



Lancia Thema LX Turbo

After 12,000 miles of fault-free performance motoring Nick Carter's LX Turbo exceeds by far its nondescript looks



DENIS BOON

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY HAS BEEN A long and arduous one for Lancia. It stretches out for some considerable distance yet and British importer Lancar is treading carefully, mindful of the fate that could easily befall it. So far it hasn't taken a false step and, while Lancia sweeps all before it in the rally world, it is beginning to rebuild the UK sales it lost after the rust scandal in the '70s with an ever-improving product line-up.

British sales may still be small beer — 3439 last year — but it's telling that buyers are chasing the more desirable models. The LX Turbo, for example, is the most sought-after Thema model: getting enough from the Italian factory to satisfy UK demand is a major problem for Lancar.

This is as it should be. After 12,000 miles behind the wheel of a Thema LX Turbo, and with a list of 'faults' so small as to be hardly worth recording, I can strongly recommend

the car as an executive cruiser *par excellence*.

It seemed expensive when delivered last August. A price tag a shade under £17,000 appeared a touch inflated, even taking into account the lavish standard equipment. Since then the LX Turbo's price has risen by only £500. Look at the opposition: a Granada 2.9 Ghia X costs about the same but has nowhere near the performance, a Rover 827 SLi is the thick end of £18,000 and the cheapest Saab 9000 Turbo costs over £20,000. If nothing else, this Thema is now good value.

But it is a lot more besides. Foremost among its attributes is performance. The Fiat/Lancia 1995cc twin cam, boosted by Garrett T3 turbocharger and fed by Bosch LE2 jetronic fuel injection, pumps out 165bhp at 5750rpm, with torque of 208lb ft at 2750rpm. Acceleration is suitably impressive as is top speed.

And all this brute force is clothed in a restrained, conservative bodysell that hardly

warrants a second glance from the uninitiated. The look of surprise on the faces of blown-off GTI drivers is always a joy to behold.

The Thema's styling often provokes debate. Some think it is just too nondescript (particularly in the test car's sombre anthracite colouring). Beauty being in the eye of the beholder, I wouldn't quibble. But after much consideration I feel that the Thema is the prettiest of all its four Type Four brothers. The Saab 9000 is perhaps more elegant, the Fiat Croma more purposeful, but the Thema gets my vote. And visually I can't get to grips with the Alfa 164 at all.

The Thema is appealing to the eye internally as well. The seats and doors are trimmed in Alcantara, a clever man-made imitation suede. My early worries about its light colour showing the dirt have proved unfounded and the material seems in any case to be especially easy to clean. The dashboard is attractively ▶

Model: LANCIA THEMA LX TURBO

WHAT IT HAS COST

Price new	£16,995
Price now	£17,495
Estimated trade-in value of our car	£12,000

FUEL/OIL

504.2 gal 4-star (EL 75/gal):	£882.35
3 litres Mobil 3 Rally Formula	£31.85

Total £894.20

TYRES

Cost £107.99 each	
Life front — 60% worn	£129.59
rear — 20% worn	£43.20
Total	£172.79

SERVICE AND REPAIR RECORD

Faults on delivery: Poor cold starting

SERVICE

Distance	Date	Cost
5920	20 Oct 1987	\$44.07
12162	29 Feb 1988	£283.80
Total		£327.87

REPAIRS

None

EXTRAORDINARY ITEMS

None

ANNUAL STANDING COSTS

Road Tax	£100.00
Insurance premium* (calculated)	£463.00

DEPRECIATION

(7 months, estimated) £1495.00

TOTAL RUNNING COSTS

(7 months, ex-depreciation) £1727.23

COST PER MILE

(including tax and insurance)	14.4p
(including tax, insurance and depreciation)	56.0p

*To put all our cars on equal footing for insurance costs, the figure given above is a typical quotation for a good-risk driver, with clean record, and car garaged in Oxfordshire, a middle-risk area. Full no-claims discount has been deducted, as has the saving for £25 excess.

SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Transverse front, front-wheel drive. Head/block/alt. alloy cast iron. 4 cylinders in line, bored block, 3 main bearings. Water cooled, electric fan
Bore 84mm (3.3ins), stroke 90mm (3.5ins), capacity 1995cc (122cc/ins)

Valve gear 20c, 2 valves per cylinder, toothed belt camshaft drive. Compression ratio 8 to 1. Marelli Microjets electronic ignition, Bosch LBJ Jetronic injection. Garrett T3 turbocharger/boost pressure 12.8psi
Max power 95bhp (PS-DIN) (128kW ISO) at 5750rpm. Max torque 208lb ft at 2750rpm

TRANSMISSION

5-speed manual, single dry plate diaphragm spring clutch, 9.8ins dia

Gear	Ratio	mph/1000rpm
Top	0.920	24.62
4th	1.132	20.00
3rd	1.518	14.92
2nd	2.235	10.13
1st	3.750	6.04

Final drive: Helical spur, ratio 2.95.

SUSPENSION

Front, independent, MacPherson struts, coil springs, lower wishbones, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar.
Rear, independent, struts, coil springs, transverse links, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar.

STEERING

Rack and pinion, hydraulic power assistance. Steering wheel diameter 15.25ins, 3.2 turns lock to lock.

BRAKES

Dual circuits, split diagonally. Front 10.1ins (257mm) dia ventilated discs. Rear 9.9ins (251mm) dia discs. Vacuum servo. Handbrake, centre lever acting on front discs.

WHEELS

Aluminium alloy 6ins rims. Tyres (Michelin MXV on test car), size 195/60VR14, pressures F32 R32 psi (normal driving).

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase 104.7ins (2660mm), track, front 58.6ins (1490mm), rear 58.4ins (1482mm). Overall length 180.8ins (4590mm), width 69.9ins (1755mm), height 56.4ins (1433mm). Weight 2085lb (1215kg)

PERFORMANCE

MAXIMUM SPEEDS

Gear	mph	LT	mph	RT	mph
Top (mean)	132	5360	139	5550	
(best)	135	5530	140	5700	
4th (mean)	120	4000	120	4000	
3rd	89	6000	89	6000	
2nd	60	6000	60	6000	
1st	36	6000	36	6000	

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Overall mpg:
LT 24.7 (11.4 litres/100km)
RT 21.9 (12.9 litres/100km)

ACCELERATION

From rest

True mph	Speedo		Time secs	
	LT	RT	LT	RT
30	33	3.0	2.9	
40	44	4.3	4.4	
50	54	5.7	5.9	
60	65	7.4	7.6	
70	75	9.9	10.5	
80	85	12.6	13.0	
90	97	16.1	16.3	
100	107	20.7	21.9	
110	118	26.0	28.4	
Standing ¼-mile: LT 7.5secs, 50mph RT 10.6secs 85mph				
Standing km: LT 28.9secs, 115mph RT 29.3secs 111mph				

In each gear

mph	Top		4th		3rd	
	LT	RT	LT	RT	LT	RT
10-30	—	—	—	—	7.4	7.2
20-40	13.0	13.2	9.2	9.1	5.6	5.4
30-50	10.9	11.2	7.3	7.0	4.3	4.2
40-60	8.8	8.9	6.0	5.5	4.1	4.1
50-70	7.8	7.6	5.9	5.4	4.4	4.7
60-80	8.0	7.8	6.5	6.1	—	5.6
70-90	9.1	9.0	7.4	7.0	—	6.9
80-100	10.8	10.5	8.6	8.3	—	—
90-110	13.6	13.4	11.3	11.1	—	—
100-120	20.6	19.8	—	—	—	—

RT denotes performance figures for Lancia Thema LX. Turbo tested in Autocar 9 October 1985.

◀ styled, the seats comfortable (though a little thigh padding wouldn't go amiss) and the little luxuries welcome.

