



DASHBOARD has a 'soft look' but feels hard and brittle. Dim panel lights mean dials can't be seen properly at night.

LOW-PROFILE tyres and alloy wheels may look pretty but make the ride even harsher.

STEERING is heavy, making parking difficult and the smaller-than-normal steering wheel adds to the problem.

INTERIOR pink and purple trim is garish. Uncomfortable driver's seat has solid metal bar at base of backrest.

PLASTIC body kit helps to add £1,000 to the cost of the car, but does little for the aesthetics . . . and nothing for the car's aerodynamics.

OVERALL the Samara Juno is too expensive. For the same money you could buy a VW Polo 1.3L that's safer, better made and holds its value.

Lada Owners Club of Great Britain

This Lada's beyond a joke

Take a sow's ear of a car, add £1,000 worth of alloy wheels, spoilers and body skirts, throw in a sunroof and what do you get?

In the case of the Lada Samara Juno, a more expensive sow's ear.

The Samara Juno, a limited edition of just 500, is the worse car I've driven in many a year. Its rough and noisy engine, dubious brakes, heavy steering, appalling ride and terrible build quality make me wonder whether 500 isn't an optimistic target.

It gets worse. You might be able to disregard the garish pink and purple trim, but you cannot ignore how uncomfortable the seats are - the driver's has a solid metal bar at the base of the backrest.

Every bump is accompanied by a jarring of the spine . . . and a crash from the suspension.

Controls

Lada talks about the new 'soft-look' dash. Just as well it didn't say 'soft-feel' since all the plastic inside is hard and brittle.

So dim are the panel lights you cannot see the dials at night and even the controls don't know whether they are coming or going - if you want to wash the windscreen, pull the lever towards you, don't push it away as the graphic suggests.

Juno is based on the front-wheel-drive 1.5 litre Samara which, unlike most of its fuel injected rivals, still uses a carburettor. Smoothness is not one of its virtues.

The low profile tyres and alloy wheels magnify every bump and pothole, and you need the muscles of Arnie Schwaregger to park the thing.

And who really needs side skirts, a deep front air dam and a boot mounted spoiler on a car that struggles to reach 100 mph?

There are a few positive points. The boot is big, the car is tough and it comes with a 50,000 mile two year warranty.

OK, the Lada is an easy target. It's built in Russia, where quality of materials and assembly standards are not as high as in the West. But it's a legitimate target for one simple reason - the asking price. Lada is asking you to lay out almost £7,600 for the Juno.

If you must have a new car, consider the much better Hyundai Accent saloon or the new safety-conscious Volkswagen Polo 1.3L.

But if you're prepared to buy something a year old with a few thousand miles under its belt, the choice is enormous.

Lada thinks, however, I'm being unfair. Company spokesman Andrew Kirk says: "We have thousands of loyal customers."

Extras

"They might have the money to buy a more expensive car, but

they want to stay loyal to Lada - the Juno gives them that it extra."

The company has just imported its 333,333rd new Lada from Russia. 'A third of a million people can't be wrong,' says Kirk.

Oh yes they can.

WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

Paul Chadderton, Motoring Editor of Auto Express:

'A LADA's chief virtue is its price - at £3,600 the Riva 1.5E is Britain's cheapest new car. But, by loading it against the Juno, it brings it up against some formidable opposition. For the Same money the Polo is way ahead of the Lada.'

Will Hoy, former British touring car champion:

WE put wings and spoilers on our racing cars to make them hold the road better. You'd need to do a lot more than that to make this Lada fun to drive. In fact, I'd probably say you'd have to start again.'

Jeremy Clarkson from TV's Top Gear:

'They forgot one extra thing when building the Samara Juno - a paper bag with eye holes so no one would spot you driving it. Mind you, it has got a damn good tool kit.'

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