

FIRST
DRIVE

Chrysler Grand Voyager

Featured model: 2.5CRD Limited



AFTER THE PREVIOUS VOYAGER'S poor showing in Euro NCAP crash tests, resulting in a substantial drop in sales, DaimlerChrysler has gone to work on the model, big time.

Still available in short- or this long-wheelbase form, the newcomer promises greater crashworthiness through an upgraded body structure with increased safety features, as well as more space and greater refinement.

There are two petrol engines: a 2.4 litre/150bhp four and an automatic-only 3.3 litre/180bhp V6. But the biggest seller in Europe is expected to be the torquey new 2.5 litre/140bhp turbo-diesel that we drove.

It's a quiet cruiser beyond the obviously diesel tickover, with balancer shafts keeping it smooth-revving. However, low-speed accelerator response is disappointing – there's nobody home at low revs, but keep it in the narrow sweet spot between 3000 and 4000rpm by use of the grumpy gearchange and it proves usefully perky. Expect about 36mpg overall.

Although no match for the sharper and more agile handling Galaxy, for example, the Grand Voyager acquits itself well on the road with an absorbent ride, well-controlled roll and nicely weighted, accurate (if feeble) steering.

Thanks to numerous electric seat adjustments, the driving position is comfortable with a commanding view (much better with the rear head restraints removed) and clear instruments. Most of the switchgear is conveniently placed, but some of the small warning lights are easy to miss. Oh, and we would like a left footrest.

Think Grand Voyager and you're thinking big. The shorter-wheelbase Voyager (at 480cm) is the same length as a Grand Espace and the Grand Voyager is 28cm longer than that. No wonder, then, that all seven occupants have plenty of room in all directions. The two centre-row captain's chairs are removable but don't slide, while the three-seater rear bench seat can be moved fore and aft to apportion space between passengers and luggage. It provides rather too much thigh support for our liking, though.

Anyway, the result is that, even seven up, luggage space is pile-'em-high roomy. The heavy and cumbersome bench is mounted on rollers so that it can be pushed away into storage (but where?) when removed.

There are cup holders galore and numerous items of standard equipment, including three-zone air conditioning with separate roof-mounted controls for the rear. But top marks go to the clever electrically operated sliding doors (and optional tailgate) that allow easy access to the walk-through interior.

VERDICT

Chrysler has sold a whopping 8½ million Voyagers and this fourth-generation model is the best yet. It's refined, spacious and well-equipped. It's well-built with greater safety in mind, too. Bear in mind, though, that its road manners aren't a match for some of its better-handling rivals, and just hope that you don't have to heave out that heavy back seat too often.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Controls/displays	★★★★○
Handling/steering	★★★★○
Comfort	★★★★○
Space/practicality	★★★★★

BRIEF SPECIFICATION 2.5CRD

engine 2500cc, turbo-diesel, 16 valves
140bhp/230 lb ft with direct injection,
common-rail fuel delivery. 75-litre fuel tank
drive 5-speed manual (no automatic
option), front-wheel drive
suspension front: independent coil
spring/ damper struts, lower control
arms, anti-roll bar Rear: single-leaf-
sprung tubular beam axle, Panhard rod,
anti-roll bar
wheels/tyres 6½J alloy with
215/65R16H tyres (full-size steel spare)
brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs
rear with anti-lock (ABS) control
0-62mph* 13.0sec
max speed* 115mph **maker's figures*
official (combined) mpg 36.7

THE VOYAGER RANGE

size and type large (Grand Voyager
extra large) luxury, premium-priced MPV
trim levels SE, LX, Limited
engines petrol: 4 cylinder/2.4 litre/142bhp,
V6/3.3/172; diesel: 4/2.5/140
drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual
on 2.4 and 2.5CRD (no auto option);
4-speed stepped automatic on 3.3 V6
(no manual option)
notable features (according to model)
powered sliding doors (tailgate extra),
three-zone temperature control, side
airbags, in-dash four-disc CD player with
10 speakers and steering wheel audio
controls, leather trim, eight-way powered
driver's seat, power-folding heated door
mirrors, sunscreen glass

LIKES ...

air intake has odour/particulate filter
trip computer (imp/metric) and compass
super 10-speaker sound system
lots of roof lights/air vents/handles
numerous bag hooks and cup holders
and GRIPEs
steering wheel adjusts only for height
remote facia switches for wash/wipe
unwiped strip by driver's screen pillar
hard bar at rear shin level
no picnic trays on seatbacks