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New Vauxhall Astra – Road Test

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NOW BEING DELIVERED TO UK CUSTOMERS – THE LATEST VAUXHALL ASTRA.

David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) test-drives the new model and gives his opinion...

The revised British-built Vauxhall Astra started to arrive in our domestic market showrooms in November, good news for the 25% of British motorists who have either owned or driven one since the Mark 1 made its appearance in 1979.



Since then, through seven generations covering 40 years, over three million have been sold in the UK, 30,000 of them in 2018.

Now a major refresh sees the Vauxhall Astra continue with five door Hatch and Sports Tourer estate models with a wide range of new petrol and diesel engines and with CO2 emissions and fuel consumption reduced by up to 21% versus the outgoing models.

Prices range from £18,855 to £29,310 for the Hatch and £20,335 to £26,920 for the Sports Tourer range - which has fewer specification levels than the more popular Hatch version. The spec levels for the Hatch are SE, Business Edition Nav, SRi, SRi Nav, SRi VX Line Nav, Elite Nav and Ultimate Nav. The Sports Tourer has SE, Business Edition and SRi spec levels.

All petrol and diesel engines on offer are lightweight three cylinder units with Stop/Start. The choices depend on the body style and spec level and they are 1.2 litre 110 hp and 130 hp petrol units with six speed manual gearboxes, a 1.4 litre 145 hp petrol with a CVT stepless auto gearbox and 1.5 litre turbodiesels with a 105 hp manual gearbox unit and a 122 hp version with six speed manual and nine speed automatic gearboxes choices.

Although diesel powered car sales have fallen considerably it has to be noted that these new Vauxhall units are compliant with the latest RDE2 emission tests so they are exempt from the added 4% Benefit-in-Kind tax hike suffered by company car drivers. Their CO2 emissions range between 90 and 120 g/km depending on the power output, gearbox option, body style and spec level. Petrol powered models have CO2 figures ranging between 99 and 112 g/km.

As a tax example my latest Astra Hatch test car with the 1.5 litre, 122 hp turbodiesel engine, six speed manual gearbox with Elite Nav specification has RDE2 compliant CO2 emissions of 95 g/km so BiK tax is only 23% instead of 27% and VED First Year road tax is £130 instead of £150, but the Standard rate VED for year two onwards remains at £145. As for fuel economy the WLTP Combined Cycle figures are 58.9 to 62.8 mpg and during my week of motoring covering most types of roads and traffic conditions the real-life figure was



56.6 mpg.

With the use of lighter weight engines and aerodynamic bodywork tweaks, including automatically opening and closing upper and lower sections of the front grille shutter and underbody engine compartment cover plus deflector shaped rear axle control arms, the drag coefficient has been reduced to just 0.26 for the Hatch and 0.25 for the Sports Tourer – which Vauxhall says is best in class. And writing about class the C-segment Astra still has to compete against the Ford Focus, VW Golf, Honda Civic, new Skoda Scala, Peugeot 308 Kia Ceed, Toyota Corolla, SEAT Leon and Hyundai i30 plus numerous mid-sized SUVs such as the Nissan Qashqai, Ford Kuga, Peugeot 3008 and Skoda Karoq, but there are many more.

Apart from its new levels of higher equipment and low tax costs the new Astra is competitive for price and usually there are deals to be had although with this latest updated line-up it's perhaps too soon to see much of a reduction in the transaction price. But new car sales are slow and the competition is fierce. A numerous amount of Swappage/Scrappage schemes are currently available throughout the industry so look for the best deals.

Exterior wise the latest Astra Hatch looks very much the same as before, sharp sleek styling lines and inside it's more of the same, just a bit smarter, well laid out and it remains roomy for a hatchback of this size.



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Up front there is plenty of leg and shoulder room, long reach seat and steering wheel adjustments and in the rear the legroom is acceptable, but not up to the room provided by the new Skoda Scala or current Skoda Octavia models. As always the 60-40 split rear seats fold down to increase the boot space from 370 to 1,210 litres (13.07 to 42.73 cu.ft) for the Hatch and 540 to 1,630 litres (19.07 to 57.56 cu.ft) for the Sports Tourer estate, which is particularly impressive in its sector.



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Spec wise as an overview the new Astra provides a whole suite of top-of-the-range technologies, including the smarter, faster and more intuitive Multimedia Radio, Multimedia Navi and Multimedia Navi Pro systems. The systems offer good levels of connectivity, and are compatible with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto.

