

**PM
ROAD
TEST**



RUSSIAN

WHEN YOU FIRST SEE IT the Lada betrays its unmistakable Italian origins. It has the same boxy body as the 124 Fiat even down to the circular indicator repeaters in the front wings. Which is not surprising since the Russians spent vast sums of roubles setting up a new factory at Togliatti (even the place sounds Italian, doesn't it?) with Fiat's help.

Although the body shape is exactly the same as the 124, the Russians have used a heavier gauge metal for the floor pan, presumably to withstand the rigours of Soviet roads and hard winters. This, and other modifications such as stiffer suspensions, heavy duty starter, larger clutch, and rear brake drums instead of discs result in a kerbside weight increase of about 200 lbs.

So there you have your Lada box with average to good trim and paintwork finish. Now, step inside — which presents no difficulties either to front or rear thanks to wide-opening doors.

The front seats are adjustable fore and aft and are fully reclining so that the backs can be brought level with the rear seat. Seat comfort is not as good as it might be and the vinyl covering becomes sticky in warm weather.

The interior finish is rather disappointing and particularly annoying was the ill-fitting plastic floor covering which could trap your clutch foot after it had been rested on the floor beside the pedal.

Drivers with long legs will find themselves a bit "jack-knifed" even with the seat as far back as it will go, on the other hand leg-room at the back is better than in most cars of a similar size.

The steering wheel is large and set rather higher than two test drivers liked. It comes fitted with a nasty glove but, happily, it's easy to take off the glove!

The speedometer is rather uncooperative, reading 20, 40, 60, 80, and 100 mph with only short lines between to indicate 30, 50, and 70 mph which, of course, are all limit speeds. The only other instruments fitted are a fuel gauge and water temperature gauge, but



there is a fairly comprehensive back-up system of lights which, in addition to the usual ones of oil pressure, ignition, indicators, and main beam, also warn you about low fuel level, side lights on and, if you have been careless, that the handbrake is on.

For oddments there is a nonlockable glove box which has its own light, and flat pockets in the front doors; behind the rear seats is a deep shelf for parcels.

The window winders are very low geared and on the test car the one on the passenger's side was so stiff that it was a real fight to lower it. Quarter-lights are fitted but the snag is that if the driver's one is opened it obscures the very useful doormounted overtaking mirror.

Standard equipment is pretty good and includes such things as two-speed and intermittent wipers, dipping interior mirror, alternator, cigarette lighter, and

grab handles for all passengers. Regrettably there is no heated rear window.

The boot will take all the usual holiday luggage for four, and the spare wheel and tools are sensibly arranged so as to be get-at-able without having to unload. The tool kit must be the most comprehensive of any car on the road today. There are ring and open ended spanners, box spanners, plug spanner, pliers, screwdrivers, tyre lever, a lead light, foot pump, tyre pressure gauge, and, shades of the good old days, a starting handle! Should be enough to get you going again if you're stuck in the steppes.

ON THE ROAD

Starting the engine was immediate whether hot or cold. The choke proved sensitive, too little and the engine stalled, too much and it also stalled from excessive fuel. The test car we had

warmed up to the no-choke position within a mile which is good for fuel consumption and engine wear.

The clutch action was very poor. When hot it was almost impossible to start from rest without some judder, sometimes quite a lot, and the bite came in during the top inch and a half of travel.

The accelerator, too, proved difficult to control with the precision one needs in traffic mainly due to poor spring loading resulting in jerky progress. You learn to live with this but it takes time.

The gear change is very positive and there is no doubt about being properly engaged, which is perhaps the reason for it being difficult on occasion to select first gear and reverse. The gear ratios seem fairly low throughout which means you get excellent top gear flexibility with reasonable pull from 15 mph. The recommended change-up point is at 5,750 rpm but we found that the engine was by no means stretched at this level and it was easy to go a good deal higher without over-stressing. First gave 28 mph, second 42 mph, and third 67 mph.

