Latest Vauxhall Astra GSe hybrid – First Impressions

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The new Vauxhall Astra GSe brief first drive by Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

As it slips into middle-age, the latest generation Vauxhall Astra has been given a modern make-over.

Originally launched in 1980, the Astra has been the bedrock of the company's offering in the small family car sector as it moved through eight generations.

This year it was given a mechanical boost with hybrid technology adding to the petrol power in a bid to lower emissions and better compete with younger rivals, particularly in the company-car business sector.

A regular reps' runabout, the changes under the skin were matched by a stunning transformation of the styling which has made it stand out from predecessors and predators.

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At the same time announcing the hatchback newcomer earlier this year, Vauxhall matched it with the Astra Sports Tourer semi-estate and the bodily different Grandland SUV, which comes with more powerful engine and all-wheel-drive, but they all carry the GSe suffix.

GSe stands for Grand Sport Electric and is the new performance sub-brand from Vauxhall as they distance themselves from the pure petrol stablemates and eventually move to a pure electric line-up.

Vauxhall declined us testing their new models until a couple of weeks ago when we managed a very brief run in the Astra GSe at the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders annual test day, and it left us with mixed impressions.

The newest model gets a substantial interior makeover with Alcantara trim, unique 19-inch Monza alloy wheels and badging together with specially retuned suspension and modified steering which gives it a lower stance.

I must confess I wondered what the Astra was like before these dynamic changes as it was a delight to drive with taut responses and a well controlled chassis, unperturbed by some poor to moderate road surfaces thanks to Koni knowledge about dampers and springing.

The Astra GSe took sweeping bends and undulations in its stride and faithfully responded to steering and brakes.

Silently moving from rest and mid-range power take up was very good and it appeared average for road noise intrusion. It’s not completely representative, I am sure, but we saw an indicated 49.5 mpg attained despite a lot of mid-range gear swopping.



It was powered by a 180 PS 1.6-litre four cylinder petrol engine, connected to an 81.2 kW or

110 PS electric motor for a total power output of 225 PS and maximum torque of 360 Nm (266 lb.ft). Featuring a 12.4 kWh battery, Astra GSe phev model achieves up to 40 miles of electric range, so can cover the average commute without using petrol.



It rekindled earlier memories of sporting Astras which I thought had disappeared in subsequent generations and which have returned to please enthusiastic drivers. If you press on, the electric motor seamlessly sweeps into play and gives a strong push along the way.

However, I am not so sure sporting drivers would like the dumbed down interior styling and trim and might not find the infotainment system very logical, practical or safe due to being a distraction to use on the move.

Astra GSe models feature Intelli-Drive technology with Forward Collision Alert and Active Emergency Braking with Pedestrian Detection. Also included is Drowsiness Detection, Lane Departure Warning and Traffic Sign Assistant, Cross Traffic and Side Blind Spot alert, also Automatic Speed Assistant with Stop Function.


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While rivals have generally increased in size, the Astra GSe has not gained much, if anything. Perhaps it was the overly dark interior but the impression it gave me was a cramped cabin with limited average front seat movement and very little legroom behind for anyone except a young child.

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Access was restricted through the doors but a high-opening tailgate revealed a good sized and quickly increased bootspace.



VERDICT

A dynamic-looking newcomer providing excellent performance, but with a less impressive interior.

Prices across the new GSe range start from £40,550 for Astra GSe and it produced just 25 g/km so attracts an 8% BIK level which means no road tax in the first year but £560 annually for the next five years as it breaks the £40,000 ceiling for evs. That’s not smart pricing from Vauxhall marketing for a car that has a tough task to take on rivals.



Tech Spec. in Brief:

Model:	Vauxhall Astra GSe
Price from:	£40,550
Engine:	1.6-litre turbocharged four-cylinder petrol + e-motor
Power/torque:	225 PS/360 Nm (266 lb.ft)
Transmission:	Eight-speed automatic, front-wheel drive
0-62mph:	7.5 seconds
Top speed:	146 mph
WLTP official Fuel economy:	256.8 mpg
CO2:	25 g/km