Testing Times – Brief Impressions from the SMMT Test Day South 2015

Published: November 25, 2015

Author: Kim Henson

Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/testing-times-brief-impressions-from-the-smmt-test-day-south-2015/

BRIEF FIRST IMPRESSIONS – CARS DRIVEN AT THE SOCIETY OF MOTOR MANUFACTURERS AND TRADERS' 2015 TEST DAY SOUTH

Kim Henson was there...



The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) hosts an annual driving day specifically for motoring writers from the southern part of Britain. Without exception I find this a very useful occasion for driving a variety of vehicles from different manufacturers, in similar conditions and all on the same day!

(In addition, it gives writers like me the chance to chat with fellow scribes, as well as our public relations colleagues in the motor industry).

So this is an important event for me; here's how I got on at the 2015 Test Day South…

VOLVO V60 CROSS COUNTRY



My first outing of the day was in Volvo's V60 Cross Country, in D4 Manual SE Nav guise. This means that it's a mid-range model in the V60 Cross Country line-up.

Compared with the 'normal' V60 estate, the Cross Country designation indicates that the vehicle rides higher on its suspension (thus giving greater ground clearance), and is identifiable by a variety of additional/different exterior features, including a revised, honeycomb type grille, protective underbody plates, and so on.

The version I drove featured front wheel drive (only), but all wheel drive is available for even greater versatility.

Powering this machine is a two litre turbocharged diesel engine, producing 190 bhp and endowing the car with scintillating performance. Acceleration from rest to 62 mph takes just under eight seconds, and the top speed is 130 mph.

However, this car is not all about bhp alone, for part of the driving pleasure comes from the generous levels of low speed pulling power (torque) provided, making the vehicle easy and enjoyable to drive in all road situations. The slick-changing six speed manual gearbox was also appreciated by this test driver.

Fuel consumption promises to be very good too, and in real-life mixed driving buyers should see around 60 miles per gallon, or better. That's impressive for a large estate. Having said that, during my test drive (admittedly fairly fast at times), the on-board readout indicated an average of approximately 49 mpg.

This V60 handles well too, taking twisty roads easily in its stride with relatively little body roll.

I found the suspension quite firm, but the ride quality was not uncomfortable.

The interior is smart and the seats comfortable, with good head and leg room for rear seat occupants. The load bay is spacious and practical too.





Standard equipment on the D4 manual SE Nav includes a touchscreen ‘infotainment’ system, satellite navigation, and a wealth of high tech. safety and entertainment features.

The V60 Cross Country range starts at £30,195, with the well-equipped version I sampled costing £32,245 (and with options on the test car boosting the figure to £38,090).

VAUXHALL ASTRA SRI NAV 1.6 CDTI



Next on my agenda was Vauxhall's Astra, in SRI Nav 1.6 litre diesel form.

The Astra has always been a popular model with buyers, and the fact that the latest versions are built in Britain (at Ellesmere Port) is a good news story, and testament to the dedication of the workforce, unions and management. They all worked together to win the long-term contract for General Motors to build the car here, against very strong competition from across Europe.

So to the car itself. Interestingly, Vauxhall says that more than a quarter of British motorists have either owned or driven as Astra, so there is always interest in new generations of the

model.

The latest Astra is built on an all-new, lightweight body structure (depending on version, up to 200 kg or 440 lbs lighter than the previous generation), thus helping to boost performance, while minimising fuel consumption and emissions.

The sporty in nature but practical five door SRI that I drove was powered by Vauxhall's latest ECOTEC 'Whisper' diesel engine, in this case developing 136 PS.

Certainly it's a smooth and quiet-running unit, and I found that it pulled strongly from around 1,200 rpm.

Acceleration, from rest and on the move, was rapid, and I found that the car was a pleasure to drive, including when I ventured along twisty 'B' roads and country lanes. The very smooth, slick gearchange aided driving enjoyment too.

On the open road, the relatively high overall gearing means that at an indicated 70 mph in sixth (top) gear, the tachometer needle was showing just 2,100 rpm





I thought that the car was comfortable and handled well. It was also packed with a wealth of standard equipment, including a variety of useful ‘advanced technology’ ‘comfort’ and safety features, including, for example, Vauxhall’s ‘Driver Assistance Pack One’, incorporating an intelligent forward camera system (providing warning of the close proximity of the vehicle in front).

I also liked the unmistakable digital indicator (in addition to the normal speedometer) showing the speed of the vehicle.

For the record, the claimed top speed of this Astra is 127 mph, having scooted from standstill to 62 mph on the way, in just 9.0 seconds. The official ‘Combined’ fuel consumption figure is 72.4 mpg (‘Urban’, 52.8 mpg), so real life everyday driving in a variety of road conditions should see most owners achieving 60 mpg or better. The CO2 emissions rating is 103 g/km.

