



ROAD TEST

PEUGEOT 205 GTi 1.9

PRICE £9295, TOP SPEED 120mph, 0-60mph 7.8secs, MPG 28.1

FOR Performance, handling, gearchange **AGAINST** Steering, idle

MAINTAINING THE ADVANTAGE

Just as Peugeot's rivals were catching up with the popular GTi hatchback in 1.6-litre form, a big-valve, 1.9 version has been introduced in the UK

Such is the state of technical advance in the car industry that it is quite possible for a trend-setting new model to be matched and overtaken by the competition if the manufacturer sits back and basks in the glow of success for too long.

Peugeot is clearly not prepared for that to happen with its ultra-successful 205 range in general and the top-of-the-line GTi in particular. When it looked like the opposition might be closing in on the little hatchback in the performance stakes, the 1580cc XU5J engine which provides such exhilarating performance sprouted a big-valve cylinder head.

This increased the power output from 105 to 115bhp without losing



any of the original engine's excellent bottom end and mid-range response.

For 1987, the 1.6-litre GTi continues, but just to head off any challenges from other hot hatchback manufacturers, Peugeot has produced a 1.9-litre version, the 205 GTi 1.9.

This is claimed to be the fastest-ever road-going version of the car with the exception of the mid-engined Turbo 16, a model required by the now-defunct Group B homologation regulations.

Externally, there is not a great deal to give the game away. The eagle-eyed observer will note the larger, 15ins diameter wheels fitted with 185/55 section tyres and the new

badges, but otherwise there is nothing to distinguish the 1.9 GTi from the 1.6. Inside there are leather-trimmed side cushions for the seats, a leather-rimmed steering wheel, and leather gear lever gaiter. Standard equipment includes electric windows and central locking.

Not so obvious, though, are the mechanical changes associated with a 15bhp increase in power and a 21lb ft increase in torque. The 1.9 model, for instance, boasts four-wheel disc brakes (the 1.6 GTi has rear drums), thicker anti-roll bars and revised spring and damper rates while the gearbox has been upgraded and, in combination with the larger diameter wheels, produces an mph-per-

1000rpm figure in fifth of 20.9, as opposed to the smaller engined GTi's 18.7mph per 1000rpm. At the front, the track has been reduced by 0.4ins and larger wheel bearings are fitted, while at the rear the track is increased by a similar amount to cater for the solid 9.7ins diameter discs.

The XU9JA engine (see *Technical Focus*) is, of course, at the heart of the new Peugeot. The fuel-injected 1905cc unit is in fact similar to that fitted to the Citroën BX GTi, and although the torque figure of 119lb ft, peaking at 4750rpm, might suggest a certain intractability at low speeds and constant gear changing once out on the open road, a perusal of the torque curve reveals that the usable

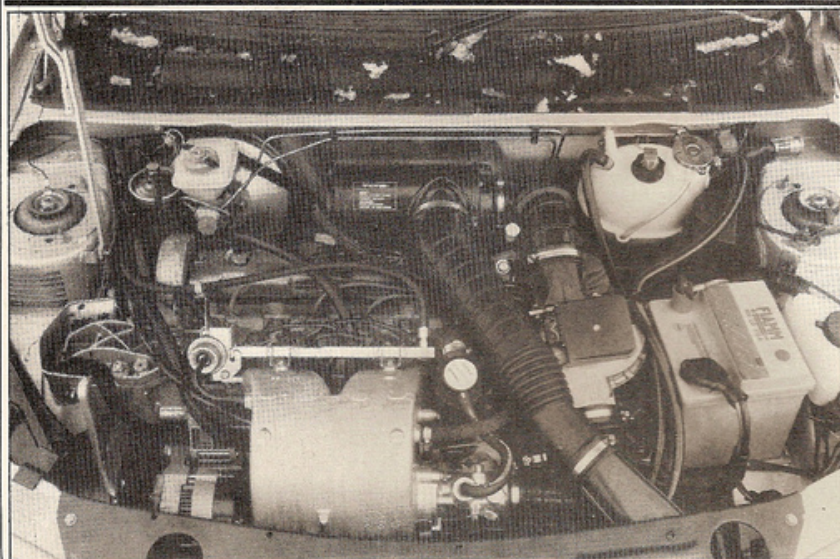
figure is above 108lb ft from 2200rpm to 6000rpm.

Because the larger displacement power unit requires very few changes in ancillary hardware — it retains Bosch L-Jetronic fuel injection — kerb weight remains similar to that of the 1.6 GTi, as does the front-rear weight distribution.

