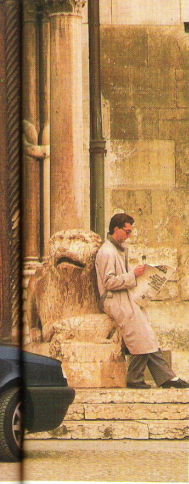




**LONG
TERM**

Lancia Dedra SE 2.0ie

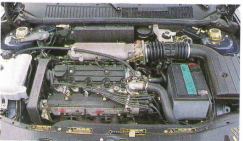
After almost 9000 miles, our Dedra is proving trustworthy, efficient and fun. Even at the wheel straight after driving a BMW 850i, European editor Peter Robinson is enthused



Dedra's ride could be more supple over bumpy surfaces but suspension is generally good. Wind noise intrusive above 75mph. Two-litre engine is willing and becomes smoother as it revs faster. Left-side dash gauges obscured by steering wheel



ANDREW TILDON



WHEN IN ROME, DO AS THE ROMANS, goes the saying, and as a foreigner living in Italy this has proved good advice: the Dedra is a willing and reliable companion. I like Lancia's mid-sized saloon rather more, I suspect, than the road test team appreciated the Dedra in a recent comparison with the Rover 416GTI, Volvo 460 and Audi 80 (*Autocar & Motor*, 4 April 1990). That was the 1.8: the long-term car is the taller-geared and more powerful 2-litre, a more logical rival to the 2-litre Audi 80 and virtually the same price as the Rover.

Our relationship grows better with every journey, reaching full-blown admiration on my part after the 325 miles from Munich to our home in Calino — via A22 autostrada over the Brenner Pass — was covered in five minutes short of four hours; an average speed of 88mph, returning 28.5mpg. This makes me suspect the bigger engine gives superior fuel consumption figures to the 1.8-litre in absolute terms.

Before turning south to Italy I'd spent the day at the wheel of the BMW 850i and expected to be disenchanted in the Dedra's lack of performance after the V12. Yet so eager is the

Lancia's engine above 4000rpm — those balancer shafts mean the engine is actually smoother the faster it revs — that after a fleeting wish for greater power, the Dedra's compelling balance made up for the absence of muscle.

The steering, I noted, was both more accurate and better weighted than the 850's. The chassis' neutral handling in the fast sweeping bends that make this road one of the most enjoyable and challenging motorways in Europe was hard to fault. The weather has turned this Trans-Alps route into a series of long, soft asphalt waves that only become obvious when you're travelling at over 80mph. Then it's surf-like and it takes a better than good suspension to soak up the expansion joint peaks in a road that combines long-radius fourth and fifth gear corners with a series of daylight-to-dark tunnels. Here, in 928 or M5 country, the Dedra is far from disgraced. There's momentary body roll as it turns into corners but then the automatic damping system takes over and the chassis soaks up the undulations, surfing over the worst of them with disdain. The limiting factor is not the

suspension but the desire for more power to stretch the chassis. Then you would choose to give the Dedra the Thema's 150bhp 16-valve engine.

In these conditions, the chassis is more impressive than in coping with the potholes and ruts of commuter driving. The ride is soft enough, yet not sufficiently supple to absorb the initial shock over small bumps. An unsealed road reveals a few body creaks and rattles and confirms that the Lancia has yet to match the overall build quality of its German rivals from Audi and BMW. The high equipment levels and opulent suede-like Alcantara trim can't quite hide the Dedra's Fiat Tipo origins.

Travelling at 100mph-plus emphasised the Dedra's wind noise problem. Slippery it maybe, with a cd figure of 0.30, but there's a surprising amount of wind noise from the upper rear door frames and from the trailing edge of the sunroof. Noticeable from about 75mph, the wind noise detracts from an otherwise refined cruising car. Interestingly enough, there's less wind noise from both ▶



the Tipo and Tempra, which lack the Dedra's flush glass. Some experimentation with taping the door seals might reveal the exact source of the noise. In still conditions the Dedra tracks perfectly. However, in strong side winds it is blown around badly above 80mph, enough to make passing a truck an exciting event.