The standard equipment includes an electric tilt/slide sunroof, electric windows and mirrors, electrically adjusted seats and a good Blaupunkt stereo radio/cassette. The seat heaters are thermostatically adjusted, switching off when the backside gets warm.

And there's so much space. Five adults on a long trip pose no problem to the Thema and there is room in the voluminous boot for all their luggage.

The occupants' comfort is aided by the Lancia's smooth at-speed ride. Although not at its best on pot-holed city streets at 20-30mph, the suspension copes admirably with large irregularities once the Thema is up and running. The steering is good, too, providing

plenty of feel at speed and plenty of assistance for parking. Of that Type Four bugbear, weather steer, there is little sign on dry roads: wet weather requires more caution.

Although a big and luxurious machine, it is possible to hustle the Thema through tight corners with abandon. Neutrality under such pressure is a forte, and body roll is minimal.

A rosy picture — one it seems a shame to spoil by mentioning the few minor faults that have cropped up. The worst has been with the car all its life, but will soon be dealt with, I hope. This is the Thema's reluctance to start cleanly from cold, due I am convinced to a faulty or maladjusted automatic choke.

Getting the car going on a cold winter morning usually involves two or three stalls, much revving and a crossed finger or two before the choke can be persuaded to work.

As the Thema requires no post-running-in service, it was not until the 6000-mile mark that a garage looked at the problem. Jack Rose, of Wallington, Surrey, professed to have cured it: next morning it was plain that he hadn't. The car should have gone back immediately, but it seemed hardly worth the aggravation for the sake of a petty niggle.

So the cold start trouble persisted until the 12,000-mile service, when Ivor Hill, of Wimbledon, looked at the car. The workshop manager at least admitted that he wasn't sure the problem was cured when I picked the car up. He was right. As I write, the car is due to return to Ivor Hill for a once and for all cure.

Another hassle that has also been with the car virtually all its life is a large red light that appears in front of the driver every time the brakes are pressed. It is supposed to warn that one of the brake lights has gone. Very commendable. But the Thema's brake lights have never failed... it was a faulty fault warning light. It was supposed to have been fixed at 5000 miles, but very soon reappeared. Now Ivor Hill seems to have banished it.

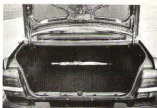
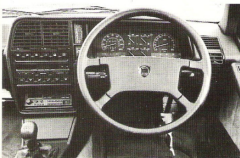
The first of the Thema's services costs £44 (parts and oil accounting for £27) and the second was £284. The size of the second bill was surprising, even though £50 of it was down to replacing the electric aerial (the previous one snapped when it became entangled with the boot-lid — poor design?). Parts — including new wiper blades, fuses, various filters, and oil — came to nearly £80. Labour was £120.

Externally the Thema is showing few signs of age. There are a couple of very minor car park knocks in the doors, a scratch or two on the large plastic bumpers but nothing more.

Nor are the tyres in bad shape. The rear pair, as you would expect, show little sign of wear and the front, responsible for putting all that power down, are nearing the stage where they will have to be replaced. The spare is unused.

Fuel consumption has hardly been a disappointment either. For the first 6000 miles the Thema returned an average of 24.7mpg, although this later dropped to 23.3. The overall figure is 23.8mpg. Given that the Thema spends most of its life crawling through London traffic, those figures are not at all bad. The 29.8mpg recorded after one long run gives a hint of the car's true potential.

In its 12,000 miles, piled on at a rate double that of the average British motorist, the Thema has shaped up well. The couple of minor faults that have cropped up do little to spoil the picture. This is a car that rightly deserves to succeed and deserves to be spearheading Lancia's long-awaited revival. ■



Despite its conservative looks the Thema LX Turbo gives impressive acceleration and top speed. Ample space and a smooth ride make it an ideal cruising vehicle. Although light-coloured, the Aicantara fabric seats and door trimmings are durable and easy to clean. Standard equipment includes an electric sunroof, windows and mirrors and electrically adjustable, heated seats