The SRI I sampled is priced at £21,480 ‘On the Road’, and with options fitted (Intellilux LED Matrix headlights, at £995, plus Electronic Climate Control, priced at £395), the total figure amounted to £22,870.

SSANGYONG TIVOLI ELX



In recent times you may have noticed increasing numbers of SSangyongs on Britain's roads. There's good reason for that, since in each case across the range the vehicles offer a great deal of motor car for buyers' hard-earned cash, and the model line-up is expanding, to provide wider choice.

With this in mind my next drive was in the latest offering from the SSangyong stable, the Tivoli.

For those who may not yet know, the SSangyong company was established in 1954, and the Tivoli is an SUV intended to provide a dynamic, efficient and stylish vehicle for young European customers. The car was named after the Italian town bearing the same name and noted for its style.

Introduced in January 2015 in its home nation of South Korea, the model was an immediate success in sales terms, and the high numbers sold made similar headlines when the car had its international debut in the spring, initially being sold in petrol-powered form only.

The firm says that production levels are already 30 per cent ahead of their forecasts, and in 2016 Tivoli sales are expected to top 100,000 units in total.

During the autumn of 2015, a new Euro 6 diesel engined version was launched, and it was one of these that I drove at this year's SMMT Test Day south.

Featuring deliberately 'European' styling (as with all Tivolis), the newcomer is powered by a 1.6 litre turbocharged diesel engine (developing 115 PS at between 3,400 and 4,000 rpm). This unit is set up to provide excellent driveability (especially in the low to mid rev ranges) and frugal fuel consumption figures.



The manual transmission versions are equipped with a ‘Stop & Go’ system to minimise consumptions and emissions.

I sampled a two wheel drive, manual gearbox version (a six speed automatic variant is also available, with an Aisin transmission). Customers can specify ‘on demand’ four wheel drive, if they need this facility.

The example I drove was equipped to the range-topping ‘ELX’ trim level (there are lower specification ‘SE’ and ‘EX’ versions too).



I found the Tivoli's interior to be spacious and welcoming, with good head and leg room for rear seat passengers as well as those in the front. I explored the luggage compartment too – it's large and sensibly-proportioned.

Equipment levels are very comprehensive, and, just as examples, on this version include a seven inch touchscreen RDS radio with iPod and Bluetooth connectivity, TomTom satellite navigation, a reversing camera, dual zone climate control, automatic headlamps, rain-sensing windscreen wipers, heated, leather-trimmed seats, and a wealth of other built-in safety and convenience features.

On the road, the Tivoli felt competent in terms of ride and handling, and at the end of my test drive I wrote in my notes that the refined, quiet-running diesel engine pulled especially strongly from around 1,400 rpm (in fact the vehicle's specification sheet later advised me that maximum torque of 300 Nm or 221 lb.ft is delivered between 1,500 to 2,500 rpm). The six speed gearbox was easy and pleasant to use too, aiding driving enjoyment.

Cruising at high road speeds was impressively smooth and hushed, with the engine turning at just 2,000 rpm in sixth (top) gear at an indicated 70 mph.

Ssangyong figures show a top speed of 109 mph and a nought to 62 mph acceleration time of 11.9 seconds for the two wheel drive manual version that I drove (107 mph and 12.3 seconds respectively, for the equivalent automatic).

The official fuel consumption figures indicate an ‘Urban’ figure of 55.3 mpg, and a ‘Combined’ one of 65.7 mpg. During my test drive the on-board computer indicated a somewhat less frugal average figure of 48 mpg.

CO2 emissions are said to be 113g/km for the model I sampled.

Even before considering the asking price, I was impressed by the Tivoli. However, with the test car costing just £17,250, and with the Tivoli range starting at £12,500 and rising to £19,500, it is no wonder that these newcomers are creating great interest among potential buyers.

SSANGYONG KORANDO 2.2 ELX (automatic, four wheel drive)



From one SSangyong to another, and my next test drive was in the 2016 model Korando 2.2.ELX, powered by a 2.2 litre Euro 6 e-XDi220 turbo diesel motor, producing 178 PS at 4,000 rpm,

and a thumping 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque between 1,400 and 2,800 rpm.

The new diesel engine delivers more power and lower CO2 emissions than its predecessor, and drives through a six speed Aisin automatic transmission.

The vehicle features front wheel drive for normal use, but with Torque on Demand four wheel drive (with lock mode) available when needed.

As with the Tivoli, the Korando line up runs upwards through increasingly well-equipped SE, EX and ELX variants.

Prices start at £15,995 and rise to £22,495, with the test vehicle costing £22,495 'On the Road'.

