward.

**Engines** 1.0 or 1.3 petrol; 1.4 diesel **Gearbox options** 5-speed manual or 5-speed semi-automatic **Body styles** 3- or 5-door hatchback **Dimensions (l x w x h)** 3.75m x 1.70m (not inc mirrors) x 1.52m **Insurance groups** 1 to 4 **Which? safety rating** To be assessed **Which? security ratings** To be assessed



## 60% Nissan Micra

£8,390 to £13,045

The Micra is one of the best-handling cars tested, thanks to smooth, direct steering, a stiff chassis, and suspension capable of absorbing most bumps. The ride is a little harsh on rough surfaces, especially with the 'hot' 160 SR model.

Although it feels refined around town, and road noise is minimal, the Micra is prone to excessive engine and wind noise at speed. We averaged 42.8mpg in the 1.2 petrol version.

The Micra is reasonably spacious up front but not in the rear. The rear seat slides fore and aft but even in its rearmost position, legroom is limited. Sliding it forward gives a reasonable 371 litres of luggage space but even less legroom. And folding the rear seats gives just 584 litres of storage.

**WATCH OUT** It isn't living up to its ultra-reliable predecessor, with owners reporting battery problems and a higher-than-average breakdown rate.

**Engines** 1.2, 1.4 and 1.6 petrol; 1.5 diesel **Gearbox options** 5-speed manual or 4-speed automatic (petrol only) **Body styles** 3- or 5-door hatchback **Dimensions (l x w x h)** 3.73m x 1.66m (not inc mirrors) x 1.54m **Insurance groups** 2 to 6 **Which? safety rating** 8.5 (poor) **Which? security ratings** Theft from: 3/10; theft of: 7/10



## 59% Ford Fiesta

£8,390 to £13,595

Despite a recent facelift, the Fiesta feels dated next to the latest 'minis'. But it's still an affordable, trusty runabout.

The 1.4 diesel isn't short on zest, despite its modest 68bhp, and its well-spaced gears allow confident overtaking and motorway cruising. We managed 53.3mpg, less than Ford's claimed 62.8mpg. The 1.4 petrol we tested returned 38.7mpg (against 45.6mpg).

On three-door models, large doors allow easy access to the front but getting into the back can be tricky for the less supple. There's reasonable space for two adults in the back. The five-door makes it easier to get in the back but it feels more cramped in the front. Boot space is fair, expanding to 945 litres with the seats folded.

**WE LIKE** Good straight-line stability and a hint of understeer create a feeling of confidence, particularly for less experienced drivers.

**Engines** 1.25, 1.4, 1.6 and 2.0 petrol; 1.4 and 1.6 diesel **Gearbox options** 5-speed manual, 4-speed auto or 5-speed semi-auto **Body styles** 3- or 5-door hatchback **Dimensions (l x w x h)** 3.92m x 1.91m (inc mirrors) x 1.47m **Insurance groups** 3 to 13 **Which? safety rating** 9.5 (fair) **Which? security ratings** Theft from: 4/10; theft of: 7/10

**Toyota's excellent reliability means the Yaris shouldn't let you down**

## What you should look for

### Safety

Five-star Euro NCAP ratings are becoming the norm for all new cars, including superminis. Choose a car that scores well in Euro NCAP and our own detailed safety inspections

### Space and flexibility

Sliding, folding and removable rear seats all make superminis more flexible. Think about your needs and try them all out

### Ride quality

Superminis can often give a jiggly ride, due to their light weight and short, stiff suspension settings – so take a test-drive on a range of surfaces before buying

### Air conditioning

You'll be grateful when it's scorching hot and you're stuck in a jam. It's a popular option that will also help you sell the car later

### Stability control

Life-saving technology that helps you keep control if you encounter an unexpected hazard. For more, see 'Cars in control', March 2006, p10



## What else

### ON SALE NOW



### CITROËN C3

It's near the top of the class for performance, fuel consumption and handling, but there isn't that much space in the back or boot. Safety is average. **SCORE 60%**





## 58% Fiat Grande Punto

£7,589 to £12,290

The Grande Punto's Italian flair helped it chalk up 5,500 sales in its first month.

