light on the pocket

STORY BARRY GREEN | PHOTOS JIM MCEWAN

There’s nothing ‘poverty pack’ about these latest entry level ‘tiddlers’ from Holden, Hyundai, Kia and Toyota.

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STARTERS: HOLDEN BARINA HATCH, HYUNDAI ACCENT ACTIVE, KIA RIO S, TOYOTA YARIS YR.

TESTERS: BARRY GREEN, JOHN EWING, JOEL TUCKER, BRODIE BOTT.

TO SAY THAT the light-car segment in Australia is ultra-competitive is to risk understatement. There are no less than 22 models from 15 manufacturers pitching to the buyer, each with a starting price under $25,000.

Late last year, Toyota, along with Holden, Hyundai and Kia, launched new or updated models of their Yaris, Barina, Accent and Rio hatchbacks respectively. Each being highly relevant in what is a price-sensitive category, we decided to put the entry level (i.e. cheapest) variants to a comparison over several days and various road and driving scenarios.

But first, before turning an ignition key, a thorough going over of our foursome. Common to each is an inline, double overhead cam, four-cylinder engine; front wheel drive; rack and pinion power steering (Barina is hydraulic, the others electric); Mcpherson strut front and torsion beam rear suspension; dual front/side/curtain airbags; anti-lock brakes (ABS) with brake assist and electronic brake distribution; electronic stability and traction controls; adjustable front/rear headrests and centre rear lap/sash seatbelt.

The tick list also includes immobiliser; central locking with remote for doors and boot; airconditioning; door and seatback pockets; driver seat height adjustment; 60/40 split-fold rear seat; steering tilt adjustment; am/fm radio; CD player with four speakers; MP3 compatibility and USB; bluetooth; Isofix child restraint mounting; power mirrors and windows; and intermittent wipers.

So, for entry level motoring, all come extremely well equipped. As to where they differ and perform, read on ...

HOLDEN BARINA HATCH

When the Barina nameplate first appeared in Australia nearly 30 years ago, a 1.3-litre, single overhead cam (SOHC) four-cylinder engine with 50 kW power, AM/FM radio, vinyl-trimmed seats and a digital clock were considered innovations of the time.

This is a far cry from the new Barina Hatch, designed by Ondrej Koromhaz, an Australian design team member, which went on sale last November.

Not to be confused with the cheaper 1.2-litre Barina Spark, the five-door Barina Hatch is equipped with a standard five-speed manual (as per our test car) or optional six-speed automatic transmission with Active Select.

Barina comes with an appealing, comparatively low price with resultant residual value and cheapest insurance premium. However, projected running costs (second highest to Rio), average warranty and not as extensive extraneous standard features contribute to it being only third best in value for money.

Barina is alone in having cruise control and alloy wheels, though a trip computer is an omission. Poorest fuel consumption on test (average of 8.4 litres/100 km compared with an ADR figure of 6.8) doesn’t make good reading.

The Holden is the equal of the others for safety and practicality; it’s best on front and rear headroom and the seats are acceptably comfy. Having the lowest load lips, internally and externally, assists with any cargo carrying and, like Rio, there’s also steering reach adjustment.

Power and torque outputs are second to only Accent, which also boasts a 1.6-litre engine, but this is diminished by Barina being the tumbiest at 1229 kg.

The engine is at its strongest in roll-on acceleration, with 50-80 km/h coming up in an average of 6.8 seconds and 60-100 in 8.9.

Barina rides on the firm side, but grip levels are good (best on test, I thought) and the steering reasonably sharp. The brake pedal feels a little wooden, but when called upon during a series of emergency stops from 80 km/h to a stop, Barina pulled up in an average of 24.1 metres, shorter than the Korean pair.

In our smoothness and quietness testing, the little Holden finished
narrowly in front, despite being the most raucous under acceleration from 50-80 km/h. In contrast, it troubled the noise meter least at a steady 80 km/h.

**HYUNDAI ACCENT ACTIVE**

Hyundai has matured significantly since the first Accent appeared on Australian roads.

The new Accent joins Hyundai’s eminently-successful i20 in the light car category, but the former is a bigger car. Dimensionally, it sits between i20 and Hyundai’s i30 small car. Available in hatch or sedan, with five-speed manual or four-speed auto, Accent comes in three spec levels, Active (as per our test car), Elite and (hatch only) Premium.

With Accent Active finishing runner up in category in the 2011 Australia’s Best Cars awards, we were expecting a strong showing – and so it proved. The Hyundai takes the points for value for money and on the road, and is just shaded by its Korean countryman in design and function.

