

HYUNDAI EON vs MARUTI ALTO 800



COMPACT CLASS

The Alto is Maruti's best-selling model. How does this latest one compare with the stylish Hyundai Eon?

What's new?

**I**N INDIA, Maruti is the undisputed king of affordable small cars. In fact, the company is so good at the small car formula, it's got no less than six hatchbacks that span everything from bare-bones basic to premium. So, whatever your budget, there's at least one Maruti hatchback that is right for you.

The new Alto 800 is the company's most important and affordable car. A step up from the earlier Alto, this car has been built to address many of the issues that regularly cropped up with the previous version. It gets an all-new body, a thoroughly updated engine and new interiors; which means this is practically an all-new car. It's also Maruti's way of taking the fight to the other car you see here, the Hyundai Eon.

Now, Hyundai knows a thing or two about making small cars as well. It also knows it's difficult to take Maruti head on in this segment, and so has taken an interesting approach with its hatchback. The Eon aims to bring style, panache and a 'bigger car' feel to a segment that has traditionally been populated only by very basic runabouts. The Eon looks like nothing this segment has seen before, and its modern styling and upmarket interiors are what Hyundai is pinning its hopes on.

Performance

Both come with puny, three-cylinder petrol engines mated to five-speed, manual gearboxes. The Eon's slightly larger 814cc engine makes 55bhp, while the Alto's considerably updated 796cc engine makes 47bhp. Now, while these power figures are nothing to get excited about, you have to remember that these two weigh close to nothing—the Alto 800 tips the scales at 725kg and the Eon, 772kg—so even these modest power figures result in acceptable performance.

The figures will tell you the Alto is marginally quicker at getting to 100kph. It'll do the run in 17.05sec, which is 0.6sec earlier than the



Cabin quality: Materials far ahead of anything else in this segment



The Eon has comfortable rear seats. Leg and headroom is quite good

THE EON AIMS TO BRING STYLE AND PANACHE TO THIS BARE-BONES SEGMENT

Eon's time, but it's in the real world that the Eon's biggest disappointment comes to light. In traffic and at low engine speeds, the Eon simply doesn't have enough grunt to carry on without shifting down a gear. You need to rev this engine to get the best out of it, and herein lies another part of the problem. When it's revving, this three-cylinder motor sounds loud, it isn't particularly smooth and the gear lever vibrates. Acceleration is often jerky and you will need to be rather measured with the throttle to drive it smoothly. Compounding this problem is a hiccup in the power delivery when pulling away at low revs—there is a hesitation from the engine before it starts pulling ahead again—this is irritating and, since it happens quite randomly, can take you by surprise.

The Alto's engine, on the other hand, is far nicer. It's a lot more responsive than the Hyundai's at city speeds, requires fewer downshifts and manages to feel quite peppy as well. Sure, it's not the quietest engine around, but it is a

lot smoother than the Eon's motor when it's revving. It has the nicer gearshift—gearshifts are snappy and positive and the clutch action is slightly more progressive than the Eon's as well. As a result, it's almost difficult to stall the Alto 800, and new drivers will appreciate this. The Eon's gearshift isn't too bad, but it requires slightly more effort to slot in the gears.

Neither car is equipped with ABS and their thin, 145-section tyres mean the wheels lock up under panic braking. And both cars have braking systems that are only barely acceptable.

Hyundai Eon ★★★  
Maruti Alto 800 ★★★★★

Ride and handling

The Alto 800 rides incredibly well for a small car. Its tall springs and high-profile tyres cope unexpectedly well with almost anything you drive over and the suspension is incredibly silent too. Still, the car's light weight and tiny wheelbase mean it does get thrown off by bigger bumps, and the dinky 12-inch wheels don't help either. Still, it is a whole world ahead of the 800s of old and there's absolutely none of the lumpiness that characterised those cars.

The Eon is not as nice. The suspension is not as well set up and that means there's more vertical movement over bad roads, the suspension isn't as refined or silent as the Alto's and the ride is never as settled. That said, the Eon's ride is not stiff to the point of being uncomfortable, but you are always aware of exactly what condition the road is in. Like the Alto, the Hyundai's small 12-inch wheels also highlight this.

Neither car is particularly exciting to drive—they both have vague steering, there's not much grip and neither likes being pushed to its limits. But this is absolutely fine, given their brief as city cars. What matters is that both cars, with their light, electrically-assisted power steering, tight turning circles and compact di-

mensions, are very easy to thread through narrow spaces. Again, the Alto 800 is marginally the nicer of the two to drive in the city. Its steering is less nervous, it feels more calm, comfortable and relaxed and that means it's less of a hassle.

