

Zastava Yugo

Communist car, latest.



• Communist-built automobiles have long been looked upon as next of kin to agricultural machinery—with good reason, near as we can tell. From ZAZ to ZIL, Red automobiles are laughably crude and about fifteen years behind the times in engineering.

There are, however, occasional bursts of progress from the other side's automotive technical centers. The latest, the Zastava Yugo 45, comes not from mother Russia, but from the independent Communist state of Yugoslavia.

As it turns out, the Yugo 45, introduced about a year ago, is basically a contemporary design. Most of the credit, however, goes to a filthy capitalist-imperialist running-dog corporation: Fiat. Fiats, in fact, are the basis of most of the five outdated models that complete Zastava's lineup.

The Yugo 45 is based heavily on the mechanicals of the nifty Fiat 127. Though the body shell and chassis are home-grown, parent company ZCZ has virtually cloned the 127's transversely mounted four-cylinder engine, its four-speed transaxle, its suspension, and most of its ancillary gear. The Yugo is a tight 137.4 inches long—just a tad shorter than a Le Car—and comes in any body style you want, as long as it's a three-door sedan.

Inside, the decor is barely more luxurious than your average Yugoslavian military vehicle, with plenty of naked metal surfaces, simple rocker switches, and little more than a speedo and a fuel gauge to keep you informed. But who needs dis-

tasteful, bourgeois, materialistic glitter anyway—eh, comrades?

The Yugo might not be too hospitable, but it does do a marginally acceptable job of getting you there. Since all the important pieces come from one of Europe's most popular minisedans, it's not too surprising to find some Italian brio surfacing through the Yugo's drab outer garb. The 45-hp motor doesn't mind forays into the upper rev range, and the chassis is well-behaved, even over rough, unpaved back roads.

Manufacturer: Zavodi Crvena Zastava
Kragujevac, Yugoslavia

Vehicle type: front-engine, front-wheel-drive, 4-passenger, 3-door sedan

Price (Yugoslavia): 135,000 dinars (\$2830 U.S.)

Engine type: 4-in-line, iron block and aluminum head, 1x1-bbl carburetor

Displacement	55 cu in, 903cc
Power (SAE net)	45 bhp @ 6100 rpm
Transmission	4-speed
Wheelbase	84.6 in
Length	137.4 in
Curb weight	1600 lbs

While this amounts to a rave review for a Zastava product, hundreds of Western cars can embarrass the Yugo 45 in virtually every measure of goodness. Where the Yugo has almost all corners covered, though, is at the bottom line. Production overhead in Yugoslavia is so low that ZCZ can sell the Yugo for \$2830 and still make a tidy contribution to the party treasury from the sale of every car. Low price is one of the reasons ZCZ has penetrated 34 nations—15 of them developing countries.

Third-world states will no doubt continue to be the prime export market for Zastava's utilitarian products, given the official government paranoia about decadence in cars. If the Yugo 45 shows us anything, it's that the Communists have yet to come to grips with the idea that cars can be—dare we say—enjoyable to live with, without compromising their utility. That breakthrough is yet to come.

—Anne Hope