

VAUXHALL MERIVA

By Jim Mc Cauley

With some very fine vehicles in Vauxhall's current model line-up, the new Meriva is perhaps one of the surprise forerunners. With a high mileage test session in Scotland and into the contorted roads of the Lake District in Northern England, the vehicle continued to impress in weather conditions that

ranged from fair to driving snow. A second lengthy period with the car a few weeks later in Northern Ireland confirmed just how good the vehicle is, providing much more than expected in a compact MPV designed primarily to meet the demands of a modern family.

The latest Meriva is the third generation of the model originally launched in 2003, and with over one million sales behind it guarantees that the best has now arrived. The car is sized to perfection – neither too large nor too small, providing generous room for five occupants with appropriate luggage space and well designed luggage add-ons. But the secret of the appeal of this vehicle is Vauxhall's new 1.6 litre

turbo-diesel which tops the range of seven engine options and endows it with so much driver appeal. Dubbed 'Whisper Diesel' by Vauxhall, the engine is ultra refined but at the same time returns a 0-62 mph time of under 10 seconds with the potential to top 122 mph.

With a semi-elevated driving position, responsive steering and torque in abundance for the 6-speed manual 'box, the Meriva 1.6 CDTi takes MPV dynamics to a new level adding immense driver appeal to what started life all those years ago as a practical family vehicle.

And practicality is the other attraction with its forward opening rear doors which make access to the rear seats much easier than the traditional 'B' post hinging. And for those with young children it makes belting them in or fitting a child seat much easier. It is one of the 'Flex' innovations that Vauxhall claim for the new Meriva, the front opening door being unique in class. Another bonus is the flexibility of the rear seats or 'FlexSpace' as Vauxhall calls them. Not only can the outer rear seats be slid forwards and back, but with the central seat folded, they can also be slid sideways to provide increased shoulder room when only four



occupants are on board.

Adding versatility to small item storage, a sliding rail central console with selectable holding options is dubbed 'FlexRail' while an optional extra is the 'Flex-Fit' bicycle carrier that slides out from behind the rear bumper.

The cabin offers comfortable accommodation with door pocket storage and flip-down seatback trays while a dual floor boot area provides level loading to the upper level with additional space underneath for increased security.



Overall, Vauxhall has added to the popular appeal of the Meriva by introducing a wide engine choice topped by the 1.6 litre 'Whisper Diesel' in the test vehicle. For those with young children or indeed older relatives, the forward opening doors provide improved access while the rear seating and luggage space combinations add to its versatility and practicality.

Equipment-wise, the test vehicle was in top SE trim, but surprisingly at this level some expected inclusions remain on the options list including Bluetooth connectivity at £225, climate control (to upgrade from air

conditioning) at £305 and rear parking sensors at £395. The model returns an official fuel consumption figure of 64.2 mpg on the combined cycle and with a CO2 emissions of 116 gms/km, is in Band C for annual car tax of £30. The model tested is listed at £21,370 and first time owners can benefit from Vauxhall's Lifetime / 100,000 mile warranty.