PERFORMANCE

We have often praised the performance on offer from the 205 GTi and we make no excuse for emphasising it. Thankfully none of the immense tractability and willingness to rev is lost in this long-stroke development which has served to boost performance with gains in acceleration, ▶

ROAD TEST



TECHNICAL FOCUS

It was probably inevitable that the Peugeot 205GTi's engine would grow from its original displacement of 1580cc to the larger size of 1905cc. Why? Because although they carry different identification codes — the 1.6-litre is the XU5J while the 1.9 is the XU9JA — they share the same aluminium alloy cylinder block with cast iron liners.

The main difference is the longer-throw crankshaft, the block very obviously being designed with the larger displacement in mind such is the amount of space in the crankcase. It is not simply a case of slipping in the new crankshaft, however: the

change also requires different connecting rods plus alterations to the pistons and combustion chambers to produce a slightly lower 9.6:1 compression ratio (the 1.6-litre engine is set at 9.8:1).

The result is that the bore remains the same for both power units, at 83mm, while the stroke grows from 73 to 88mm. Predictably, power and torque outputs have increased accordingly, the former climbing from 115bhp at 6250rpm to 130bhp at 6000rpm and the latter from 98lb ft at 4000rpm to 119lb ft at 4750rpm. Bosch L-Jetronic fuel injection is used on both engines.

The gearbox is, of course, part of the key to getting the power to the ground effectively. In the case of the 1.9 GTi, the first and second gear ratios have been raised compared with the 1.6 version while the final drive is also higher (3.69 versus 4.06), a change with which the more powerful engine is capable of coping and which has the added benefits of endowing the car with a higher theoretical maximum speed and more long-legged cruising ability.

The single dry plate, diaphragm spring clutch with its cable operation remains the same diameter at 7.9ins.

top speed and mid-range torque so that the engine very rarely feels stressed.

From a driver's point of view, this latter aspect becomes more obvious when travelling at motorway speeds in fifth gear. There is a cut of 1.3secs over the 50 to 70mph span compared with the 1.6-litre-engined 205 GTi. The faster the speed the more impressive the result, with the 70 to 90mph step showing a 1.7 second advantage. In third gear, which is ideally suited to motorway overtaking, topping out at 89mph, the 50 to 70mph figure is reduced to 4.9secs for really brisk acceleration.

In absolute sprinting terms the Peugeot 205 GTi 1.9 is just as difficult a car (if not more so) to accelerate quickly off the line as its less powerful brother, simply because you can provoke excessive wheelspin without really trying. Even a feathered clutch start brings wheelspin as full power is fed through the wheels. The front of the car goes very light, and it takes a good bit of patience trying different launch techniques until you feel the results are truly representative of the available performance. Only one

gearchange is required to reach 60mph, which appears in only 7.8secs, a figure considerably better than all of the Peugeot's close rivals with the notable exception of the giant-killing Renault 5 GT Turbo.

The 205 GTi 1.9 also gives a reasonable account of itself in top speed too. It is not the fastest car in its class but manages a respectable mean maximum speed of 120mph with the engine turning over at 5750rpm, slightly under peak power but close enough to illustrate the near ideal gearing.

As with the more humble 1.6-litre versions, the gearbox is a delight with its light and easy change and ratios carefully chosen for smooth acceleration. In the case of the 205 GTi 1.9 those ratios are slightly altered to suit the modified engine characteristics. For instance, both first and second are higher, as is the final drive. This means that whereas the 1.6 litre GTi pulls 18.68mph/1000rpm in fifth gear the 1.9 version returns a higher 20.80mph/1000rpm. To put it another way, a steady 70mph in the 1.9 equated to 3350rpm, down from 3750rpm in the regular 205 GTi.

vealed there to be 1.5 gallons remaining in the tank.

The 205 GTi 1.9 is one of the few new cars that suffers quite badly from fuel surge — on sharp right-hand bends — even with an indicated quarter tank of fuel remaining. This results in jerky progress, with the engine coughing and spluttering until the wheels are turned straight and the fuel contents sloshed back over the pick-up.

The locking fuel filler cap is neatly incorporated into the side trim and is of a convenient height set into the offside C-pillar so that the user does not have to stoop to remove it.

REFINEMENT

The change in gearing has helped to improve the overall refinement levels and at 70mph in fifth for instance the 1.9-litre engine is clearly quieter thanks to more leisurely revs. At lower speeds, however, there is considerably more road noise from the ultra low-profile Michelins with their wider contact area. Also there is a marked boominess at lowish engine revs, again more so than in the smaller engined variant.

