Vauxhall Combo Life – Road Test

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VAUXHALL COMBO LIFE FIVE SEATER – VERSATILE AND VALUE FOR MONEY MOTORING.

David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) gives his verdict…

The Vauxhall Combo Life is one of a trilogy of new van derived MPV, multi-purpose vehicles also known as ‘people carriers’. Its stablemates are the Peugeot Rifter and Citroën Berlingo and they are all available with five and seven seat versions with standard or longer body styles. All have two side hinged front doors, sliding rear side doors and a high opening rear tailgate giving access to a low and flat load floor. Each of the brands also offers van versions

of these models.

The Peugeot Rifter is styled more towards an SUV with added bodywork protection panels. The Citroën Berlingo is styled interior-wise more towards being an MPV and the Vauxhall Combo Life has perhaps more ‘workhorse van with windows’ exterior styling, but it’s still not lacking in versatile seating, safety features, also driver information and support specification.

The engine/gearbox options are common throughout the three brands, part of the PSA-Group. The Vauxhall Combo Life is available with either a 1.2 litre, three cylinder 110 hp turbo petrol unit with a six speed manual gearbox, a 1.5 litre, four cylinder 100 hp turbodiesel with a five speed manual gearbox or a 1.5 litre, 130 hp turbodiesel unit with the choice of six speed manual or eight speed auto transmissions.

The Vauxhall Combo Life is available with two trim and equipment levels, Design and Energy, plus Standard and XL body lengths. Vauxhall says the Combo Life is aimed at active families and empty nesters but of course in reality there are many more potential customers such as the Taxi, Private Hire, Chauffeuring, Motability and as owner/operator business transport, where it can be used for family or load carrying circumstances

Prices for the Vauxhall Combo Life start at £19,610 and rise up through 14 derivatives to £24,060, very similar to Peugeot and Citroen versions. The driveability characteristics are also much the same so the final purchasing choice by customers will probably be made on brand loyalties, convenience of the nearest dealership or the final ‘haggling price’.

And it will come down to price as MPVs are not the most popular type of vehicles for today’s image conscious families. SUVs have taken over that role with style outperforming function. Sales of MPVs in the UK last year fell by 34% and in Europe by 27%. But the industry is not giving up with bringing new MPVs to market and the PSA Group trilogy of the Rifter, Berlingo and Combo Life models show this is still an important market sector, and a more practical solution when it comes to ‘passenger packaging’.

I had planned to test drive the Vauxhall Combo Life with the 130 hp turbodiesel engine because I had already driven the Peugeot Rifter five seater with the 100 hp diesel and the same engine again in the Citroën Berlingo but with the seven-seat layout. However a ‘technical’ issue stopped the Combo Life 130 hp arriving and a five seater 100 hp model arrived instead, so a big thanks to the ever-efficient Vauxhall Media Department in keeping me mobile. My substitute test version had the top spec Energy level and that model carries a price of £21,540 which is really good value considering the space per person and the spec it offers.

The five seater standard length model has a minimum load area volume of 597 litres (21.08 cu.ft) but with the rear seat backs folded down this more than triples to 2,126 litres (75.08 cu.ft) and it allows a maximum load length of 2,700 mm (8.86 ft). The sliding rear side doors make it very easy to get in and out of the vehicle in tight fitting car park spaces and it allows easy loading of child seats. All three rear seats have ISOFIX child seat location points and it’s easy to get in and out of for adult passengers as well, with the flat floor giving no limitations to foot space.



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The Combo Life offers considerable and useful amounts of storage in its segment. The ‘hatbox’ above the windscreen is perfect for smaller items, while the driver, front seat passenger and those in back seats can stow their personal items in large door pockets. Seat-back pockets and drawers offer further storage for those in the back. The driver and front seat passenger can take advantage of the upper and lower glovebox. As the airbag on the passenger side is located in the roof, the cooled upper glovebox offers a lot of space, even for large items, and is the ideal place to store drinks.

When ordered with the £840 panoramic roof, the Combo Life comes with overhead storage running down the centre of the vehicle with LED lighting as standard. In this configuration, it is also fitted with a large 36 litre (1.27 cu.ft) storage box mounted above the ‘hat tray’ in the boot. The storage box is ideal for clothes, books or small toys. It can be loaded from the rear when the boot is open or via the optional opening window integrated in the tailgate, and accessed from inside the vehicle via two sliding doors at the front of the box.

