

DRIVING

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO DRIVE?

The fundamentals of the BYD Seal are reasonable, its trick battery technology helping lower its centre of gravity while there's a '50:50 golden axle load ratio' according to the bumf. Perfect weight distribution, in other words. Handy when there's an unavoidably chunky weight figure to keep in check: 2,055kg for the RWD car, 2,185kg if you've gone AWD.

Now the Seal does a very admirable job of keeping that weight under control when it's going along at a good lick. Body control is decent, the suspension doesn't kickback or fidget. It feels softly sprung but doesn't quite have the necessary damping control. That's because the focus has been on comfort and safety – the latter being 'the ultimate luxury' in an EV, according to the engineering team.

FIVE STAR EURO NCAP THEN?

Yes, although that feels curiously devalued these days since it necessitates features (lane keep, cross traffic alert, city braking etc) that we believe actually make cars less safe, interfering with the driving. We digress, but only slightly, because even by the current standards that see all cars suffer some sort of distracting bongs and irritating toots, the Seal is a prime offender. More on that below.

Other safety matters. It's pretty surefooted, both RWD and AWD cars putting their power down cleanly without ever notably upsetting the traction control. What the car never exhibited was any great thrills or enough sophistication to convince as a luxury car. Too much road grumble comes back through the chassis at low speeds, the steering is distant and the damping is too loose to control vertical motion properly. It just doesn't feel very cohesive.

This applies more to the 4WD car, which has more pace than it needs or can properly cope with. In this way, it does feel commendably like the Model 3 it is so clearly aimed at. But maybe BYD should have benchmarked it against other, more talented, rivals.

BUT DO PEOPLE ACTUALLY CARE ABOUT DYNAMICS?

They don't think they do, but ride and handling works in the background for most people, and if a car isn't doing exactly what their inputs tell them it should be doing, that's an issue. Look, for the company car buyers it's likely to entice, it's fine. Enthusiasts, those of you who cared what was written above, look elsewhere.

SPEED IS A SELLING POINT FOR IT THOUGH...

Yes, but speed and satisfaction are two very different things. Speed and numbers sell, which is why BYD puts the '3.8s' badge on the back of the 4WD car. The RWD car doesn't feel a whole lot slower than its sprightlier sibling. Allied to its longer range figure, it's probably the one to have given the Seal isn't billing itself as a performance car in the first place, and its passive suspension feels as comfy as the AWD's active setup. Both are very refined and the only thing to break their library-esque atmosphere is the low-speed tinkle.

SAY WHAT?

Below 20mph, as you trundle through town, passers-by are alerted to your presence by either a growing, almost ghoulish warble (one which was slightly out of sync with the throttle in the first test car we drove) or via BYD's own tinkly tune that's not unlike an ice cream van on a summer's day. The stares of pedestrians are very real, not least because you don't have a bootful of Fabs and Twisters to appease them.

However, proving how reactive BYD is, they took criticism on board and have changed the noises – both inwardly and outwardly, this is now a more demure car. They also took the opportunity to change the indicator and wiper stalks round (indicator on the left now).

Even more intrusive, though, is its suite of active safety systems. 'Yeah, yeah,' we hear you say, 'you always moan about these things.' But almost every rival implements them with more class, or certainly makes them simpler to turn off than the cumbersome trawl through tricky sub-menus required here. You'll get there in the end, but it's not going to help you fall in love with the car.

Implemented well, some electronic helpers are golden – driving a car without parking sensors or blind-spot monitoring now feels as exposing as cycling without a helmet. But very few of the Seal's systems are so polite in their assistance.

CAN I TAKE BYD'S WORD ON RANGE?

No less so than with any other electric car maker. The RWD one promises 354 miles on paper, and after running it for 150 (mostly motorway) miles in chilly conditions, we used just over half the battery. That points to efficiency of 3.3mi/kWh and real-world range of 270 miles, both of which will be much higher in temperatures that don't require your finest North Face attire. Respectable return, that.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE RANGE

THE FASTEST

390kW Excellence AWD 83kWh 4dr Auto

0-62	3.8s
CO2	0
BHP	523
MPG	
Price	£48,640

View all specs

THE CHEAPEST

230kW Design 83kWh 4dr Auto

0-62	5.9s
CO2	0
BHP	308.4
MPG	
Price	£45,640

View all specs

THE GREENEST

390kW Excellence AWD 83kWh 4dr Auto

0-62	3.8s
CO2	0
BHP	523
MPG	
Price	£48,640

View all specs