Although our subjective judgement was that the acceleration lacked briskness, the track test figure of 0-60 mph in 14.4 seconds is respectably nippy. In fact, when driving in town traffic, you can keep up with the other basic 1200s, without really trying.

In spite of the relatively large steering wheel, low speed manoeuvring is heavy work, especially parking and the radial tyres which are standard add to the steering effort needed, but at normal cruising speeds it feels much lighter yet perfectly stable.

Cornering quickly causes the car to run wide but the understeer doesn't convert to a tail-out posture of oversteer if you lift off the accelerator. The handling is very good and the car sits firmly on the road. On motorways you notice the slipstream of the heavy lorries as you overtake though there is nothing alarming about the deflection.

The suspension is the same design as the Fiat 124 but has been

LADA 1200

Italian design, plus Russian labour,
equals the Onetwofourski

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE. OHC 4-cyl in-line water cooled 1198 cc develops 62 bhp at 5600 rpm. Compression ratio 8.5:1. Carburettor: twin choke down draught. Oil capacity 6.6 pints including filter.

TRANSMISSION. Clutch: 8.0 in. diaphragm operated hydraulically. Gearbox: 4-speed all synchromesh with floor mounted lever. Final drive 4.3:1 by split prop shaft to live rear axle. Oil capacities: gearbox 2.4 pints, rear axle 2.6 pints.

SUSPENSION. Front: independent double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, and anti-roll bar. Rear: four trailing arms, coil springs, telescopic dampers, and Panhard rod. Brakes: 10 in. discs at front, 9.8 in. drums at rear, servo assisted, dual hydraulic circuits. Steering: worm and roller.

GENERAL DETAILS. Battery 12v. 55 amp/hr. charged by alternator. Tyres: 155 x 13 Michelin ZX on 4 1/2 J rims. Wheelbase 7 ft. 11 1/2 in. Track 4 ft. 5 in. front, 4 ft. 3.4 in. rear. Overall length 13 ft. 4.4 in. Overall width 5 ft. 3.4 in. Overall height 4 ft. 6 1/2 in. Ground clearance 4.9 in. Kerb weight 18.7 cwt. Fuel: mechanical pump from 8.6 gallon tank at rear.

PRICE. £980.84 including VAT and Car Tax

PERFORMANCE

TEST CONDITIONS Overcast Dry tarmac Light cross wind
TEMPERATURE 15.5 deg. C.

ACCELERATION TIMES

0-30 mph	4.6	secs.
0-40	7.3	..
0-50	10.5	..
0-60	14.4	..
20-40 (in top)	11.7	..
20-40 (in third)	7.5	..
30-50 (in top)	12.1	..
30-50 (in third)	7.7	..
40-60 (in top)	13.8	..
40-60 (in third)	8.5	..

STANDING 1/4-MILE—20.3 secs. **MAXIMUM TRUE SPEED**—88 mph.

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

Speedometer reading:	20	30	40	50	60	70	80
True speed:	20	29	39	48	58	67	77

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Town driving	25.2	mpg	(45.8	mpp)
Country driving	36.3	..	(66.0	..)
Main road (up to 70 mph)	36.0	..	(65.4	..)
Economy driving	50.8	..	(92.4	..)
Overall (780 mile test)	25.8	..	(46.9	..)

(Mpp = miles per pound at 55p per gallon)