Base SE versions have 16-inch alloy wheels, 7-inch colour touchscreen, Bluetooth, USB, DAB radio, air-con, cruise control, electric windows and door mirrors and dark tinted rear windows and so the spec items move up through the range.

The top-of-the-range Multimedia Navi Pro comes as standard on Elite Nav and Ultimate Nav trims, with an eight-inch colour touchscreen and voice control. Connected navigation services are available and these give the driver real-time traffic information and online map updates. The navigation display appears with redesigned symbols in a fresher and more



modern look while the instrument cluster features a new digital speedometer.

The range-topping Ultimate Nav trim is equipped with a Bose premium sound system, wireless charging and IntelliLux LED Matrix headlamp system which brings premium spec technology to mainstream models.

Specifically my popular Elite Nav test drive version has as standard 17-inch alloy wheels, uprated sat-nav with an 8-inch touchscreen, electronic climate control, heated front and rear seats and heated steering wheel, front safety camera, LED headlights and leather seat trim. It also has a comprehensive display of dials in front of the driver which not only include the speedometer, a rev counter and fuel gauge, but oil and water temperature gauges as well -which is very unusual these days. The only missing item was a rear view camera - given the tight parking spaces we endure these days, and the Hatch body shape (which doesn't give the best rear quarter visibility), a standard-fit camera would have been welcome. However, you have to move up to Ultimate Nav spec level to get that rear camera system plus Park Assist and Side Blind Spot Alerts.



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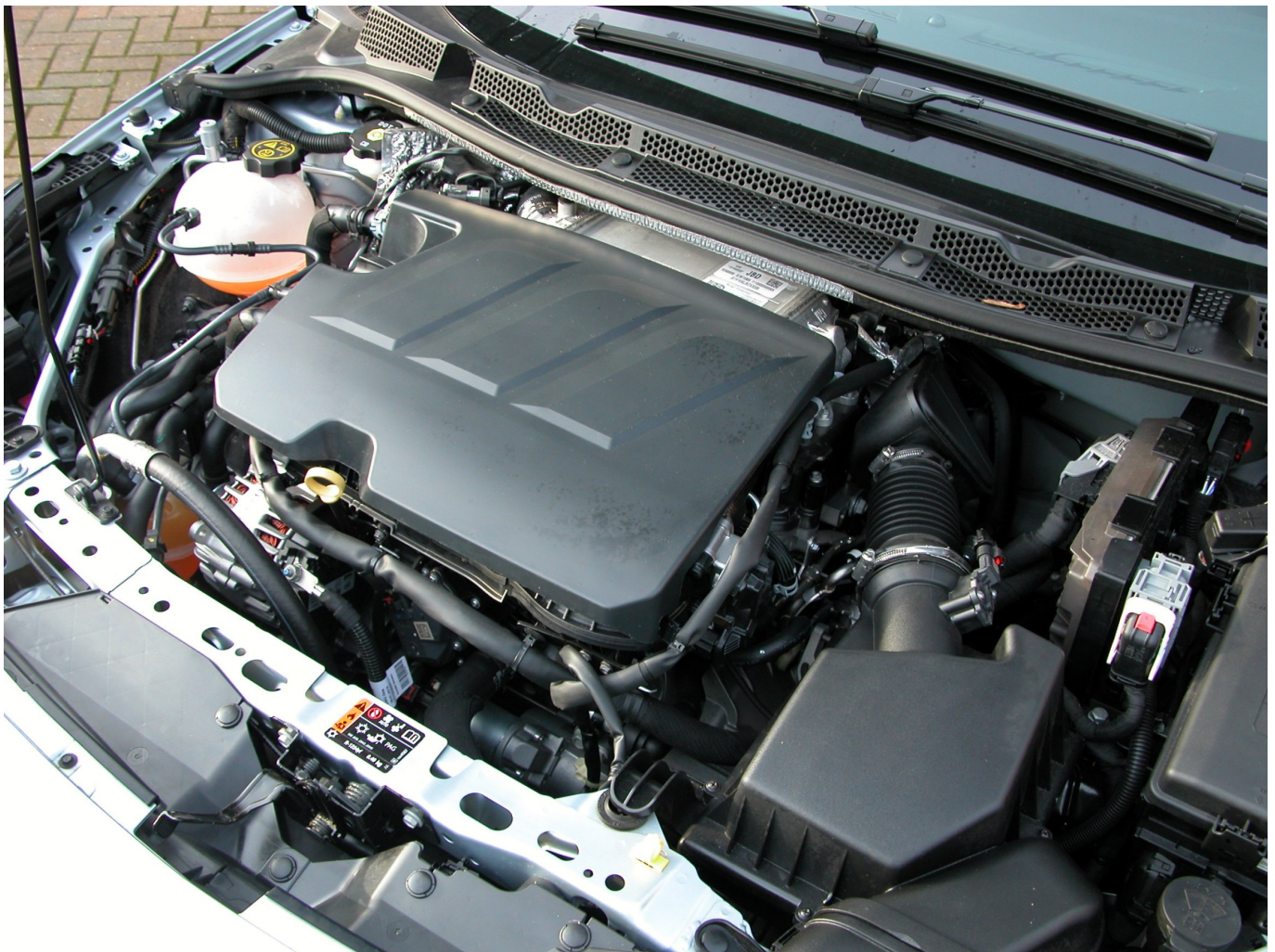
My Astra Hatch Elite Nav test car with the 1.5 litre turbodiesel 122 hp engine and manual gearbox is priced at £24,850. It was also fitted with several extra cost options which included an emergency spare wheel at £110, Emergency Call at £415, front and rear parking sensors at £480, heated windscreen at £320, Traffic Sign Recognition and Pedestrian Protection at £275 and premium paint at £655, so all-told the test car costs £27,105 on-the-road but hopefully that price might become negotiable if falling industry-wide new cars sales continue.

