



THE PROTON SATRIA NEO 1.6 GSX

A seriously cool drive...

The clue is on the rear where a quite small unobtrusive badge proclaims 'Handling by Lotus.' Even someone tailgating you would miss it. Putting that badge on your car means ha-hem, you've got something a bit special going on in the nether regions of the unseen chassis. And you'd not be wrong because Proton have incorporated the legendary racing nous of Lotus (who they own outright nowadays) to really great effect in the new 3-door hatchback Proton Satria Neo 1.6 GSX. The result is a car that is a seriously cool drive. Proton even admit that the vast majority of purchasers of the Satria Neo will be male mid 30s and early 40s age groups - still lots of testosterone hanging about awkwardly across this age range hankering for some mad performance en-route to the office every day. Well, boys form an orderly queue because this car is just what you've been waiting for... The model I tested costs £9,595 OTR but the price range is from £7,995 (1.3litre manual SX) up to £10,395 (1.6litreGSX automatic).

There are styling cues from sources as diverse as the Peugeot 207 and even the old RoverMG 25 on the Satria but the end result is quite an eye-catching body style that oozes sex-appeal. This is a class act benefiting from the Lotus input more clearly than any other model from Proton. Everything about the bodywork is spot on - check out the brilliant 'tiger-eyes' headlights, the racing style filler cap and the centre mounted exhaust. The Satria is almost saying, 'C'mon if you think you're hard enough...'
'And I like a bit of attitude in a car.

Okay so far so good now what's under the bonnet? A CamPro 4-cylinder 16valve Multi-Point Injection petrol engine developed in collaboration with Lotus. Producing a tasty 111bhp it claims a top speed of 118mph (which I can verify) and loads of useful torque. 0-62mph is reached in under 12 seconds. A combined fuel consumption of around 40mpg is reasonable but really push on with a heavy right foot and expect circa 27mpg. My model had the 5-speed manual gearbox. The automatic version is slightly slower.

The interior carries on the good news especially now Proton has embraced quality plastics and improved fit and finish over previous low-rent materials. The input from Lotus is again evident with the cool and chic amber and blue glowing dials on the instrument panel. This is so good you'll find yourself turning on your lights in broad daylight just to enjoy looking at how fast you're going and what the engine revs are. Intimate bucket seats in the front give excellent support and the subtle blend of black and purple colouring adds to the sporty ambience of the interior. The equipment level is generous and includes RDS and Mp3 CD capability with a 4-speaker system.

THE VERDICT

Easily the best yet from the Proton stable this is a great buy if you want to add some real excitement to your everyday driving.