Lowest projected running costs, an average fuel consumption of 6.8 litres/100 km on test (0.8 higher than the ADR figure) and a generous warranty that matches the Kia are among its several strong points.

The projected residual and extra standard features such as an alarm, twin auxiliary power outlets and map reading lights (Rio has same), audio and Bluetooth controls conveniently mounted on the steering wheel and auto off headlights add further appeal.

It’s a match for Rio on rear head, knee and foot room and the driver scores a comfy ‘work station’ although (as with Yaris) steering reach adjustment is an omission. Apart from this, Accent measures up ergonomically with its Korean cousin. Boot space is good, but length apart, not as generous as the overall dimensions of the car suggest.

On performance, the others don’t see which way the Hyundai goes. Endowed with 91 kW and 156 Nm, which translates into best on test for power and torque to weight, Accent topped all six of our acceleration tests convincingly. The gear ratios are well matched to the powertrain and the six-speed gearbox shifts smoothly and precisely.

Ride quality is supple and composed and Accent carries its pace around corners competently when pushed, although at the expense of some tyre holler. Pulling up in an average of 25.6 metres, its braking proficiency is not as good as Yaris or Barina, which surprised somewhat given that the Hyundai and Kia have front and rear discs as opposed to the Toyota and Holden’s disc/drum combination.

**KIA RIO S**

Launched in September last year, Kia’s fourth-generation Rio is available in five-door hatch, with three and four-door body styles arriving in February.

Buyers have a choice of three trim levels: the 1.4-litre engine S with six-speed manual or four-speed manumatic auto and Si and SLi powered by the 1.6-litre ‘Gamma’ engine with six-speed manual or six-speed manumatic.

In Si manual guise, Rio is a cracker of car and a deserved winner of the 2011 Australia’s Best Cars ultra-competitive light car under $20,000 category. However, the smaller-engined, lower-specification S is not as convincing, as our test shows.

As supplied with optional auto ($2000) instead of standard manual, our test vehicle immediately takes a hit on pricing and resultant depreciation. Projected running costs also are the highest of the four cars on test, along with insurance premium. And average fuel consumption of 8.0 litres/100 km, 1.7 higher than the ADR figure, is only third best on test.

But where the S really struggles is in performance where it refuses to be ‘launched’ from a start, with fairly pedestrian results – a 0-100 km/h time of 15 seconds and 20.0 seconds for the standing 400 m, all this to the accompaniment of an engine that sounds like it’s working its head off. Hills particularly test the S, and even using the sequential manual gearshift to shuffle down the gears, it struggles markedly due to a lack of low down torque (pulling power).
The trade off with an auto is, of course, more convenient stop-start driving, and here Rio holds an obvious advantage. That said, at a constant 60 km/h, it often seems in two minds as to whether to change up, or down a gear. The Kia was also a little lazy in our braking test, taking an average 26.3 m to pull up from 80 km/h.

But, look beyond its shortcomings and you will find that, typical of the latest Kia offerings, the S comes with a long warranty, is well equipped, shows impressive build and finish and exudes plenty of style, inside and out. Performance and transmission limitations aside, it’s still a good drive, offering up plenty by way of comfort and sound ergonomics, alert handling and firm but compliant ride. Space, both boot and interior, though could be more accommodating.

**TOYOTA YARIS YR 1.3 THREE-DOOR**

Priced between $14,990 and $21,390, the new-generation Yaris hatch range offers a choice of three and five-door body styles, two VVT-i equipped engines (1.3-litre and 1.5-litre), two transmissions (five-speed manual and four-speed auto) and four model grades.

Yaris is also the cheapest of our four test cars, a plus which flows on to the lowest depreciation and second-lowest insurance premium. Projected running costs are also favourable, beaten only by Accent.

Despite being the shortest and narrowest overall, Yaris makes optimum use of space. Knee room in the rear is the most generous of all, the seats supportive and well bolstered and, by our measurements, its boot wins on width and height. There’s some 22 various storage places, including a spacious tray under the boot floor.

However, in having a spacesaver it’s the only one not to have a full-size spare wheel (Barina’s comes as no cost option) and there’s no steering wheel adjustment nor front seatbelt height adjustment. On the plus side, Yaris is the only one to boast a driver’s knee airbag and voice control function.

Though reasonably comfortable inside and the controls and switchgear intuitive, its interior feels dated and dull. Here, testers considered Toyota missed the opportunity to inject some additional style to match particularly Kia and other best in category competition.

