Vauxhall Vivaro Life MPV – Road Test

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LARGER THAN LIFE – The new Vauxhall Vivaro Life Elite MPV

By Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency)

At a time when every motor manufacturer is rushing to produce popular crossover and SUV models, Vauxhall has delivered something different, in the shape of the Vivaro Life, a very large MPV with standard and longwheelbase choices.

Prices start from £40,705 for the main selling Elite models but there is the choice of a more basic Life Edition model priced at £27,210 with a lower powered diesel engine aimed more at the work transportation or taxi markets.

Clearly a derivative of its acclaimed and award winning van range, but using parts from parent company PSA Group to soften its character, the Vivaro Life Elite is a genuinely large

seven-seater ranking in practicality alongside Volkswagen and Mercedes-Benz MPVs.

As such it's almost certain to become a very good alternative to its more established rivals snapped up by private hire businesses for airport runs and VIP transport. Social and Motability groups and large families are also likely to be attracted if they need room for both people and luggage without the need for a small trailer.

There is a family of models in the Vivaro Life line-up and we tested the Elite long wheelbase with its 150 hp 2.0 litre turbodiesel engine and using a six-speed manual gearbox. There's a shorter body, petrol engine and automatic transmission on others in the series.



The first thing which strikes you about the Vivaro Life is its size. This is no shrinking violet

of an MPV, it's in your face when you walk up to it and opening the door you have to step up quite a way to the driving or passenger seats.

Sitting a good bit higher than most other MPVs or SUVs, you see the interior stretching a long way back over the middle and third row seats in the two-two-three configuration, and behind them is a truly enormous luggage space. That can be dramatically increased by gradually folding some or all of the five back seats.

The two hinged front doors and twin sliding side doors are matched with a very wide (and some might find too-high) lifting fifth door tailgate. All open very wide to make access or unloading very easy.

The big and generously padded seats are very comfortable and have excellent adjustment ranges, with the front pair also getting folding armrests, electrical adjustment, heating and massage functions for ultimate comfort on a long journey. It was one of the most comfortable seating arrangements I have encountered on any car in recent years.

Add to these the Vivaro Life's extremely smooth, absorbent springing and shock absorbers and you have a very refined MPV which has almost completely shaken off its van origins.

I say almost because, comfortable as it was, the Vivaro Life Elite did irritate with its very poor turning circle. It was not so much Life as lethargic when it came to parking or slowly manoeuvring, and thankfully the power steering was there to ease the effort.

There is good visibility with the low waistline and big windows throughout but you really need the reversing camera and sensors for those out of sight objects lurking to dent your vehicle and insurance premium.

Lights and wipers were very good.

The comparatively modest 150 hp 2.0 litre turbodiesel engine is a workhorse which is best when tickled a bit with the gear-lever as it tends to reach maximum power very quickly and

then needs another ratio to keep charging along, particularly when you load it. It's a narrow gate and it's easy to miss-select a ratio.



The need to constantly change gear on a cross-country journey did hit our fuel economy and we returned just under 35 mpg overall, but it did not improve much even at a steady 60 mph on motorways.

It's a big MPV and the room inside is extremely good for seven once you wiggle past the middle pair of seats, which swivelled on our test car. Head and shoulder room is very generous indeed and it has good heating and ventilation throughout, with privacy blinds and glass on the sides and rear, and there are twin sunroofs.

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The oddments room for seven is a different matter. There is virtually nowhere to store items if you are sitting in the back row, those in the middle can share a very clever optional folding central box-cum-work surface and the front seats are served by long door bins which are actually too low to reach most of the time, fascia bin, glovebox and top compartment with a very slim and poorly shaped recess ahead of the gearlever which allowed items to simply roll out when moving.

The occupants would not roll out of their seats however, as the Vivaro did corner quite well and could be encouraged along at a fair pace with modest lean and a tendency to run wide on tighter turns, but it quickly came back on line as you eased off the throttle or unwound the steering.

I liked the ease of the major controls and their positioning was ideal, the stalks all had a positive feel but the cruise and radar control was out of direct sight.

Instruments were straightforward either side of a multi-display for vehicle settings and readouts. There is a head-up display for the driver and Multimedia Navi Pro sat-nav with connectivity and voice control, cruise and speed limiter and automatic parking heater.

Noise levels were generally low and the Vivaro must be well-insulated as road and engine noises barely intruded. Which all meant it sounded, felt and performed like a car, not a van, except for that turning circle.

VERDICT

If you are in the market for a genuine load lugger, want comfort and versatility, the Vivaro Life is a breath of fresh air but is expensive with its over £40,000 price attracting high Standard rate road tax costs for five years.

For: Roomy, comfort, versatility, ride, quiet.

Against: Turning circle, modest oddments space, mediocre economy and no automatic

transmission for now on this engine.



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

Vauxhall Vivaro Life Elite Long 2.0 litre, manual.

Price: £42,420 (as tested £45,310).

Mechanical: 150 hp, four cylinder, 2.0 litre turbodiesel, six speed manual.
Performance: 105 mph, 0–62 mph 12 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 41.5 mpg (34.7 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 152 g/km, VED First Year diesel rate £855, Standard rate £145 + £310 supplement for five years as it costs over £40K, BiK company car tax 37%.

Insurance Group: 25E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Sizes: L 5.31 m (17.42 ft), W 1.92 m (6.30 ft), H 1.93 m (6.33 ft), boot space: 3 m^3 (105.94 cu.ft).