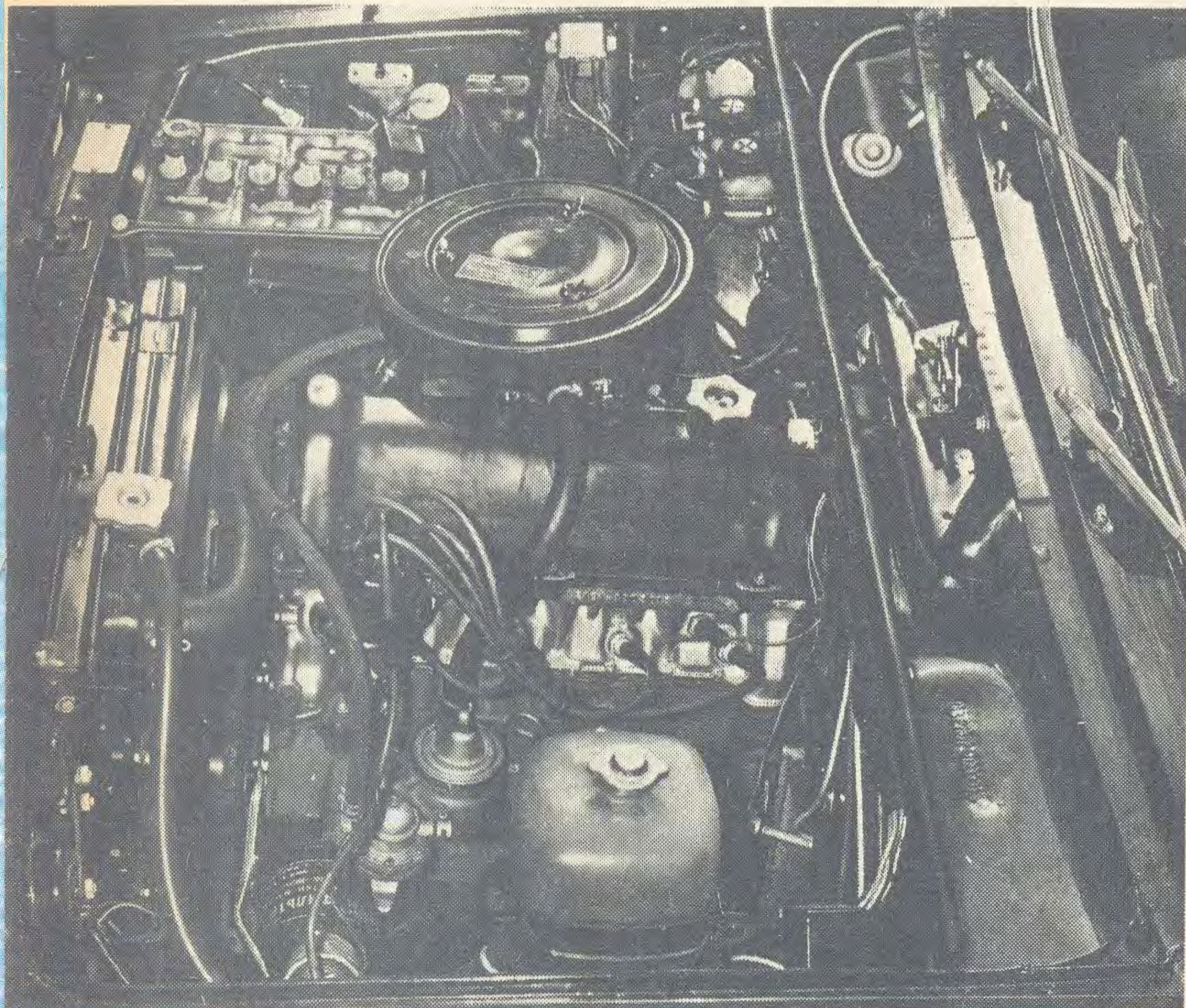
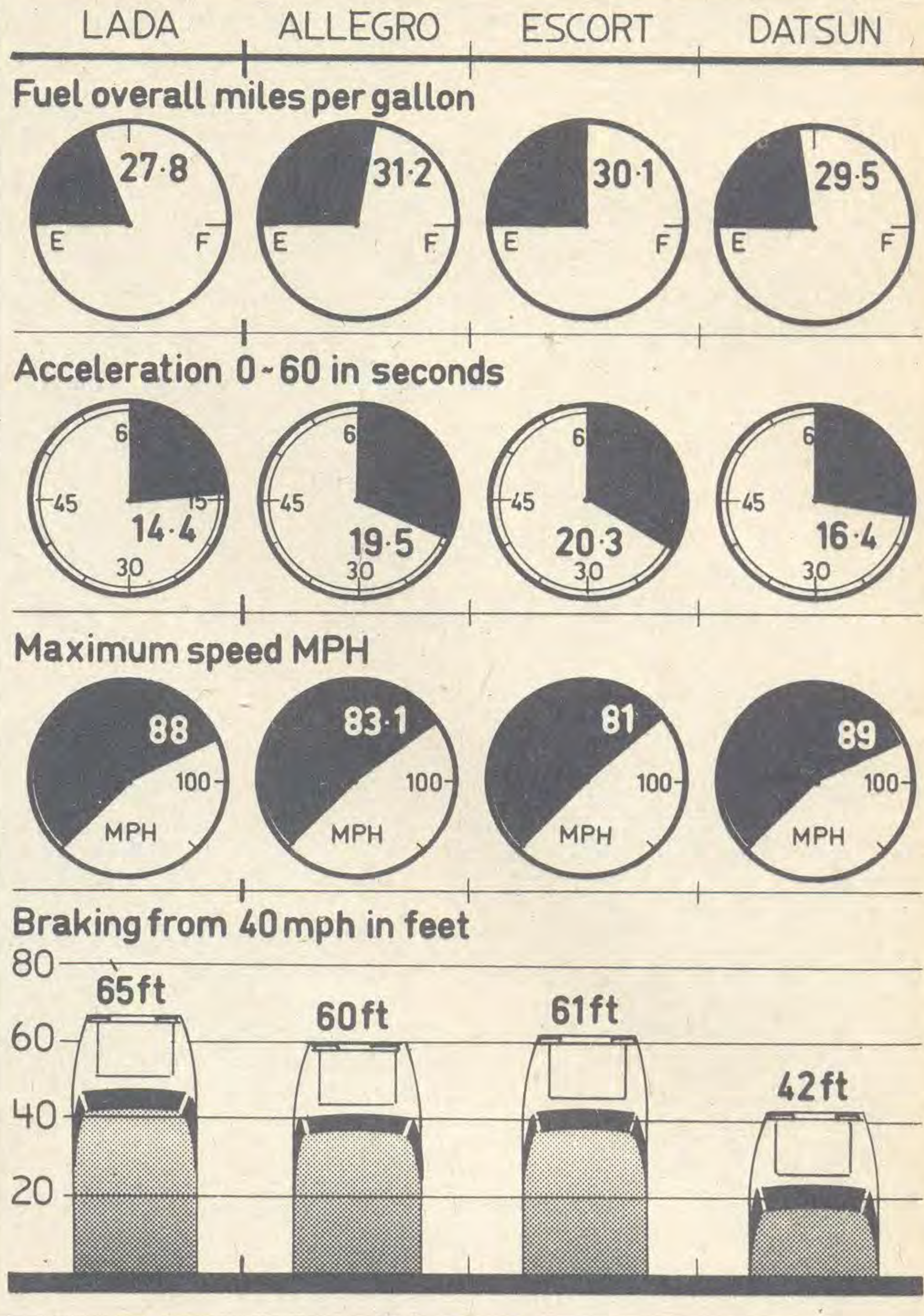
BRAKING (Averaged distances) Stop from:

