

FIRST
DRIVE

Vauxhall Corsa



PPRIVATE PURCHASERS BUY more Superminis than any other size of car – and last year in the UK, Vauxhall sold more Corsas than ever – second only to Fiesta.

In fact, the model has been increasingly showing its age, so far as we're concerned – not surprising when you realise that the basic platform and running gear date back to the original Nova.

Now all that's changed – the new model uses significantly revised petrol and diesel engines supported (with the front suspension and electrically power assisted steering) by a costlier sub-frame. This is designed to cure handling vagaries and ensure better crash protection as well as effective noise and vibration control.

It works – whether it's the sweet 1.2 with a sensible 75bhp or the more muscular but long-legged 1.7 diesel, the Corsa pulls without vibration from low revs and remains remarkably hushed on the motorway.

Gearshift movement is clean, with no slop in the linkage and there are two automatics, as well. The 1.4 stays with the pleasant but profligate four-speeder with torque converter, but the "Easytronic" 1.2, for just £350, applies electronically controlled shifting to the conventional synchromesh gearbox of the five-speed manual. It's not completely slick and surge-free, but it's the best attempt of its type so far and will ensure no fuel economy penalty as well as no clutch pedal.

The petrol consumption is likely to range from 50mpg overall on the 1.0-litre

three-cylinder, perhaps 42mpg on both of the 1.2s and 40 on the 1.4/90bhp manual version. The latest diesel alternative is a significant redesign of the previous Corsa turbo-diesel. Now a 1.7 litre and using direct injection, it's again likely to prove more economical than all except the three-cylinder Polo 1.4.

Inside the new Corsa, the facia is pleasant, the front seats and driving position are excellent but behind, there's half-hearted seat-folding arrangements. The absence of trim on the rear seatbacks, dangling seatbelts (albeit five lap and diagonals) and hard, dimpled plastic on the facia and doors, are not everyone's idea of good detailing.

Nevertheless, it's a pleasant performer thanks to those refined engines and much tauter, more deft, cornering ability. Although some may dislike the inert steering reaction at speed, the car's a doddle to park. The ride is firm, preferring well-surfaced tarmac, but wind noise and body flexure are absent.

VERDICT

This slightly bigger Corsa is a much improved performer for small hatchback buyers who enjoy driving but also need something economical. The firm ride puts it in good company, yet more could have been done to make the adequately roomy accommodation more adaptable as well.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

LIKES AND GRIPEs

variable delay front wipe/auto rear one electric sunroof with shade
five "proper" belts with force limiters
"active" anti-whiplash head restraints

low-set, obscure warning lamps
rear blind spots (3dr)
prominent load sill
less rear legroom than before

THE CORSA RANGE

body 3 and 5 door supermini
trim levels Club/GLS, Comfort, Elegance, SXi, SRi
engines petrol: 3 cylinder/1.0/60bhp 4/1.2/75; 4/1.4/90; 4/1.8/125
diesel: 4/1.7/65(Di); 4/1.7/75(DTi)
drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (Auto shift synchromesh option on 1.2; 4-speed with torque converter on 1.4)
notable features electric power steering; chip-controlled auto gearbox (1.2); galvanized bodywork; extended service intervals (12 months or 30,000 miles) child-friendly Isofix, smart airbag options

ALTERNATIVES

Ford Fiesta still hard to match on the move

Skoda Fabia larger outside and inside

VW Polo 1.4 diesel clashes head on, but dated otherwise

Toyota Yaris smaller, yet more adaptable interior – and lots of fun

VITAL STATISTICS

length x width (inc mirrors)	382x196
front - legroom	82-106
- headroom (with sunroof)	91-98
rear - typical legroom	95
- typical kneeroom	71
- headroom	94
- hiproom	124
load space (all seats in use)	
(litres/cu ft)	300/10.5
load length (seats up/folded)	55/122
load width	104
load sill height (inside/outside)	23/69
boot/load aperture height	52/87