Outside, it's larger than the 'standard' Punto (which is still on sale) but inside it's actually smaller. Access, seat space and comfort are good up front but just average in the back. Boot space is typical for the class, but with the seats folded, it grows to an impressive 1,030 litres. However, the old five-door Punto takes 50 litres more (a small suitcase).

Handling is pretty good but the usually precise steering needs frequent corrections during motorway journeys. And with gearing set up for economy, both the 1.2 petrol and 1.3 diesel struggle to deliver much punch. We got 42.2mpg from the 1.2 petrol model, compared with Fiat's claim of 46.3mpg. **WATCH OUT** Fiat reliability is usually poor, which limits the Grande Punto's score. Predicted depreciation is also high, so haggle hard for a discount.

**Engines** 1.2 and 1.4 petrol; 1.3 and 1.9 diesel **Gearbox options** 5-speed manual (petrol); 5- or 6-speed manual (diesel) **Body styles** 3- or 5-door hatchback **Dimensions (lwxh)** 4.03m x 1.69m (not inc mirrors) x 1.49m **Insurance groups** 2 to 6 **Which? safety rating** To be assessed **Which? security ratings** To be assessed



## 47% Mitsubishi Colt

£7,494 to £12,999

The Colt shares its architecture with the Smart ForFour – so engines, gearboxes and many chassis components are common. But the Colt is taller and less sporty and somewhat quieter to drive.

The 1.5 diesel comes with a manual or automatic gearbox and produces very good power, even at low revs. Both options are frugal: we achieved 53.3mpg in the manual but the more efficient automatic returned 54.3mpg. The 1.5 petrol managed 39.2mpg.

The Colt corners well, without much body roll. But the steering feels poor, and needs frequent readjustments.

Space in the front is excellent but it's tighter for rear passengers and luggage. The 220-litre boot expands to 585 litres with the rear seats folded.

**NOT EASY TO USE** The five-door Colt has removable rear seats to create more load space. A good idea, but they're fiddly and heavy to lift out.

**Engines** 1.1, 1.3 and 1.5 petrol; 1.5 diesel **Gearbox options** 5-speed manual or 6-speed semi-automatic **Body styles** 3- or 5-door hatch, 2-door convertible **Dimensions (lwxh)** 3.87m x 1.70m (not inc mirrors) x 1.55m **Insurance groups** 3 to 15 **Which? safety rating** 8 (poor) **Which? security ratings** Theft from: 5/10; theft of: 6/10



## 47% Smart ForFour

£7,290 to £17,195

Quirky styling and detachable panels make the Smart stand out, but its kit-car looks mirror kit-like performance.

It's the best handling car in the test and the well-engineered 1.5-litre petrol version provides plenty of power, a smooth transmission and an exciting sports-car feel. But the sporty drive brings poorer fuel economy than many rivals' and less refinement, with lots of engine and wind noise at high speeds.

Inside, the 'retro-look' dials are well laid out and easy to read. There's generous space in the front, and you can cram two adults into the back seat. The boot is a tiny 145 litres when the rear seats are slid back to give more passenger legroom. With the seats slid forward this rises to 270 litres.

**WORTH KNOWING** Smart recently discontinued the ForFour due to flagging sales, so look out for end-of-line bargains on forecourts.

**Engines** 1.1, 1.3 and 1.5 petrol; 1.5 diesel **Gearbox options** 5-speed manual or 6-speed semi-automatic **Body styles** 5-door hatchback **Dimensions (lwxh)** 3.75m x 1.68m (not inc mirrors) x 1.46m **Insurance groups** 4 to 16 **Which? safety rating** 9 (fair) **Which? security ratings** Theft from: 3/10; theft of: 6/10

The Grande Punto is bigger outside, but inside it's smaller than the old car

## se can you buy?



### HYUNDAI GETZ

The Getz rides and handles fairly confidently, but safety lags behind the best. It's loved by owners and reliability is first-rate. It has a five-year warranty, too. **SCORE 63%**



### MINI

The Mini trades on its iconic looks and fun drive. Reliability is good, although owners report a few niggles. Space is limited. Pricey but holds its value. **SCORE 61%**



### RENAULT MODUS

A super-sized supermini, which majors on safety and versatility. It would run the Jazz close if Renault could sort out its poor brand reliability. **SCORE 60%**



### SEAT IBIZA

The recently facelifted Ibiza is a budget, sporty choice that steers and handles as well as the best in this class. It's in the top five for safety and fairly reliable. **SCORE 62%**



### VW POLO

VW's ageing stalwart falls short of the best, though it's fairly competent. Avoid the 1.2 petrol engine, which has lacklustre on-the-road performance. **SCORE 58%**

### COMING SOON



### PEUGEOT 207

In showrooms this month, the 207 will sell alongside the popular 206. There are three- and five-door versions and three petrol and three diesel engines. Starts at £8,995.