Wind noise is well controlled up to very high speeds and at the maximum legal limit certainly does not present any real problem. One previous source of complaint with all 205s, that of a noisy booster fan, appears to have been solved if current examples are anything to go by. Previously there was always an audible whirring with the fan set even on its lowest setting; that is now absent.

The only real refinement complaint with this (and indeed with the less powerful 205 GTi) is the car's inability to crawl along in slow moving traffic at a smooth pace. Part of the problem can be attributed to the ultra light throttle which needs only a slight flexing of the big toe to send the car surging forward; the other part comes from the hunting nature of the engine on idle. This characteristic disappears totally when the throttle is loaded.

ROAD BEHAVIOR

As soon as one encounters a less than perfect section of road in the 205 GTi 1.9 it soon becomes apparent that the ride does not have quite the absorbent characteristics as the 1.6-litre car. The ride is notably firmer, uncomfortable at times and certainly much less of a compromise. Springs, dampers and anti-roll bars are all uprated in an effort to help handle the sizeable boost in performance. Though the ride has suffered, outright handling is certainly more predictable. There is little body roll and the car feels far tauter in hard cornering and exhibits very little pitch during hard acceleration or braking manoeuvres. Combine this with steering which, as we have previously commented, seems to have a very quick response either side of the straight ahead position despite its 3.8 turns lock to lock, and you have a car which is an extremely neutral handler in most circumstances but one that can be flicked into oversteer

ECONOMY

By modern standards an overall fuel consumption figure of 28.1mpg for such a high performance device as this is particularly praiseworthy, but even this figure is beaten well down the listings by opposition from the Toyota Corolla GT 3-door — 28.8mpg — and the hot hatch fore-runner, the Golf GTi — 29.0mpg.

Put into perspective, this figure is still better than some 1.6-litre-engined cars we could name and does illustrate that in this case, a large engine in a light bodyshell is indeed a good recipe for acceptable economy.

The fuel tank is of 11 gallons and theoretically has a range of just over 300 miles between fills, however the pointer on the fuel gauge of the test car had a habit of dropping on to the reserve section at the 250-mile mark on the odometer. Refuelling re-

on a trailing throttle. The overall handling balance of the 1.6 205GTi was spoiled only by this strong oversteering response which can call for quick steering counter measures to avoid a spin; the 1.9-litre version with its uprated suspension and further fine tuning exhibits similar oversteer characteristics but build up is more gradual so that a driver has more time to take corrective action.

Improvements in overall handling have come at the expense of steering effort to some degree, which is considerably greater in the 205GTi 1.9 so that you really have to fight the wheel when taking tight corners at speed. Thankfully Peugeot has seen fit to replace the rather uncomfortable plastic-rimmed steering wheel with a thicker leather rim which feels far more comfortable to hold and allows a driver to counteract steering resistance to some degree. At parking speeds steering effort really is substantial, approaching Fiat Strada Abarth 130 TC levels.

On paper the brake specification looks very good with huge ventilated front discs and solid discs of similar size at the rear replacing the previous drum arrangement. The results of the fade tests showed virtually no trace of brake fade with pedal pressure stabilised at 26lb during the latter half of the 10 high-speed 0.5g deceleration runs. Though pedal pressure remains light there was no shortage of feel through the pedal and little chance of premature locking. The response tests gave reasonable results considering the far from ideal test conditions, though handbrake performance proved less satisfactory barely holding the car on the 1 in 4 test slope.

AT THE WHEEL

The driver position is little changed from the current 1.6-litre 205 GTi but it felt as though there was slightly more padding in the differently trimmed seat bases. Apart from this feature, and the thicker far more comfortable leather-bound wheel, both cars appear identical.

Seat adjustment is via the usual, simple turnwheel, and some form of lumbar and seat height adjustment would be welcome. Otherwise the seats themselves offer a reasonable amount of lateral and vertical support and proved relatively comfortable after longish motorway trips.

The steering column is set a little too low for some tastes and taller test drivers complained that the wheel occasionally rubbed against the knees.

The pedal arrangement is absolutely right for heel and toe changes with plenty of space in the footwell area, even for size 10 shoes. The instrument layout follows the normal 205 GTi pattern with matching speedometer and tachometer flanked either side by ancillary gauges. The layout is very clear and night time legibility good. Column stalks, one either side of the wheel operate indicators/lights (left) and washers/wipers (right). Both are within easy reach without the user having to take his hands from the wheel. The gear change is very light and requires only a gentle movement to engage each ratio while the clutch requires a more substantial, though not excessive, 35lb pedal effort.

