Vauxhall Combo Life MPV – Road Test

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Vauxhall Combo Life Energy 1.5 Turbodiesel 130hp MPV...

Assessed by Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

Vauxhall know about big families or those with big demands, particularly now it's part of the immense PSA Group.

So it's reflected in the range of models now coming to market with the famous long-lived Griffin badge, and that includes the immensely practical, roomy, agile Combo series of MPVs with five or seven seat options.

For those with shorter memories, MPV multi-purpose vehicles predate the SUV sports utility

vehicles which are now coming to dominate registrations and which have spawned a further new sector of crossover cars. While SUVs and Crossover models are really compromises, the MPV is a statement of a single aim, to offer a model that fulfils many roles in one. Pure and simple.

And there is a lot of purity and simplicity in the Vauxhall Combo if you're looking for room and an easy driving character, including a very compact turning circle, with the added benefits of low running costs through good economy.

Okay, with the diesel engines you pay more at the pumps and in tax but there are gains on the ground with lower consumption and generally a longer life in hard use.

The Combo is therefore ideal for urban use with a taxi or delivery company or among drivers who need space for whatever reason and appreciate agility. Access is excellent with sliding rear side doors and a large and high opening rear tailgate.



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Now part of the PSA Group, the Vauxhall Combo is based on a van with a choice of two wheelbases giving over 19 cm (7.48 in) more legroom and up to 567 litres (20.02 cu.ft) additional loadspace, a truly huge amount of extra capacity for those who need it.

They come with a choice of 110 hp 1.2 petrol and 100 or 130 hp turbodiesel engines, with an automatic gearbox available on the more powerful version, with Design or Energy trim levels and with five or seven seats.

Prices at time of testing ranged over the 14 models from £19,610 to £24,060.

Options on the test car included £450 sat-nav, parking pack £400 and spare wheel £110.

The 100 hp turbodiesel engine is a slogger, not a sporty unit, and to make progress you have to stir it along through the short-shift five-gears but that’s easy thanks to the light progressive clutch and direct lever action.

The brakes haul down speed smoothly and easily and the parking brake will securely hold it on a steep slope but it is the effortless steering and its very compact turning circle which come in very handy in town or parking situations. I would be happy to sacrifice the poor feedback through the wheel for the ability to turn in narrow streets or inch into parking spots between closely positioned stationary vehicles. Sensors and cameras worked well to assist.

On the move, the Combo Life Energy is more in keeping with its name as it rolls along with modest fuel consumption and enthusiasm, and when you come to tighter corners it can get a bit frantic leaning to the outside. It does stay on the road even if it understeers and heads towards the outside of an intended course around a corner until you ease off the throttle.

Acceleration is adequate in traffic but you have to carefully judge some overtakes and be prepared for gearchanges mid-way if required.

Secondary controls are basic but good, instruments clear if not large and the optional sat-nav on our test model was straightforward. Heating and ventilation was elementary yet effective in the big cabin.

Oddments provision was very good throughout and the big boot had a low and flat floor, rapidly quadrupled in capacity as the seats were folded and the access was unrestricted throughout.

Seats were on the small side for taller users – and lacked under-knee support and a long adjustment range in front, but their seat-back shaping was comfortable. Visibility was very good all round thanks to the boxy shape and big back window.

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I liked the low waistline and big mirrors, and found the lights adequate for performance even if the wipers were a bit on the slow side on their fastest setting at motorway speed.

That boxy shape with sliding rear side doors clearly shows the Combo's development from a van design and it does mean that with the modest insulation it has a noisy interior, dominated by road and wind sounds and with a busy engine when pressed. Driven with restraint and on good road surfaces it is much quieter.

I was pleased with the overall economy achieved and noted it was heading into the mid and high 50s at times on motorways and even on mixed roads it kept in the upper 40s, although they are both some way off the WLTP test suggestions.

VERDICT

So the Vauxhall Combo Life Energy title is more grand sounding than it actually is, but it is an honest attempt to fulfil a function which many need and which is likely to outlive the fashionable SUVs and Crossovers – and do more than they can ever hope to achieve.

For: Extremely roomy, excellent access, comfortable ride, good economy, very tight turning circle and light controls, highly practical.

Against: Modest performance, body roll, engine and road noise intrusion, utilitarian trim, ungenerous warranty.



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

Vauxhall Combo Life Energy 1.5 Turbodiesel 100hp, five seat.

Price: £21,540 (exc. options).

Engine/transmission: 1.5 litre, four cylinder, turbodiesel, 100 hp, 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) from 1,750rpm, five speed manual.

Performance: 107 mph, 0–60 mph 12.7 seconds.

Fuel consumption: WLTP Combined Cycle 67.3 mpg (50.3 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 111 g/km, First Year diesel road tax £205 then £140 Standard rate, BiK company car tax 27%.

Insurance Group: 8E-9E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4.41 m (14.47 ft), W 1.85 m (6.07 ft), H 1.85 m (6.07 ft), boot/load space 614 – 2,126 litres (21.68 – 75.08 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,300 kg (2,866 lb), five doors/five seats.