I also dislike the excessively spongy brake pedal, though the brakes work well enough, the anti-lock system having paid for itself on at least two occasions. But my big complaint, and one that I'm forced to acknowledge every time I get into the car, is the lack of headroom. I'm 6ft 3ins tall and the combination of a sunroof and the higher, electronically-adjustable, seats means my hair brushes against the headlining. I'm also conscious of the relatively low windscreens. Furthermore there's a feeling that the seats should offer more lateral support — you do sit on rather than in them. That said,

Sharing platform and suspension with Fiat Tipo, styling of Dedra remains controversial. Grille distinctive but quaint. Headlight angle is adjustable. Split-folding rear seat aids versatility

after my four-hour stint at the wheel I emerged ache-free. The sunroof was specified (it's not standard in Italy) so the Dedra could be used as a camera car. Tall drivers would be advised to forgo the hole in the roof. No complaints about the position of the pedals, nor the gearchange, though the driver's door armrest is a little too far away to be really effective while the central armrest is too short and low.

I'm impressed by the fuel consumption, which seems to be improving as the engine frees-up. The overall average of 29.2mpg reflects the inordinate number of motorway miles I cover. It drops to 26mpg in town — not bad for a four-seater of this size and performance and good enough for a useful touring range of 375 miles. Surprisingly, the speedometer reads four per cent fast, but the odometer actually underestimates the distance by 0.5 per cent.

We've yet to test the Dedra, so the claimed performance remains unverified. Lancia's figures indicate a 0-60mph time of around 9.5secs, which feels right. The engine is tractable and eager enough with a pleasant growl as it revs out, though there seems little point to exceeding 5500rpm for maximum acceleration. Up to 4000rpm this is a quiet engine. Lancia says oil consumption of one litre every 1500 miles is perfectly normal for this engine, though I still find it rather off-putting.

There's always been a little clutch judder as drive is engaged but this may not be a problem with the cars sold in the UK. Right-hand-drive models use a hydraulic clutch but left-hand-drive cars, for some inexplicable reason, use a mechanical linkage.

So far, very little has gone wrong with the Dedra, and none of it could be called serious. There was a stream of cold air from the base of the heater, located above the passenger's feet, that negated the effectiveness of any warm air coming through conventional ducting, but this required only a small piece of foam to block the flow. I've found three small screws on the rather poor quality carpet but nothing is obviously loose. The headlights, out of alignment when the Dedra was delivered, were also adjusted and I discovered there are two position toggle adjustments under the bonnet, a boon if the car is heavily laden. The huge windscreen washer bottle, near empty when I picked the car up, has a capacity of just over one gallon. With washers for the headlights, windscreen and rear window that's probably essential. The rear seat back was tightened at the first service.

The styling remains the most controversial aspect of the Dedra. I still find it awkward from some angles and the curve towards the centre of the base of the grille quaint rather than attractive. Actually, the Dedra was signed off from IDEA in 1984, before the Tipo was designed, although the Dedra followed the Fiat into production. The depth of the body gives it a heavy, sometimes narrow, look that for some reason is emphasised when it's dirty. Clean, the mid-blue Lancia is almost elegant.

Although it shares the same platform and suspension with the Tipo, I'm not as conscious of space as I am in the Fiat. The wide C-pillar and more elaborate trim and equipment probably adds to this impression, which is proved by the figures, the Dedra having marginally less shoulder room. Still, it's a good four-seater though the sunroof also intrudes into rear seat headroom. Like the Tipo, the



LANCIA DEDRA SE 2.0ie

ACQUIRED 5 December 1989
TOTAL MILEAGE 8688 miles

COSTS

Price new in UK £15,295
Price now in UK £15,295
Estimated trade-in value no data

FUEL OIL (for 8688 miles)

302 gal, 4 litres of oil
Consumption
Overall mpg: 29.2
Best/Worst mpg: 32.5/25.6

SERVICE AND REPAIR RECORD

Faults on delivery: Headlights out of alignment
Faults to 8688 miles: none
First service: (611 miles) free

SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Transverse, front, front-wheel drive
Capacity 1995cc, 4 cylinders in line
Bore 54mm, stroke 90mm
Compression ratio 9.5 to 1
Head/block all alloy/cast iron
Valve gear dohc, 2 valves per cylinder

Ignition and fuel electronic ignition, Weber I.A.W. electronic fuel injection

Max power 120bhp (PS-DIN) (46kW ISO) at 5750 rpm
Max torque 119.5lb ft (162 Nm) at 3360rpm

TRANSMISSION

5-speed manual.