Ancillary switchgear is dotted around the dashboard as before with the usual array of push button switches; the rear wash/wipe control, however, is now incorporated in a small button on the end of the right hand column stalk which is easier to find but annoying in that the only setting is a simple single sweep and simultaneous wash.

CONVENIENCE

As mentioned previously, there are very few interior alterations on the 1.9 GTi compared with the 1.6 version, so most of the comments which pertain to that model also apply to its larger-engined brother.

Certainly there are the leather-trimmed seats, but these make no difference in terms of comfort or location compared with the cloth-covered items of the 1.6.

Of more use to the driver and passengers are the electric windows and central locking, both standard equipment items on the 1.9 GTi. In fact, the car is well equipped for the class, with such items as remotely operated door mirrors, locking fuel cap, stereo radio/cassette player and halogen driving lights included in the price tag.

The only extra fitted to the test car was a glass sunroof with sliding sunblind. Unfortunately, freezing weather precluded experiencing the delights of the sunroof, but it seems to operate easily enough and in the ▶



Front seats sport a new leather side treatment



205 GTi offers the same convenience as the other 205s



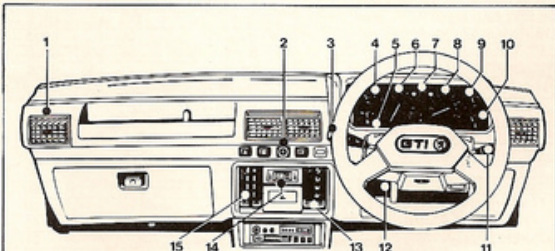
Simple and symmetrical layout



Unequally divided rear seats



Instruments are as the 1.6 GTi. Steering wheel was thought too low



1 Ventilation outlet, 2 Controls for hazard flasher/heated rear window/lighter/fog lights, 3 Lights/indicators/horn stalk, 4 Oil pressure gauge, 5 Fuel gauge, 6 Speedometer, 7 Warning lights, 8 Rev counter, 9 Oil temperature gauge, 10 Water temperature gauge, 11 Wipers/washers stalk, 12 Rheostat, 13 Ventilation control, 14 Digital clock, 15 Temperature and fan controls

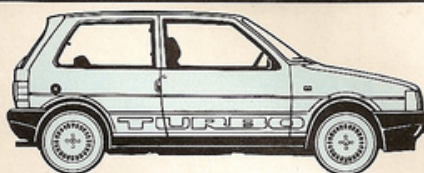
THE OPPOSITION

FIAT UNO TURBO

£7490

Fiat's standard-setting supermini, Car of the Year in 1984, remains a very competitive package. The intercooled turbo engine is purpose-built and delivers smooth and immediate power with virtually no sign of lag. Exciting performance is achieved without sacrificing fuel economy. Nice gear-change, tolerable ride, while handling and grip are excellent

Tested	31 Jul 1985
ENGINE	1299cc
Max Power	105bhp at 5750rpm
Torque	108lb ft at 3200rpm
Gearing	20.01mph/1000rpm
WARRANTY	12/UL, 6 anti-rust
Insurance Group	OA
Automatic	N/A
5-Speed	●
Radio	●
Sunroof	£209
WEIGHT	1976lb



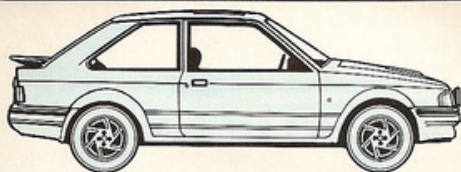
TOP SPEED	120mph	MPG	26.1
0-62mph	9.1secs	Range	285 miles

FORD ESCORT RS TURBO

£10,028

Anyone who drove the original Escort RS Turbo is likely to be disappointed by this latest, softer version. The car is still an impressive contender among hot hatchbacks — mechanical refinement and fuel consumption have been improved, but the increase in overall gearing means that the new RS Turbo has lost some of the edge of the previous car

Tested	27 Aug 1986
ENGINE	1597cc
Max Power	132bhp at 5750rpm
Torque	133lb ft at 2750rpm
Gearing	22.59mph/1000rpm
WARRANTY	12/UL, 6 anti-rust
Insurance Group	OA
Automatic	N/A
5-Speed	●
Radio	●
Sunroof	£572†
WEIGHT	2247lb