30 mph	31	ft.
40	65	ft.
50	105	ft.
60	150	ft.

TURNING CIRCLE—36 ft.

POWER/WEIGHT RATIO—66.3 bhp/ton.

HOW IT COMPARES LADA



There is plenty of room around the engine to get at all the essential maintenance points such as battery, oil filler cap, distributor, petrol pump, hydraulics, and so forth. Reaching number one plug might be a bit difficult, but that's about all

steered up and body roll on corners is well controlled, but this results in a rather choppy ride over bumpy surfaces.

Assuming that the brakes were properly adjusted on the test car, the pedal travel is over long and there is a vague, spongy feel to them. They work adequately on the road but for a servo assisted system you would expect less leg effort to be required. A limiter valve controls hydraulic pressure to the rear wheels and under heavy, emergency braking, it certainly prevents the rear from weaving.

Although the overall test figure was a little disappointing at 25.8 mpg, the Lada responded well to economy style driving, giving a 50.8 mpg average. For everyday use under mixed traffic conditions, a careful driver should be able to better 35 mpg.

All round visibility is pretty good although there are the usual rear quarter blind spots, the offside being taken care of by the door mirror. The high up driving position gives a good view of all four corners which is very desirable when parking and weaving through traffic.

Unless revved hard, which you

tend to do when wanting to get a move on, the Lada's engine is not especially noisy, but as speed rises wind roar is at a pretty high level. The test car was on Michelin ZX tyres and they were commendably quiet.

MAINTENANCE

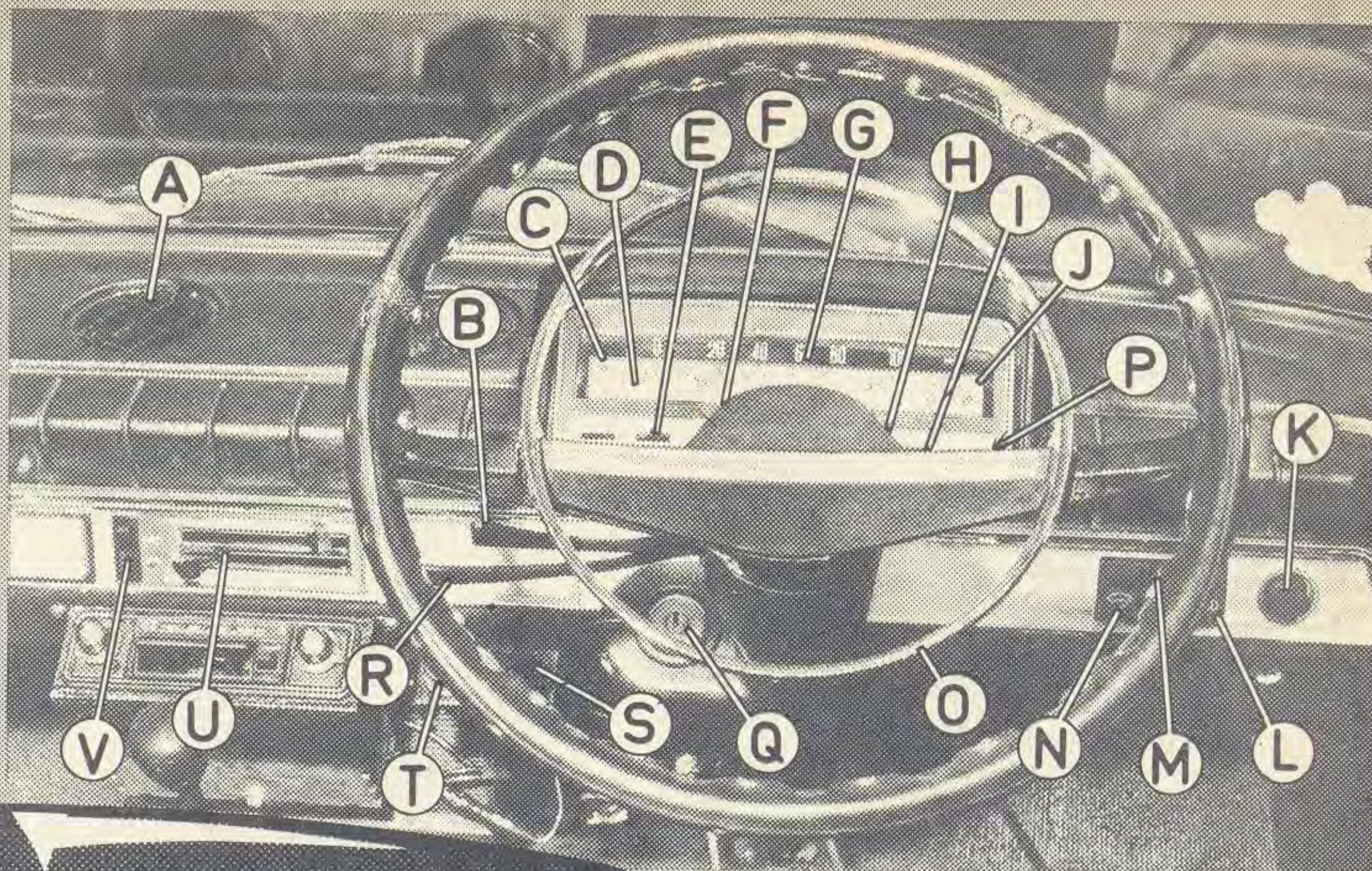
Considering the comprehensive nature of the 100 page owner's handbook and the very full tool kit which even includes a feeler gauge, the Russians obviously expect that the Lada will be very much a d-i-y car. Where most European manufacturers' handbooks tell you to, "entrust this to your Vauxleyforchry dealer," the Lada book tells you how to do the job with many excellent illustrations.