Neither is well suited to the highway, however. The Alto moves about a fair bit and doesn't feel comfortable cornering at higher speeds, and the Eon's nervous steering and unstable temperament needs even more concentration on a highway. Our

THE CONTENDERS



- Hyundai Eon Era+
- List price ₹3.18 lakh
- Hyundai's aim is to give people more than just basic transportation with the Eon. It's got styling previously unseen in this segment, and the upmarket interiors will surely appeal to owners.



- New Maruti Alto 800 Lxi
- List price ₹2.99 lakh
- Maruti hasn't fiddled extensively with its successful small hatch recipe. That's the reason why the new Alto remains true to its basic roots, and yet has improved considerably over the old car.

advice—if you must drive on the highway with these cars, don't try and keep up with the big boys.

Hyundai Eon ★★★  
Maruti Alto 800 ★★★★★

What are they like inside?

The Eon is physically bigger than the Alto—it is longer, wider, taller and has a longer wheelbase. Despite this, it's the Alto that has a bit more room inside. Maruti has worked hard on the interior packaging of its newest car and it shows—sitting three abreast at the rear is slightly more comfortable than in the Eon and this is down to the space liberated by the Alto 800's thin doorpads. That said, these cars are best used as four-seaters. Both are pretty similar on legroom and headroom at the rear, but both also have relatively small windows and can get a bit claustrophobic. Both cars also have really short seat-backs and no head restraints, so you won't get too much protection from whiplash injuries in the event of a rear collision.

In the Alto, we had problems with the front seats as well. In its quest to stretch the available space in the Alto, Maruti has made a compromise—the front seats are too slim and flat and, as a result, are unsupportive, and their seat-bases are extremely short. This means you start feeling uncomfortable pretty soon into the journey.

The Eon's front seats are the opposite of the Alto's. They have excellent side support and the seat cushions are nicely padded as well, and this makes the Alto 800 feel very basic in comparison. The Eon also scores on the look and feel of its interiors. The quality of materials used, the fit and finish, and the dashboard design are a few steps above the Alto's. It's here that the Eon feels thoroughly modern and much better than the Alto's typical 1990s feel. Still, the Alto LXi gets a few splashes of silver trim around the centre console and on the steering wheel, and Maruti has spruced the cabin up considerably with an all-new dash.



Cabin quality: Hard plastics remain, but new design is much fresher



Rear seats not too bad in the Alto. Maruti has worked hard on interiors

MARUTI HASN'T GONE RADICAL ON THE ALTO'S PROVEN FORMULA FOR GOOD REASON

As for storage space, both have quite a few useful cubbyholes—the Eon gets a nicely scooped out section above the glovebox and a large storage box just ahead of the gear lever. The Alto gets a clever one-litre bottle holder ahead of the gear lever, and a storage slot above the glovebox, which itself is rather big. Shockingly, the Alto only gets a slim, cheap-looking door pocket for the driver's door, while the Eon gets bigger door pockets moulded into both the front doors. Both cars have surprisingly generous boots, but it's the Alto's that more usable thanks to the low loading lip.

Hyundai Eon ★★★★★  
Maruti Alto 800 ★★★

Will they break the bank?

The top-spec Alto LXi costs ₹2.99 lakh, and for that you get front power windows, power steering, air-con and body-coloured bumpers. However, you can forget conveniences like a left-hand-side outside mirror or central locking. There's no option of ABS either,

but Maruti does offer a driver's airbag for ₹16,000 more.

The Eon costs ₹3.18 lakh for the similarly equipped Era+ variant. Now this may sound expensive, but Hyundai is currently offering a ₹9,000 discount and a further ₹20,000 bonus over the value of your old car if you wish to exchange it for the Eon.

Fuel economy-wise, it's the Eon, with its 13.7kpl city figure, that's slightly better than the Alto and its 13.3kpl.

Maruti has the wider service network, although Hyundai isn't far behind. Not that you will have trouble with either of these cars—they both use tried and tested mechanicals—but in case you do, Hyundai's two-year, unlimited-mileage warranty betters Maruti's two-year, 40,000km offer.

Hyundai Eon ★★★★★  
Maruti Alto 800 ★★★★★

Our verdict

It's Eon's ahead. The Eon makes you feel like you have got a lot more for your money.

If you are looking for nothing more than a basic car, the new Alto 800 does almost everything you ask of it. Its key strengths include strong performance, clever use of space and a comfortable ride. Other Maruti plusses like the hassle-free ownership experience and tried and tested mechanicals helped it score well in our test. It's a tough, dependable, honest little car that is surprisingly well engineered.

The Eon, however, manages to take the game ahead. Sure, it may not ride as well, and it may not be as smooth to drive either, but tolerate these shortcomings and the Eon manages to convince you it is a car that's half a generation ahead. It looks much more attractive, the interiors feel like they are from a higher segment and the seats are much more comfortable too. Here is a car that makes you feel like you've got a lot more than what you paid for and that's exactly why the Eon wins.