



Vauxhall Vectra

Featured model: 2.2 DTi Elegance 4-door



AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

THE VECTRA RANGE

size and type upper-medium (mid-priced) 4-door saloon, 5-door hatchback; estate later
trim levels LS, SXi, Elegance, SRI, Elite; GSi later

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.8 litre/120bhp, 4/2.2/145, V6/3.2/208; Dualfuel: 4/1.8/120; diesel: 4/2.0/99, 4/2.2/123

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (5-speed stepped automatic available with 3.2 V6 and 2.2 petrol/diesel; 1.8 CVT later)

notable features available five-driver seat memory, air quality sensor, oil change/servicing warning, tyre pressure monitor, rain-sensing wipers, "see-me-home" xenon headlamps, cooled glovebox, front and rear park assist, pedal-release system, heated back seats

VITAL STATISTICS (cm)

length x width (exc mirrors)	460x180
front- legroom	91-110
- headroom (with sunroof)	90-96
rear - typical legroom	100
- typical kneeroom	78
- headroom	92
- hiproom	134
load space (all seats in use) (litres/cu ft)	480/16.9
load length (seats up/folded)	97/188
load width	103
load sill height (inside/outside)	18/71
boot height	48

OK, THE GLOVES ARE OFF AND it's no more Mr Nice Guy. For too long the mild-mannered Vectra has had sand kicked in its face by the upper-medium class contenders. Now, in its latest all-new guise, it's determined to give the likes of Mondeo, Laguna, Passat and Primera a good hiding. And the Vauxhall people are so confident they've got a winner, they even invited Jeremy Clarkson to the launch.

The new body is bigger in all directions than its predecessor's (though still shorter than the Mondeo), yet surprisingly legroom front and rear is no better – nothing to worry Ford there, then. Rear kneeroom is ample, however, and Vauxhall claims that there's more width at shoulder level, too. The Teutonically firm back seat (Opel's influence?) is too erect for some. It's not cramped in the rear, but neither is it exactly cosy; pity the backrest doesn't recline, Stilo style.

Up front, the electrically operated seats are equally firm, but you would have to be a weird shape not to get comfortable behind the fully adjustable wheel, so numerous are the driving position permutations. Remove the rear head restraints and all-round vision is very good, with parking aided by (optional) proximity sensors front and rear. These form just part of the technological wizardry with which the Vectra is loaded.

The electro-hydraulic steering is usefully weighted and impresses with its smooth proficiency (albeit with little feel), not least through fast winding turns. Such conditions also showcase the taut

chassis's stability, while a whole bunch of acronyms, including IDS, CBC and ESP, keep the car pointing in the right direction.

This tautness of control is echoed in the ride, which though on the firm side, is sufficiently supple to challenge the best in class.

Five familiar engines are offered, from 120 to 208bhp, including a dual-fueller and two 16-valve diesels: a two-litre and the non-common-rail 123bhp 2.2 DTi we drove. An impressive unit it is, too. This "big four" displays a trace of tremor from 1200 to 2000rpm, after which it pulls with smooth eagerness and cruises with hushed long-legged ease at motorway speeds. Expect about 43mpg overall.

The big boot is a sensible, boxy shape whose length can be extended (even on the saloon) by lowering the 60/40-divided rear backrests without having to remove the three rear head restraints. For even longer loads (carpet, say) the front passenger's backrest folds flat, as well.

VERDICT

The new Vectra brings nothing to the market that we haven't seen recently, in terms of appearance, equipment and dynamics. Nevertheless, it's a much improved car and all credit to GM for its now-competitive ride and handling, superior cabin crafting and the wide range of technology on offer. It doesn't deliver its rivals, particularly the Mondeo, a knockout blow, but it does the full fifteen rounds and emerges as a worthy opponent.

LIKES ...

comprehensive safety features on offer
doors shut with an expensive "thunk"
generous heating ventilation to rear
plenty of storage spaces
key locks on rear seat backrests

and GRIPES

indicator stalk over-sensitive
free-play in drive-by-wire accelerator
gearchanging arm contacts centre cubby
handbrake lever not ideally located
hard-to-see red instrument needles