

## DACIA SANDERO dCi 90

By Jim Mc Cauley

Dacia might be cut-price Renault, but are they the supermarket's own brand or the bottom shelf bargain in the pound shop?

Dacia has advanced onto our shores as it progressed from eastern Europe and their Romanian manufacturing base. While the range opening Sandero may be sitting in dealer showrooms with a sub £6,000 price tag, the diesel version and subject of this



test climbs the ladder to almost half as much again.

Appearance-wise, and the design is far from budget looking. The Sandero is a well balanced and individual 5-door hatch design with acceptable lines that would allow it to carry the badge of almost any other European manufacturer. Glance inside, and the cabin looks good as well, but once inside you're immediately introduced to the price-cutting measures. Cabin finish is basic plastics but the major failing of the car is a fixed steering column and

lack of height adjustment on the driver's seat. However, there is some consolation in that the backrest has vernier adjustment allowing for fine tuning of this feature.

Fire up, and there is no doubting the willingness of the 1.5 litre diesel, seemingly quicker off the mark than its official 0-60 mph time of just under 12 seconds. For those chasing economy there is a gear change indicator on the instruments to advise when best to move through the 5-speed gearbox. Steering is marginally low geared and requires a little more lock than first expected, while the brakes also provide adequate stopping power. Ride is smooth and supportive but rough surfaces can unsettle the car which weights in at just 1,033Kg.

But the final surprise of the Sandero is the fuel economy from its 90 HP engine which is officially given as 74.3 mpg in mixed driving and enables the driver to squeeze a range of over 700 miles from a tankful of fuel. Its economy is matched by its low emissions coming in at 99 gms/km to put it in Band A for zero road tax.



Accommodation-wise, the car is a compact 5-seater with adequate rear room and wide opening doors which provide clear access. A high sill means a higher lift for luggage

onto a flat boot floor under which there is space for a full-size spare wheel. However the test vehicle came with the lightweight alternative of a puncture repair kit and plug-in compressor which in no way compensates for a proper spare.

And talking of practical matters, a heavily cowled speedometer makes it difficult to read in dull daylight while the absence of clear kilometre markings prevents accurate adherence to speed limits in the Republic.



However, as a package at the price, the diesel Sandero should be seen as an 'own brand' product, which in fact it is with its now Renault parentage, rather than as an undesirable 'cheapie'. It drives well and delivers superbly on its economy while still looking good on the road. Yes, it lacks interior panel quality, electric gadgets and side airbags, but most of the necessary items are there with the rather strange omission of an adjustable steering column.

While there is one stand-alone dealership in Belfast, the brand is available in all Renault

dealerships, supported by a comprehensive 3-year / 60,000 mile warranty.

The 1.5 litre diesel model tested in Ambience trim is listed at £8,395 with 15-inch alloys adding £425. Also available is metallic paint at £470, emergency spare wheel at £50 and a protection pack which includes rear parking sensors and boot liner at £430. The standard 3-year warranty can be extended to 5 and 7 years for £395 and £850 respectively.