All the main service points in the engine compartment are easy to get at. The distributor, battery, hydraulic reservoirs, cooling system expansion tank, coil, and oil filter present no problems.

There is only one greasing point and that is for the splined joint at the gearbox end of the prop shaft and this only requires attention every 18,000 miles. Incidentally, the Lada prop shaft has a "bungy" universal joint at the gearbox end,

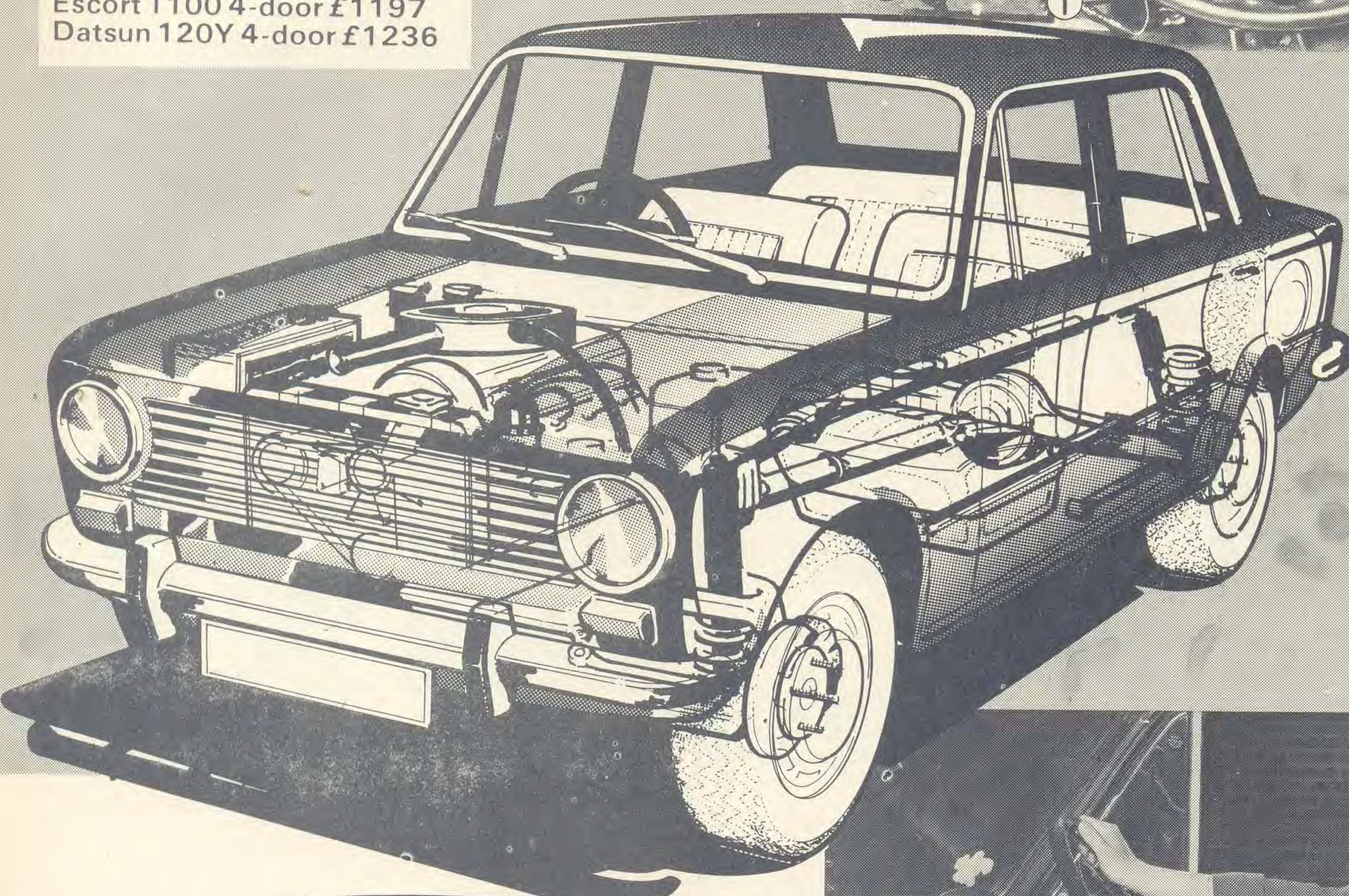
DASHBOARD KEY

A — Air vent. B — Indicators stalk. C — Low fuel light. D — Fuel gauge. E — Oil pressure. F — Ignition light. G — Speedometer. H — Indicators warning light. I — Side lights warning. J — Temperature gauge. K — Washers button. L — Lighting switch. M — Panel light switch. N — Wipers switch. O — Horn ring. P — Main beam light. Q — Ignition/column lock. R — Dip/main beam/flasher. S — Choke. T — Cigarette lighter. U — Heater controls. V — Heater blower.



COMPARISON CARS

LADA 1200 4-DOOR £981
 Allegro 1100 4-door £1214
 Escort 1100 4-door £1197
 Datsun 120Y 4-door £1236



HOW WILL YOU FIT?

A—12 in. minimum, 16 in. maximum. B—6¼ in. seat uncompressed. C — 19 in. D — 35 in. seat uncompressed. E — 8½ in. minimum, 14½ in. maximum. F — 18 in.

and two needle type U Js, one in the middle and one at the diff. end.

The normal maintenance interval is 6000 miles for such things as engine oil and filter changes. Gearbox and rear axle oil is checked and topped up at the same mileage, and both are drained and refilled after 18,000 miles.

Although there is an overhead camshaft there is no difficulty about adjusting valve clearances, and the camshaft does not have to be removed. All you have to do is

to set the shaft in a marked position which gives the TDC for No. 4 piston, you then adjust by loosening a lock nut and rotating an adjuster bolt. The others are set after each half rotation of the engine in the order set out in the handbook.

The Lada 1200 is cheaper than most other cars of the same engine size and would appear to be a pretty robust car. It has its faults such as the heavy steering and sudden clutch but as value for money it has to rate high.



The driving position suited none of the test team in every respect. Chris Drake (above) found the steering wheel too high, as did Martyn Williams, and Doug Mitchell found his long legs too bent—but we all became more or less used to it after a while.

With the driver's seat adjusted for himself, Chris had plenty of leg-room at the back. Head-room, as well, is perfectly adequate

The boot is quite large enough for the luggage of four adults on holiday. The tool kit is excellent and well stowed for access

