

CLASSIC DRIVER

[rhd smart car launched](#)

Right-hand drive versions of the smart City Coupe and Cabrio are now available in the UK. Private imports of early left-hand drive models proved surprisingly popular, so DaimlerChrysler took up the challenge of importing them officially in 1999. Sales have continued to grow and will no doubt get a further boost in Britain with the steering wheel now on the right.



Prices start at £6,295 on the road for the smart and pure, the basic 599cc three-cylinder turbo with 44bhp on tap. The sportier smart and pulse, at £7,295, has increased boost pressure and develops 61bhp. The more luxurious smart and passion starts at £7,995 and has boost adjusted to give 54bhp.

All the new British smarts have ABS, traction control, twin airbags, electric windows, remote central locking, rev counter, clock and RDS radio cassette as standard.

On the road in the city, they are quite brilliantly manoeuvrable, parkable, and fun. Put your foot down for a tight turn and the smarts, with their skinny front sheels, do run noticeably wide as speed increases: lift off and they tighten their line safely and neatly.

There is plenty of room inside for two very tall people, even though the passenger footwell is slightly reduced in size by a battery box. At the launch, 16 people crammed into a new smart for an official, and successful, Guinness Book of Records attempt. However, they were diminutive members of the Chinese State Circus, and there's no doubt that any smart is better with no more two occupants. Out of town journeys are still feasible but quite hard work thanks to the noise at speed and the choppy ride.

"Softip" clutchless, six-speed transmission is standard on the basic models and very easy to operate. The "Softouch" gearbox, standard on smart and passion and optional on the less expensive models, is even more convenient as it is possible to move between manual and automatic modes at the flick of a switch.

They all have a top speed of 85mph, with 0-62mph figures of 18.9sec, 17.2sec and 16.8sec according to the model chosen. Expect fuel consumption in the 45-60mpg range.

smart franchises are being expanded throughout the uk at present. Just one question remains: is there really an advantage to rhd in Britain for such a neat little city car?

Report by Tony Dron





Gallery