The test car was very well equipped, standard features including a Smart audio system with a seven inch touchscreen and TomTom satellite navigation, fully automatic air conditioning with a temperature sensor and a digital display, leather upholstery plus heated front and rear seats, to name just a few.

Users of the Korando will find 'acres' of interior space, plus a generously-proportioned luggage compartment too.

Behind the wheel, I found that the car performed smoothly, quietly and in a spirited manner.

The tremendous pulling power available from low engine speeds makes driving in traffic and on hilly routes an easy affair, and will also be useful to buyers intending to use their Korando for towing purposes. In fact the maximum towing weight is 2 tonnes (for braked trailers).

At an indicated 60 mph in sixth (top) gear, the engine needs a whisker over 1,500 rpm, at which speed it is particularly refined.



My verdict? A likeable machine. Any bad points? Well personally I didn't like the large blind spot noticeable in each of the rear corners (especially when reversing). Otherwise, I feel that the Korando is a cost-effective, competent vehicle; well worth considering.

NISSAN PULSAR TEKNA 1.5 dCi



Nissan's current model line-up offers wide-ranging appeal across a variety of types of vehicle, each offering individualistic styling and many useful features to make ownership easy and enjoyable. The car in which I took my next drive is a case in point…

Nissan's Pulsar is a smart, modern-looking five door vehicle, and, especially with the top of the range 'Tekna' specification level, as sampled, is brimming with modern technology. Among the many standard safety-related features on this car are 'Moving Object Detection', 'Lane Departure Warning', Blind Spot Warning', and 'Forward Emergency Braking'. Other interesting aspects of the vehicle include the Intelligent key system, plus a front, rear and side colour camera 'Around View Monitor' system, a five inch high definition colour 'Thin

Film Transistor' ('TFT') screen, Bluetooth with a microphone, USB/iPod connectivity, leather upholstery, and so on, and so on.

The vehicle has been designed to be as practical as possible in terms of interior space (generous – including for rear seat occupants), and for load carrying. The tailgate opens from bumper level, to reveal a wide, deep flat-floored compartment, and there's a 60/40 split fold facility for the rear seats.





I found the seats comfortable during my test drive, and also felt that ride comfort, roadholding and handling were all good.

The test car's 110 bhp 1.6 litre turbodiesel four cylinder engine pulled well and was very smooth-running. At an indicated road speed of 70 mph in the sixth (top) gear, the rev counter was indicating a relaxing 1,800 rpm.

Acceleration from rest to 62 mph takes 11.5 seconds, and ultimately the car is capable of 118 mph.

Official fuel consumption readings indicate an 'Urban' figure of 68.9 miles per gallon, and a 'Combined' figure of 78.5 mpg. During my test drive (admittedly including some enthusiastic motoring on the open road) I achieved a much more modest average result of 53.9 mpg.

I found this Pulsar (priced at £22,445) comfortable, practical, with a well-built feel, and entertaining to drive, in a good way.

RANGE ROVER AUTOBIOGRAPHY



At the end of my driving day I just had enough time to take for a short run a magnificent 2016 model year Range Rover ‘Autobiography’.

At the top of the Range Rover line-up, the Autobiography incorporates a huge variety of luxurious standard equipment, including a panoramic, light-allowing roof (with a full-length power-operated blind), contrast-stitched Semi-Aniline leather upholstery, and such a long list of additional features that it is difficult to include them on a single sheet of A4 paper!



It’s certainly sumptously furnished, extremely roomy in terms of passenger space and luggage carrying, and incorporates almost every imaginable gadget.

One interesting feature that took me by surprise (as I wasn’t expecting it when driving the car) is the ‘massage’ facility built into both front seats and providing five different programmes.

No doubt, this is a beautifully put-together vehicle, and with 339 bhp plus a stonking 740 Nm (546 lb.ft) of torque available from the 4.4 litre V8 turbodiesel engine, its performance is both stately and rapid. The power is delivered to all four wheels via an eight speed automatic transmission.

From rest, 60 mph can be reached in 6.5 seconds, and the top speed is said to be 135 mph.

Probably more importantly for most owners, the vehicle cruises in near-silence and with impeccable manners at high speeds. During my test drive, at 70 mph the tachometer needle was showing just 1,500 rpm.

The vehicle proved to be surprisingly nimble on winding routes too.

The official fuel consumption figures are better than might be imagined from such a large, powerful vehicle, albeit a diesel: The ‘Urban’ figure is quoted as 26.2 miles per gallon; ‘Combined’, 33.6 mpg. So in general use you might see 30 mpg or better.

It’s a wonderful machine for sure. The price? ‘Basic’ (‘On the Road’), £98,550, but with options as fitted to the test vehicle, a total of £109,710.