Those in need of even more space and storage, or those who want to tow a small caravan (trailer load up to 1,500 kg or 3,307 lb, depending on model), can fit a trailer via the optional £500 fixed or removable towing hook. To ensure the safest possible driving conditions, the vehicle comes with Trailer Stability Control as standard when ordered with a towing hook. This additional ESP function stabilises the trailer or slows the vehicle as required.

The design of the cabin layout is all about functionality. The centre console is clearly divided in three different areas. The upper section is devoted to a prominent infotainment screen, with heating and ventilation controls below that and ample storage for a 500 ml bottle in the lower section. The driver also has good visibility thanks to the elevated seating position and the large windscreen.

Standard features for the Energy spec includes an 8-inch touchscreen, digital radio, Bluetooth, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity, air-con, auto lights and wipers, front and rear parking sensors, electrically adjusted and heated door mirrors, electric front windows, 16-inch alloy wheels, automatic emergency braking with pedestrian detection, forward collision alert, lane keep assist with lane departure warning, cruise control, traction control, speed sign recognition and six airbags. In keeping with most new passenger vehicles there is a wide range of extra cost options and fitted to my test vehicle was a £110 spare wheel, touchsreen sat-nav at £450, head-up display at £355, winter pack which includes a heated steering wheel and heated front seats at £200 plus Brilliant paint at £285. All-in-all the test vehicle cost £23,140 which is still a bargain for the space and spec it offers.

The 1.5 litre, 100 hp, four cylinder turbodiesel unit we know well from other models in the Vauxhall, Peugeot, Citroen and DS ranges. In the longer seven seat Citroën Berlingo I tried recently it just about coped with the extra weight and bulk of the vehicle but it was workmanlike rather than rewarding to drive. In the Combo Life five seat model tested here it felt slightly spritelier and responsive, cruising easily and happily at 70 mph motorway speeds. It was good with fuel economy, returning 54.5 mpg on longer motorway journeys.

Add in some local stop start driving and a period of snow covered roads and the average dropped to 50.1 mpg for my week of motoring. The new WLTP official Combined Cycle figure is 50.8 mpg so my actual test driving figure was impressively close to that.

Top speed is 107 mph and zero to 60 mph takes 12.7 seconds but it felt a bit faster than that, providing full use was made of the five speed manual gearbox. My personal preference for all models from this new family of MPVs, the Peugeot Rifter, Citroën Berlingo and this Vauxhall Combo Life, would be to opt for the 1.5 litre 130 hp turbodiesel unit which has a bit more torque and also has a six speed manual gearbox and even an eight speed auto gearbox option. It would just make lighter work of driving performance especially if the vehicles are being used most of the time fully loaded with passengers, cargo or a mixture of both. However the more powerful engine and six speed manual gearbox combination does add £1,120 to the on-the-road price over the 100 hp model, but the official fuel economy figure is the same.

With CO2 emissions of 111 g/km the First year diesel rate VED road tax is £205 followed by the £140 Standard rate cost. After 1 April this year when VED rates change, the First Year rate cost actually decreases to £170 as it’s a new generation EU 6.2 rated engine but the Standard rate confusingly goes up to £145. As for company car Benefit-in-Kind tax currently it is 27% but that drops to 26% from April because the engine meets the latest real-life WLTP standards. Insurance is Group 8E.



VERDICT

Overall the Vauxhall Combo Life Energy 100 hp turbodiesel five seater is a very useful family or workhorse MPV, it’s comfortable and has a compliant ride, it is roomy with versatile seating and load carrying options and the spec level is good. Some of the plastic trim feels a bit hard but at least it will be durable given the likely tough use these types of vehicles suffer.

Certainly it’s a very functional vehicle if not currently a fashionable one, but who knows when the craze for owning expensive mass-market SUVs will end. But when it does, new

generation MPVs like this Vauxhall Combo Life are ready and waiting to pick-up sales.

For: Spacious, versatile passenger or load carrying options, lots of storage compartments, comfortable ride, easy access, high safety and driving support specification, good real-life fuel economy, well priced.

Against: Engine lacks low down response, some areas of hard budget quality plastic trim, ungenerous warranty.



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

Vauxhall Combo Life Energy 1.5 100 hp turbodiesel, manual, five seat.

Price: £21,540 (£23,140 as tested).

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

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

Fuel consumption: WLTP Combined Cycle 50.8 mpg (50.1 mpg on test).

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

Insurance Group: 8E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,403 mm (14.45 ft), W 1,921 mm (6.30 ft), H 1,841 mm (6.04 ft), boot/load space 597 to 2,126 litres (21.08 to 75.08 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,300 kg (2,866 lb), five doors/five seats.



2018 Opel Combo Life