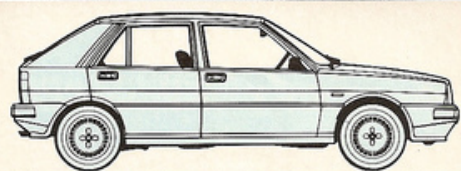
TOP SPEED	124mph	MPG	27.4
0-60mph	9.2secs	Range	290 miles

LANCIA DELTA HF TURBO IE

£8790

Worthy, but often forgotten contender in the hot hatch stakes, especially in 1987 specification with cleaned up outside and very much improved interior. Above average refinement levels for an Italian performance car. Modest body changes cloak quite substantial mechanical revisions especially to the engine, which now has an intercooler for the turbo

Tested	27 Aug 1986
ENGINE	1585cc
Max Power	140bhp at 5500rpm
Torque	141lb ft at 3500rpm
Gearing	20.93mph/1000rpm
WARRANTY	36/UL, 6 anti-rust
Insurance Group	OA
Automatic	N/A
5-Speed	●
Radio	DO
Sunroof (manual)	●
WEIGHT	2352lb



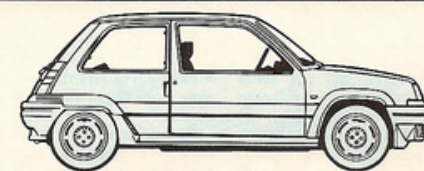
TOP SPEED	119mph	MPG	24.5
0-62mph	8.5secs	Range	310 miles

RENAULT 5 GT TURBO

£7695

This Renault undeniably sets new standards of performance for the whole, keenly squabbling hot hatchback brigade including the Golf GTi-Abarth 130 TC elite corps. Ride is stiffish, and it understeers a little with power, but straight line stability is excellent and cornering behaviour good. Visibility is not ideal, rear is very cramped. Engine incorporates latest technology.

Tested	26 Mar 1986
ENGINE	1397cc
Max Power	115bhp at 5750rpm
Torque	121lb ft at 3000rpm
Gearing	21.75mph/1000rpm
WARRANTY	12/UL, 5 anti-rust
Insurance Group	OA
Automatic	N/A
5-Speed	●
Radio	●
Sunroof	£140
WEIGHT	1749lb



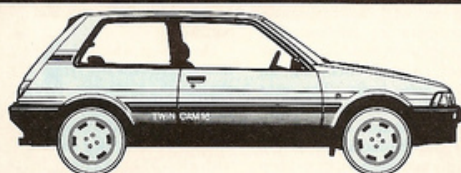
TOP SPEED	125mph	MPG	22.0
0-60mph	7.1secs	Range	240 miles

TOYOTA COROLLA GT 3-DOOR

£8549

Now one of the quickest of all the performance hatchbacks. Toyota created this pocket rocket by fitting its 1587cc twin-cam, 16-valve engine to the competent, but rather mundane, Corolla hatchback. An impressive performer with 119bhp on tap. It possesses Japanese traits of good finish and generous equipment levels. Handling is easily up to the performance

Tested	10 Apr 1985
ENGINE	1587cc
Max Power	119bhp at 6600rpm
Torque	103lb ft at 5000rpm
Gearing	18.6mph/1000rpm
WARRANTY	12/UL, 6 anti-rust
Insurance group	6
Automatic	N/A
5-Speed	●
Radio	●
Sunroof	●
WEIGHT	2091lb



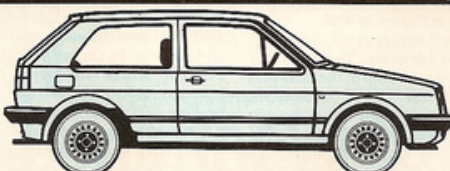
TOP SPEED	102mph	MPG	28.8
0-60mph	8.5secs	Range	315 miles

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTI

£9248

Must go down as one of the decade's trend-setting cars, the latest version combines the wonderfully smooth, free-revving 1.8-litre VW engine with the established advantages of the Mk2 Golf's roomier body. It's not cheap, but for your money you get a tremendously refined package. Ride and handling are especially good

Tested	12 May 1984
ENGINE	1781cc
Max Power	112bhp at 5500rpm
Torque	114lb ft at 3100rpm
Gearing	21.26mph/1000rpm
WARRANTY	12/UL, 6 anti-rust
Insurance Group	OA
Automatic	N/A
5-Speed	●
Radio	●
Sunroof	●
WEIGHT	2063lb



TOP SPEED	114mph	MPG	29.0
0-60mph	8.6secs	Range	230 miles

● Standard ○ Optional at extra cost † Part of option package N/A Not applicable DO Dealer Option



1.9-litre 205 GTi sits on unusual size, 185/55, Michelin MXV



Peugeot's distinctive lines are unchanged in latest sports version

closed position did not seem responsible for any obvious increase in the amount of wind noise.

