

Small car



big smile

by Ian Lamming

SUDDENLY I'm 17 again and it's a hot May day. I'm riding my first motorbike, a 125cc Honda, along the twists and turns of Swaledale when I should be revising for my A Levels and I'm smiling.

How weird is that? The reality is that I'm well and truly grown up and it's a freezing cold January day. I'm driving the new Nissan Micra, which thankfully remains on four wheels not two, along the twists and turns of Swaledale when I should be writing but I am smiling.

The pace starts to gather and the car swings through the switchbacks that make Swaledale such a great drive. The Micra is doing quite well; the centre of gravity feels a bit high, the suspension a tad soft and it is getting a bit rocky.

But the tyres are Continentals and the levels of grip and control are impressive.

The Honda wasn't the best ride either but what it did was challenge you, your skills and your riding prowess.

It's the same with the Micra. The DIG-S is definitely nippy.

The 1.2 litre three cylinder is blown and produces a considerable amount of torque and real-life performance. It then takes the driver to exploit its true talents.

New Micra had already climbed the steep inclines of the Dales incredibly well. The Nissan has perfect ratios and a

slick gearbox that enjoys being used. Power comes in well below 2,000rpm and it pulls amazingly well all the way to the red with a lovely rasp coming from the trio of cylinders. And the soft ride smoothes the ups and downs of the rollercoaster roads.

Fun over, it is time to tackle the A1 and the Micra proves to be a capable cruiser; it's only small but you sit quite high and the motor is surprisingly relaxed.

Through town the nippy nature of the Nissan comes into its own and of course it is easy to manoeuvre and park.

The new Micra has much more presence than its predecessor thanks to more generous proportions and a bold new look, which apes the much larger Qashqai. It is incredibly well specified with electric power steering, touch screen satnav and parking slot measurement.

It also features cruise control with speed limiter, trip computer, rain sensing wipers and automatic lights; in fact it has the spec of a much larger car.

The Micra is proof of just how far small cars have come since I was 17. But what hasn't changed is the mystical driving appeal that still makes you smile.

Fact File:

Nissan Micra
 Engine: 1.2 petrol
 Power: 98PS
 0-62mph: 11.4
 Top speed: 112
 Combined miles per gallon: 65.7
 Transmission: five speed manual
 Insurance: NA
 CO2 g/km: 99