This generation Yaris is some 20 kg less than its predecessor, with the YR three-door manual weighing in at just 990 kg, making it significantly lightest on test. Although the 1.3-litre engine, at 63 kW and 121 Nm, is the least powerful and torquey, this absence of bulk makes for relatively zippy performance and agility and best on test fuel consumption, a thrifty 6.7 litres/100 km (ADR figure 5.7).

The Toyota was second quickest to the Hyundai in four of our acceleration tests, being toe off the mark from 0-60, 80 and 100 km/h and over 400 m. However, lack of power and torque catches it out in roll-on acceleration, where it trails its rivals in 50-80 and 60-100 km/h.

**CONCLUSION**

Barina Hatch is an improvement on the insipid Barina Spark in just about every way, and has several things going for it, but in this company, falls short of the best.

So, too, Kia Rio S, and that’s a disappointment as its bigger-engined, better-equipped and slightly-dearer sibling, Rio Si, is such a good thing. There’s no doubt the S would have acquitted itself better had it been the manual gearbox version, but we can only compare what is, and not what might have been.

Yaris, in three-door YR form, punches above its weight against the dearer, more powerful and bigger competition. If you’re seriously in the market for a car at the lower end of the light car category, check it out. As is probably already apparent, it’s hard to go past the Hyundai Accent Active as the smartest buy in this company. In the 2011 Australia’s Best Cars awards it didn’t upstage a previous winner and stablemate, the Hyundai 120 Active, for nothing.
How they stack up!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>HOLDEN BARINA HATCH</th>
<th>HYUNDAI ACCENT ACTIVE</th>
<th>KIA RIO S</th>
<th>TOYOTA YARIS YR (3-DOOR)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRICE</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>175/70R14</td>
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<td>Spacesaver</td>
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<td>Driver’s seat height adjustment</td>
<td>S/X</td>
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<td>Seatbelt pretensioners (front)</td>
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<td>Height-adjustable seatbelts (front)</td>
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<td>S</td>
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<td><strong>PERFORMANCE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Engine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Max. power (kW@rpm)</td>
<td>85 @ 6000</td>
<td>91 @ 6300</td>
<td>79 @ 6300</td>
<td>63 @ 6000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Max. torque (Nm@rpm)</td>
<td>155 @ 4000</td>
<td>155 @ 4200</td>
<td>135 @ 4200</td>
<td>121 @ 4400</td>
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<td>Transmission</td>
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<td>Kerb weight (kg)</td>
<td>1229</td>
<td>1115</td>
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<td>990</td>
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<td>0-100 km/h (average, 2 occupants)</td>
<td>14.7 sec</td>
<td>11.6 sec</td>
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<td>Braking from 80 km/h (average)</td>
<td>24.1 m</td>
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<td>Average (litres/100 km, as tested)</td>
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<td>Tank (litres/range (km, as tested)</td>
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<td>43/632</td>
<td>43/538</td>
<td>42/627</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environmental rating (GVC)</td>
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<td>*******</td>
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<tr>
<td>CO₂ emissions (g/km)</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>134</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SERVICING/TYPICAL REPLACEMENT PARTS PRICES</strong></td>
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<td>Warranty (yrs/km)</td>
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<td>Est. service costs 5 yrs/75,000 km</td>
<td>$3017</td>
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<td>$3469</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>INSURANCE COSTS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Annual**</td>
<td>$557</td>
<td>$615</td>
<td>$666</td>
<td>$591</td>
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**Based on an RACQ Insurance comprehensive policy for a 35-year-old male, maximum no claim bonus, vehicle financially unencumbered, and $500 excess. Postcode 4066. Multi-policy and RACQ member loyalty discounts may apply. Discounts of 2.5 to 17.5 percent may be available to RACQ members, depending on length of membership.**

**STAR RATINGS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>TOYOTA YARIS YR (3-DOOR)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Value for money</td>
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<td>★★★★☆</td>
<td>★★</td>
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<td>★★★☆</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>★★★☆</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
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<td>★★★★☆</td>
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</table>

**LEGEND:** S = STANDARD, O = OPTION, X = NOT STANDARD. ^ PRICES ARE MANUFACTURERS’ LIST PRICES AND DO NOT INCLUDE STATUTORY AND DELIVERY CHARGES. PREDICTED TRADE-IN VALUES HAVE BEEN PROVIDED BY GLASS’S GUIDE FUTURE VALUES, THE INDUSTRY RECOGNISED STANDARD. RACQ CAN HELP WITH CAR FINANCE. CONTACT 1300 361 316 OR VISIT RACQ.COM/LOAN. FOR RACQ INSURANCE, CALL 13 1905 OR VISIT RACQ.COM.