Gear	Ratio	mph/1000rpm
1st	0.891	21.99
2nd	1.156	16.96
3rd	1.541	12.7
4th	2.267	8.6
5th	3.545	5.5
Final drive ratio: 3.353 to 1.		

SUSPENSION

Front, independent, MacPherson struts, coil springs, driver adjustable telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar.
Rear, independent, trailing arm, struts, coil springs, driver adjustable telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar.

STEERING

Rack and pinion, power assisted, 3.0 turns lock to lock.

BRAKES

Front 10.1ins (257mm) dia ventilated discs. **Rear** 9.4ins (240mm) dia discs, ABS anti-lock.

WHEELS AND TYRES

Cast alloy, 5½j × 14in rims.
Michelin MXV 185/60R14 tyres.

MADE BY

Alfa Lancia Industriale S.p.A.,
Via Vincenza Lancia 27, 10141 Tortona, Italy.

Notes: Since this Dedra is an Italian-specification car run in Italy, we have abridged our normal long-term test information panel to avoid confusion.

doors open to 90deg, as does the boot lid. Fold down the small side of the rear seat and there's enough length for skis. The boot is deep and a practical shape. Not so commodious are the rather mean little pockets in the front doors. The steering column stalks—identical to those on the Tipo—require familiarity but once understood work fairly well. The fast setting for the wipers is not fast enough to cope with heavy rain and there's a point, right in my line of vision, where the left-hand wiper is incapable of clearing water above 75mph.

My only grievance with the electronic dashboard is in the near impossibility of reading the two gauges to the extreme left, which are hidden by the steering wheel. The idea of both digital and analogue dials works well. The Dedra is unique in my experience in having two read-outs for the exterior temperature. One sensor is located under the driver's exterior mirror, the other under the front bumper bar. Occasionally they will vary by one degree. Initially, I considered them a gimmick but have been surprised at how useful they are.

I have but one question and intend to find the answer before my next Running Report. How big is the Dedra's petrol tank? The official press launch material says 63 litres (13.8gal), and that's confirmed by the Italian owner's handbook and the UK press blurb. However, the English handbook says it's 60 litres (13.2gal), as does the digital fuel read-out and gauge. To add to the confusion, the Fiat Tempra—which has the same tank as its sister-under-the-skin Lancia—quotes 65 litres (14.3gal). The digital read-out is no help for it doesn't provide a figure below 5 litres.

I have had one big problem with the Dedra, but it was to do with the Italian way with bureaucracy rather than any failing of the car's. It started when, needing to catch a plane from Milan's Linate airport, I discovered a two-hour wait for official parking space because the car park is being enlarged in preparation for the World Cup. If I wanted to catch my plane, I would have to park on the street nearby. This I did, in some slight trepidation, but the car was still there when I returned next day. What was missing, however, were both front and rear number plates.

Having reported this loss to the *carabinieri* (police), there ensued a catalogue of form-filling and red tape that went on for two months while the car's number was displayed on pieces of cardboard. During this period, even though we had reported the theft to the *carabinieri*, we did not dare take the car out of the country. It would have been far too complicated.

Eventually, new papers arrived from the Italian registration body, the ACI, and I was allowed to pay £80 to re-register under a new number. That night, the *carabinieri* rang to say our old number plates had been found on a stolen car. More visits to Milan and more forms. Could we choose the registration we'd like for the Dedra? No, the by-now mud-spattered plates were to be destroyed. So, instead of the MI 6N1871 you'll see in the photographs, the Dedra is now MI 4P8017.

These days I travel to Linate by train unless I'm on an early morning flight and almost guaranteed a parking spot.

The Dedra is not an old-school Lancia; its Fiat heritage is far too obvious for that. Nonetheless it is a charming, highly competent saloon, clearly capable of accepting more power. Yes, I like it, even if I've yet to remember the new registration number. ■

Dedra not so spacious inside as sister Tipo, but is a good four-seater. Headroom short in front, especially with sun roof. Seats comfortable but could offer more lateral support. Door pockets stingy

