



Vauxhall Astra 1.7D Merit



What's new . . .

Modifications for all 1995-Series Astras, plus a "soft" turbo added to cheaper 1700cc diesel

THERE ARE TWO ENTIRELY DIFFERENT diesel engines used in Astras and Cavaliers, although they're both called 1.7. The German 1700cc unit goes back a long way. In our 1993 test (R9331A), it was a 60bhp unturbocharged, uncatalysed unit – as were all its predecessors.

For 1995, however, both items are added, but they are there as much for emission control as for a power boost – rather like VW's "Umwelt" diesel.

To avoid confusion with the Japanese Isuzu 1686cc/82bhp turbo-diesel that has always been listed as 1.7TD, the latest German engine continues to be called a 1.7D (even though it too is now a turbo-diesel!). Confusing, isn't it?

How the 1.7D performs

The extra 9bhp improves acceleration both in and through the gears, from doleful to respectable. The in-

gear times look much better, in fact, and because diesels pull higher gearing better than petrol versions, the Astra's response in fourth gear is lively and relaxed.

It's quieter as a result of the recent mods, particularly when cruising; some early morning rattle still offends, but it quickly abates.

We didn't get instant even running from a cold start, however – the engine took several seconds to clear its throat before it was wise to pull away, even after a similar pause before turning the starter, while the glow plugs performed their preheating task.

The engine also feels vibrant below 1500rpm (30mph in fourth gear) and the turbo-boost doesn't really occur until 800rpm later; it revs willingly to the governed 5500rpm limit, but it pays to change up earlier (as our tables show) to obtain the best acceleration times. We think a rev counter is especially desirable to keep tabs on this sort of thing, but the 1.7D doesn't have one. Our car's odometer was accurate, but again, its speedometer scandalously over-read (by nearly 5mph) at town speeds. The 30mph limit itself is often a hard enough stricture to obey, without adding to the curtailment.

In exchange for the added zest, this latest 1.7D uses more fuel. Our mpg tests don't allow any change in driving style, so it's not for that reason. No, even at a steady 70mph there's a 4mpg increase in thirst. The "50mpg overall" figure still compares favourably with the competition, but the Isuzu alternative is just as economical, with more power on tap. In fact, the most frugal Astra diesel we've tested was the first 1.7-litre/57bhp version. In a 1989 Mark 2, it gave us 57+mpg overall. Since then, more performance and lower emissions have compromised fuel efficiency.

On balance, we would say go for the current 82bhp version, if the £1000 extra isn't too much of a strain. However, its advantage has been narrowed by the 1.7D's latest revisions.

The Astra's 1995 revisions

All Astras now come with power steering and a driver's airbag; the latter has meant the loss of wheel-height adjustment, so the seat-height adjuster becomes much more desirable for shorter drivers. The Merit's is on the options list. In fact, the Merit's trim is very trim these days and it's only the absence of a sunroof and central locking that's the main inducement to finding the extra £925 for the LS. With its Omega-style front grille and attractive interior decor, the Merit is no loss-leader.

Other 1995 changes include revised suspension details; the Astra's gas-filled damping feels more assured these days and, with faster-reacting power steering too, it's easier to "place" with

confidence. There's some underlying harshness over ridges and ruts and there's no true feel of the road through the light steering; nevertheless, the Astra's suspension is now usefully improved over the cars we drove at the launch, three years ago.

VERDICT

The current Astra is a worthy car that offers a lot of style and space, but it's very ordinary in terms of road manners. The range of power units does better than most for fuel economy, however, with the diesels and the petrol 1.6 E-Drive being especially commendable. The latter's price separates it from this 1.7D by just £115 at present, and their respective performance and economy aren't far apart. It's an intriguing choice, within the same range, between petrol and diesel alternatives.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Same as for R9331A, except for:
ENGINE

Compression ratio 22.0:1

Fuel system low-pressure turbocharger and two-way catalyser

Maximum power 68bhp at 4500rpm

Maximum torque 97 lb ft at 2400rpm

TRANSMISSION

Gearbox ratios: first 3.55, second 1.96, third 1.30, fourth 0.89, top 0.71 and reverse 3.31:1

Mph per 1000rpm 24.8 in top, 19.8 in 4th

Rpm at 70mph 2825 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension gas-filled dampers all round (anti-roll bars front and rear, with revised attachments and new front control arm bushes)

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion, with 3.5 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 32½ ft between kerbs with 55ft circle for one turn of the wheel

Tyres Continental Contact on test car

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph 4.5	0-60mph 14.4	¼ mile 20.0
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mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.4	5.9	9.9	16.1
IN 5TH GEAR		9.3	17.3	25.2	33.8
IN 4TH GEAR		5.7	10.8	16.4	22.8

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		20.4/12.6	15.9/10.7		
			17.3/10.8	16.5/12.0	

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	1	3	5
		5000*		4800	4000	27	72	99
						50	95	
						2	4	

*for best acceleration

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade for tests: diesel

Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	38
Short journeys in the suburbs	44
Motorway – 70mph cruising	46½
Brisk driving, mixed roads	51½
Gentle driving, rural roads	60½
Typical mpg overall	50
Realistic tank range*	44 litres/485 miles

*based on fuel gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience