

NEW VAUXHALL ASTRA

By Jim Mc Cauley

It is certainly an Astra but definitely not as we know it in this all-new and tech-loaded model. The badge has been on Vauxhall's C-sector contender for the past 36 years accounting for over 3 million

models in UK sales alone, and currently taking 12 per cent of C-segment purchases. It is a segment where the model has to be right in terms of equipment levels and pricing, facing opposition from the likes of the Ford Focus and Volkswagen Golf.



Totally new from the floorpan upwards, the new Astra is as much as 200Kg lighter than its predecessor with a buyer choice of nine turbocharged power units.

The new design also benefits from a rethink on proportions with a car that is marginally shorter, but with greater rear leg room.

Although the range opens with a 1.0 litre petrol engine, test choice looked at a pair of mid-range petrol and diesel units, the 1.4T petrol and the 1.6 litre CDTi diesel. This latter engine develops 136PS with 320Nm of torque availability between 2000 and 2250 rpm. This is good for a 0-60 mph time of 9.0 seconds with the potential to top 127 mph. This power output rests mid way in the three output options with this engine, branded by the company as 'Whisper Diesels'. On road, and you soon realise why. The engine is extremely quiet as it the overall ambience of the cabin with excellent road noise suppression as well as the benefit of aerodynamic detailing to further refine the airflow. Driving through a 6-speed manual gearbox, the car demonstrates a lightness and agility not normally associated with C-segment diesels and this is mated to quick and accurate steering as well as competent brakes. Performance and handling raise the stakes for the new Astra range and



along with a high quality interior, give it a very welcoming premium feel. But the new engine offers more than that with an official combined fuel consumption of 72.4 mpg and a CO2 emissions of 103 gms/km. This places the model in Band B for zero car tax in its first year and £20 per annum thereafter.

The petrol range enjoys the same performance benefits as the diesels but with the increased enthusiasm of the 1.4 litre turbo petrol. This power source in the test vehicle produces 150PS and can slice through the 6-speed gearbox to provide a 0-60 mph time of 7.8 seconds en route to a potential maximum of 134 mph. Again, the combination of all the engineering and design elements



embrace a quality feel and give the Astra a new-found status in line with the larger Insignia.

On the economy and environmental fronts, this model has an official combined fuel consumption of 51.4 mpg and a CO2 emissions of 128 gms/km. This places it in Band D for zero car tax in Year 1 and £110 subsequently.

But it is the technology elements that really lift the new range with high level provision that includes the availability of glare-free LED matrix headlights. With eight light sources in each 'IntelliLux' headlight unit, the system

automatically and constantly adapts the length and distribution of the light beam to every traffic situation. With a night-time driving opportunity provided, the effectiveness and increased safety advantages of this system were clearly demonstrated. The system depends on the switching of the individual light sources and has the advantage of having no moving parts. The set-up is also easily converted for driving on Continental Europe.

Another technical first for the range is Vauxhall's own in-house 'OnStar' connectivity. This in effect turns the new Astra into a 4G LTE Wi-Fi hotspot and can support up to seven devices. It will also trigger an automatic alert if in the event of an accident the airbags are deployed with direct voice contact to the vehicle from a UK based contact centre. The service provides 24/7 access to an on-line advisor.

Also available is Vauxhall's 'IntelliLink' infotainment system which is compatible with Android Auto and Apple 'CarPlay' and allows phone functions and apps to be accessed and controlled on the car's central 7-inch colour touch screen.

While the 1.6 Whisper Diesel range starts at £16,995 and the 1.4 litre 150PS petrol model starts at £17,695, the test vehicles were in high specification levels and were in the region of £20,000.

However, equipment provision was comprehensive and included 17-inch alloys, sports front seats, Navi 900 'IntelliLink' system, automatic lighting with tunnel detection, Hill Start Assist, six airbags, 'OnStar' connectivity and Drive Assistance Pack One which flags up speed limits as the screen mounted camera recognises relevant road signs. Available extras include electronic climate control in lieu of standard air conditioning at £395, IntelliLux headlights at £995 and Parking Pack at £595.