### VAUXHALL CORSA

Due to be unveiled at the Motor Show in July, Vauxhall claims the all-new Corsa is bigger, safer and better equipped than ever. On sale in August, it should start from £7,000.

MODEL	PRICE	WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE									SCORE %
		HANDLING	SUSPENSION	BRAKES	VISIBILITY	SPACE IN FRONT	SPACE IN REAR	BOOT SPACE	EURO NCAP CRASH TEST	BRAND RELIABILITY	
1 HONDA Jazz	8,795	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	66
2 SKODA Fabia	7,570	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	65
3 RENAULT Clio	9,145	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	62 <sup>a</sup>
4 TOYOTA Yaris	8,990	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	62 <sup>a</sup>
5 NISSAN Micra	8,390	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	60
6 FORD Fiesta	8,390	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	59
7 FIAT Grande Punto	7,589	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	58 <sup>a</sup>
8 MITSUBISHI Colt	7,494	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	47
9 SMART ForFour	7,290	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	47

<sup>a</sup> Total score is capped by 10 points, due to insufficient model reliability data. Score may rise if model reliability proves to be good

#### USING THE TABLE

##### Price

The lowest on-the-road price in the range (including registration, delivery and 12 months' road tax).

##### Test performance

Ratings based on our rigorous

independent road test and convenience assessments.

**Euro NCAP crash test** This is the score, out of five, based on car's ability to protect adult occupants in Euro NCAP front and side crash tests.

**Brand reliability** This is based

on owners' feedback from our 2005 car survey.

##### Score

Ignores price and is based on:

**50%** Road test  
**30%** Safety and security  
**20%** Reliability/ownership

#### WHICH? CAR 2006-2007



Look out for our bigger and better annual car guide, published in September. It's free for all *Which?* subscribers.

## Which should you choose?

### Best for families

SKODA FABIA/  
HONDA JAZZ

The Skoda Fabia and Honda Jazz offer contrasting family accommodation. Choose the Fabia estate for out-and-out space – nothing beats its carrying capacity. It's a heavy car, though, so avoid the 1.2 petrol engine if you're regularly at full capacity. Check there's enough rear legroom for your regular passengers, too.

The Jazz has a large boot and offers a good balance between space for passengers and luggage. The rear seats fold completely flat, giving lots of space and excellent access.



sport option but it costs a whopping £17,195. The other 1.5 petrol and diesel versions also have plenty of zip, though. Make sure you get a good discount.

### Best used buy

**FORD FIESTA** The Fiesta makes a sound used car, thanks to plentiful supply, good reliability and low parts' prices. Expect to pay around £3,000 for an early 2002/02-plate version of this model.



### Budget buy

FIAT GRANDE PUNTO 1.3 MULTIJET

Less than £8,500 gets you a Fiat Grande Punto 1.3 Multijet diesel Active 3-door. With a five-star Euro NCAP rating, claimed



fuel economy of more than 60mpg (combined) and low running costs, it certainly looks good value. It's too early to say how reliable it will be, though.

### Most reliable

**HONDA JAZZ** The Honda Jazz is still the king of the hill. Its excellent reliability record and three-year, 90,000-mile warranty offer the kind of reassurance many new-car buyers seek. It's also sought after on the used market, which keeps resale values healthy.

The brand-new superminis on test (the Fiat Grande Punto, Renault Clio and Toyota Yaris) all look promising but they need to earn their spurs in the field if they're to match the Jazz. Expect it from Toyota – reliable motoring should be a given. But Renault and Fiat's poor brand reliability means the new cars have to work hard to prove they're trustworthy choices.



### Most fun

**SMART FORFOUR** Forget space, refinement or practicality and go for the Smart ForFour. The 1.5 Brabus is the range-topping