As for driveability, some tuning has taken place to the suspension dampers and these appear to have improved the ride compliancy which is generally good and not too soft to hamper handling control. The steering has been recalibrated to improve response and



feedback at higher speeds. It doesn't have the handling finesses of a Ford Focus or VW Golf but the ride quality is better than the Golf.

At the heart of this particular Astra is a new 1.5 litre, three cylinder turbodiesel engine producing 122 hp and 300 Nm (221 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm. This unit features an electrically-activated turbocharger with variable geometry turbine vanes and, like its petrol counterparts, a balancer shaft in the cylinder block for additional refinement. The exhaust manifold is integrated in the cylinder head to improve engine warm-up time to lessen emissions. Optimum exhaust after-treatment is delivered by the emissions reduction system consisting of a passive oxidation catalyst, AdBlue injector, SCR catalyst and Diesel Particulate Filter - hence its very competitive RDE2 emissions compliancy rating.





It's not all so smooth though. The engine is noisy on start up and vibrations do extend into the car initially until underway. Also there wasn't the smoothest of power delivery from slow start up speeds, between first and second gears, it was easy to stall without enough engine revs, which for a diesel is unusual, and during initial acceleration between the first two gear ratios the engine had a noticeable flatspot before picking up again once 2,200 rpm had been reached. This appears not to be a one-off, having checked out other media reports. I suspect it is all to do with running the engine very lean for emission reasons.

Once underway the engine became livelier with a zero to 60 mph acceleration time of 9.6 seconds, and top speed is 130 mph. It was evident that as with many three cylinder engines compared to four cylinder units, many of the triple-pots have to be worked just that bit harder carrying passengers or during acceleration, going up hills and at motorway cruising speeds. But the fuel economy potential is there if driven in a reasonable manner.

VERDICT

There are lots of good things to like about the latest Vauxhall Astra Hatch in diesel form. It meets the requirements for today's family/business motoring, with the lower CO2 emissions and lower tax costs and other general all-round improvements being good enough reasons to at least give it some consideration.

For: Meets the latest RDE2 diesel low exhaust emissions level, lower tax costs, good real life fuel economy, improved ride comfort and steering feedback, reasonably well equipped.

Against: Engine flatspot between first and second gears, noisy engine tone on start-up, no rear view camera on this high spec level, some options such as front and rear parking sensors should be standard-fit for this higher spec price level, ungenerous warranty.



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

Revised Vauxhall Astra Hatch, Elite Nav 1.5 Turbo D, 122 hp, manual.

Price: £24,850 (£27,105 as tested).

Engine/transmission: 1.5 litre, three cylinder turbodiesel, RDE2 compliant, 122 hp, 300 Nm (221 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm, six speed manual.



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Performance: 130 mph, 0-60 mph 9.6-seconds.

Fuel consumption: WLTP Combined Cycle 58.9 to 62.8 mpg (56.6 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 95 g/km, VED First Year road tax £130 then £145 Standard rate, BiK company car tax 23%.

Insurance Group: 18E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,370 mm (14.34 ft), W 1,809 mm (5.94 ft), H 1,485 mm (1.59 ft), wheelbase 2,662 mm (8.73 ft), boot/load space 370 to 1,210 litres (13.07 to 42.73 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.