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Latest Vauxhall Insignia – First Impressions

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First Drive of the new Vauxhall Insignia Grand Sport.

By Robin Roberts (Miles Better News Agency).

The smooth new Vauxhall Insignia Grand Sport will ruffle some feathers among rivals.

Bigger, lighter, more economical and better equipped than the original Insignia launched in 2008, the Insignia Mk2 is now on sale as a five-door hatchback from £17,115 to £26,445.

It will later this summer be joined by a Sports Tourer semi-estate version costing about £1,500 more for each model in the range and which pushes up luggage space to 1,665 litres (58.80 cu.ft).



Developed from the 2013 Monza Concept shown at the Frankfurt Motor Show, the Insignia was shaped under the eyes of Brit Mark Adams, who has produced Opel and Vauxhall landmark models for nearly a decade and who revels in sharp edges and accentuating curves evident on Insignia.

It retains improved and updated petrol engines of 140 or 165 PS 1.5 and 260 PS 2.0, with currently 110 or 136 PS 1.6 and 170 PS 2.0 diesels, but later this summer will be joined by a 210 PS bi-turbo 2.0 diesel. Six speed manual gearboxes are fitted but top versions also get an eight-speed automatic with FlexRide suspension and chassis tuning as well as torque vectoring twin clutch rear differential in their 4WD powertrain.

New Insignia has a bigger footprint with a longer wheelbase and wider track, and this has created more leg and shoulder room but there is also added headroom and the occupant comfort is enhanced with better seats, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity as well as the groundbreaking OnStar assistance system for emergencies or concierge services. A new Exclusive paint option provides bespoke colours and trim finishes.

A lot of work has gone into cutting weight and it features an aluminium bonnet which also enhances pedestrian protection and model for model the new car is about £1,500 less than the previous near comparable models.

This lower price and enhanced safety features help to keep down the BIK penalties and Vauxhall is aiming the new Insignia at the user-chooser fleet driver and wants to increase the retail share from a current level of about 10%.

Britain is the biggest European market for Insignia and at its peak in 2011 about 46,000 were sold, twice the number in Germany. With the current diesel market declining and impact of business penalties being played out, Vauxhall is being cautious about the likely split of sales and the rise in the petrol versions ordered.

Vauxhall is, however, confident of taking away sales from rivals at Ford, Audi, BMW and even Mercedes-Benz.



The new Vauxhall Insignia really puts on a lights show. Standard on the top model and available on almost all the rest, Insignia gets the next generation IntelliLux LED Matrix headlights with 32 lenses which give additional long-range penetration, spotlight and turning illumination, all without dazzling oncoming or preceding traffic.

That's double the elements for the Astra which debuted the system and the latest is not only brighter but faster-acting as well.

When specified as an option it adds about £1,000 to the vehicle price, but it's a big step forward in road safety, particularly for those who regularly drive in the countryside at night.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Walk up to the new Vauxhall Insignia and it looks large yet sleek and inside the roominess is striking.

You sit low in wrap-around seats with a high central console and a curved fascia, with different layouts depending on trim level, but sharing a large central infotainment screen.

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Our first model was the 170 PS 2.0 diesel which had a long travel clutch in the six speed manual powertrain, but it was not particularly quiet when idling or pushed hard through the intermediate gears, although it did pull well.

It came with 18-inch wheels and was firm but not hard while the 165 PS 1.5 petrol version seemed to ride better on the 17-inch wheels and tyres and was a lot quieter and better-composed.

My favourite, but also likely smallest seller, was the 265 PS 2.0 4×4 Elite Nav, which is top of the range.



Selectable drive modes really make a difference, the performance is very effortless and useful, while the new eight-speed automatic was superbly smooth after instant kick-down. It's one of the best autoboxes available.



VERDICT

With no intention to build a saloon version, and adding the Sports Tourer very soon, the Vauxhall Insignia is going for buyers who want practicality and purpose without paying for pretentiousness.

For: Good performance and economy, sharp handling, roomy, smooth powertrain, smaller tyres better for ride comfort.



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Against: Road and wind noises, small back window.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Vauxhall Insignia Grand Sport Tech Line Nav.

Price: £20,010, as tested £26,075.

Engine/transmission: 165 PS four cylinder, 1,490cc turbo-petrol, six speed.

Performance: 138 mph, 0-60mph: 8.4 sec, fuel consumption 38.9 mpg.

Emissions and taxation: CO2 136 g/km, new VED road tax £200 First Year rate then



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£140 thereafter. BIK company car tax rate 26%.

Insurance Group: 17E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions: L 4.90 m (16.07 ft), W 1.87 m (6.14 ft), H 1.46 m (4.79 ft), Boot: 490 – 1,450 litres (17.30 – 51.21 cu.ft), kerb weight 1,440 kg (3,175 lb), five doors/five seats.