



## Lada's looking good, at last

**LADA'S** front wheel drive **SAMARA** was born in the mid-1980s and my early opinion of the first example I set my eyes on in Belgium was that the product would hardly appeal to British buyers.

**Lada's** importers were obviously of the same opinion, for the car they launched into their dealer showrooms, was a far cry from that left-hand drive vehicle I had come across in the Ardennes.

Since then over 6,00 **Samaras** have been sold in the UK. Now, with the recent arrival of the flagship **Juno**, Lada can prove their product is a very serious contender in the all-important, budget sector of the market.

The transformation of the **Samara** takes place after it has made its 2,000 mile journey from Estonia to the Carnaby Import Centre at Bridlington in Yorkshire.

Here there is the specialised assembly line which extensively upgrades the car, using many UK sourced components. Such is the uplift in quality that, according to **Lada Cars'** spokesman Andrew Kirk, the newly wealthy Russians are taking note. This **Juno** four-door saloon I have been testing is marketed as a limited edition version, based on

the **1.5GL** but boasting body styling innovation penned by ex-Lotus designer Colin Spooner. These take the form of side skirts, front apron and a high level boot spoiler.

In addition, there are spoked alloy wheels on low profile tyres, plus the new oval **Lada** badge. This still retains the image of a Viking long-boat.

Inside the **Juno** there is a revised instrument panel, upgraded cloth trim, leather-bound steering wheel, tilt / slide sun-roof and an effective four-speaker **Blaupunkt** audio system

I must admit the paint job looks impressive and the build quality is the best I have ever seen from this maker. Its now at a standard suggestive of a car costing quite a bit more than the asking price.

Of course, the angular looks are a bit dated, but the body package is spacious and the uncluttered lines quite aerodynamic.

The 1.5 litre engine delivers its 75 bhp in a lively, albeit a touch noisy, way. The unit is good for a claimed 102 mph, with 0 - 60 achieved in an acceptable 12 seconds.

During my test drive, under touring conditions, fuel consumption approached almost 35 mpg, but with harder use I saw a realistic 30 mpg. At the wheel it is a fairly easy and comfortable driving car, the

road holding is actually achieved by really working the engine hard, which means making a lot of use of the well ratioed five-speed gearbox.

I did, however, find the haphazard switchgear too a bit of getting used to.

The equipment package is fairly limited, even the windscreen wipers were not self-parking, though adequate for the price. This is a car particularly for the owner driver who is probably more appreciative of the two year / 50,000 mile warranty and one year National Breakdown cover.

Quite honestly, I think the Juno package is just testing the water and could easily lead to further upgraded **Samaras**.

### TECH SPEC:

**Engine:** 1499cc; max power 75bhp at 5,600 rpm.

**Transmission:** Front wheel drive, five speeds.

**Suspension:** Front - independent; rear: beam axle with coil springs.

**Brakes:** Disc front, Drum rear.

**Dimensions:** Length 4205mm, Width 1620mm, Height 1400mm, Weight 915Kg.

**Fuel tank capacity:** 9.46 gallons (43 litres) - range approx, 275 miles.

**List price:** £7595.

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