Winter weather always provides the opportunity to try out a car's heating and ventilation arrangements to the full, and here the Peugeot's air-blending heater seems to cope well. It provides copious amounts of warm air for quick demisting as well as reasonably precise temperature control. The only slight let down in this area is the rear wiper, which works on an intermittent-only basis. The rear windows of hatchbacks always attract considerable amounts of road dirt and spray and the facility to have a permanently activated wiper to keep the glass clean is almost a necessity in some weather conditions. It is not enough to keep the button on the end of the Peugeot's right-hand stalk permanently depressed because the washer is activated as well.

Oddment space, as with other 205 models, is adequate. There is a tray moulded into the top of the fascia plus a bin in the centre console, a hinge-down glovebox above the passenger's knees and small, hard-sided door pockets. One of the attractions of hot hatchbacks is that they combine high levels of driving pleasure with a good degree of practicality. The Peugeot is no exception thanks to its split/folding rear seats and a cargo

area which suffers virtually no intrusion from rear suspension components.

In addition, the tailgate opens down to bumper level and the small tail-light clusters guarantee that the opening is as wide as possible. The engine compartment is quite full with the 1.9-litre power unit and its ancillary components, but the reservoirs are all easily reached as is the battery.

One point which should be mentioned concerns the tyres. A chance chat with a nearby tyre stockist revealed that the 15ins Michelin MXV tyres fitted to the Peugeot are unusual in that they are 185 section with a low 55 aspect ratio. In fact, this is a brand new tyre and is unlikely to be generally available in the UK for some months.

SAFETY

As ever, automotive safety can be split into two distinct areas: active and passive. In the active area, the Peugeot scores strongly with its tremendous handling and impressive braking — it actually gives the driver a fighting chance of manoeuvring his way out of a tricky situation. Overall visibility is also good thanks to the relatively slim A and B posts of the 205, although there can be something of a blindspot in the rear three-quarter area because of the thickish



Spot the difference — front track has been reduced by 0.4ins and hence obstructive rear pillars.

On the passive side, the 205 GTi 1.9 incorporates all the usual items such as front headrests rear seatbelts and a laminated windscreen. It has the usual high-intensity rear foglights matched by a pair of front foglights which are set into the spoiler. As required by the Type Approval regulations, there are no potentially injurious internal or external projections and the body sides incorporate plastic mouldings capable of absorbing small knocks and bumps.

VERDICT

The heart of this latest 205 is undoubtedly the power unit. Leaving aside for the moment the question of putting 130bhp through the front wheels of a relatively light car, it has to be said that the 1905cc engine in the form fitted to the Peugeot is most impressive. It provides smooth, clean power right the way through the rev range, which equates to a really noticeable improvement in responsiveness — and that for a car which was already noted for its responsiveness.

In fact, the only complaint in this area concerns the tendency of the engine to 'hunt' at idle. It can make the business of crawling along in slow-moving traffic very unpleasant because the car either stalls frequently or makes forward progress in a

series of kangaroo hops.

If one were to try to sum up the basic difference between the 1.9 and 1.6-litre 205 GTis, one could draw a useful parallel between the Fiat Strada 105 and 130TC models. The latter is a fairly harsh, no-compromise machine which is clearly intended for the owner who enjoys driving pleasure above all else. Excellent performance and precise, predictable handling are perhaps its two most important attributes.

The 1.9-litre GTi is somewhat more refined than the Fiat, but the concept is very similar. The steering is particularly heavy at low speeds, the ride is notably harsher than the 1.6 GTi, the front wheels 'tramline' along the road surface like a competition car and, predictably, a bit too much enthusiasm with the accelerator pedal results in massive amounts of wheelspin as the front wheels scabble for grip.

There is no doubt, though, that this is a driver's car — as long as you like very powerful front-wheel-drive machines — for it accelerates, handles and brakes with the best in this class. Admittedly it is not a car which will ever appeal to the mass market, but we can only applaud any manufacturer building such a no-compromise model which also possesses such a commendably high driving enjoyment quotient. ■