



Sunday drive: Vauxhall Astra Hatch 1.5 Turbo D 122hp

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The revised British built Vauxhall Astra has arrived in showrooms and that's good news for the 25% of Brits who



have either owned or driven one since the Mark 1 appeared in 1979, *writes David Miles.*

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 3-cylinder units with Stop/Start. The choices depend on the body style and spec level and they are 1.2-litre 110hp and 130hp petrol units with 6-speed manual gearboxes, a 1.4-litre 145hp petrol with a CVT stepless auto gearbox and 1.5-litre turbodiesels with a 105hp manual gearbox unit and a 122hp version with 6-speed manual and 9-speed automatic gearboxes choices.

As a tax example my latest Astra Hatch test car with the 1.5-litre, 122hp turbodiesel engine, 6-speed manual gearbox with Elite Nav specification has RDE2 compliant CO2 emissions of 95g/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 62.8mpg and during my week of motoring covering most types of roads and traffic conditions the real-life figure was 56.6mpg.

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 120g/km depending on the power output, gearbox option, body style and spec level. Petrol powered models have CO2 figures ranging between 99 and 112g/km.



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, 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 deal.

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



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 for the Hatch and 540 to 1,630-litres for the Sports Tourer estate which is particularly impressive in its sector.



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 includes the speedometer, a rev counter, 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 doesn't give the best rear quarter visibility. You have to move up to Ultimate Nav spec level to get that rear camera system plus Park Assist and Side Blind Spot Alerts.



My Astra Hatch Elite Nav test car with the 1.5-litre turbodiesel 122hp 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, 3-cylinder turbodiesel engine producing 122hp and 300Nm of torque from 1,750rpm. 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 2,200rpm had been reached. This appears not to be a one-off having checked out other media reports. I suspect it is all to running the engine very lean for emission reasons.

Once underway the engine became livelier with a zero to 60mph acceleration time of 9.6-seconds and top speed is 130mph. It was evident that as with many 3-cylinder engines



compared to 4-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 is driven in a reasonable manner.

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.



MILESTONES: Revised Vauxhall Astra Hatch, Elite Nav 1.5 Turbo D, 122hp, manual £24,850 (£27,105 as tested)

Engine/transmission: 1.5-litre, 3-cylinder turbodiesel, RDE2 compliant, 122hp, 300Nm of torque from 1,750rpm, 6-speed manual

Performance: 130mph, 0-60mph 9.6-seconds, WLTP Combined Cycle 58.9 to 62.8mpg (56.6mpg on test)



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

Insurance group: 18E Warranty: 3-years/60,000-miles

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,370mm, W 1,809mm, H 1,485mm, wheelbase 2,662mm, boot/load space 370 to 1,210-litres, 5-doors/5-seats

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.