



Vauxhall Cavalier



If you're thinking of buying a used Cavalier, we can help. We've delved into our breakdown, warranty and vehicle inspection service statistics covering the last few years and have come up with what you need to know if you're planning to become the second owner.

MORE A WAY OF LIFE THAN MERELY A means of getting from A to B, the Cavalier has been hugely successful for Vauxhall, consistently out-selling all-comers in the hard-nosed fleet sector, bar the one with the blue oval badge.

Over the years the Cavalier name has spanned three generations, witnessing first a switch from rear- to front-wheel drive, then gracing two distinct variations on the front-driven theme. Our interest here, though, concerns the Mark Three version, sold from October 1988 onwards. It was the last of the line before being replaced by the remarkably similar-looking Vectra in late 1995.

Part of the Cavalier's success is that it offered a model to suit almost everyone, from bargain basement fleet specials to a top-of-the-range V6 executive express, with an almost equally generous catalogue of power units under the bonnet. Unlike either the Vectra

or the previous Cavalier, however, an estate version has been notably absent, so the body styles on offer are limited to a four-door saloon or the more-practical-for-families five-door hatchback.

The main points to look for...

Engine

Cavalier buyers are spoilt for choice, because power outputs range from the 1.4's modest 74bhp to over 200bhp for the barnstorming 4 x 4 Turbo. Derv fans aren't neglected, either, being catered for by a 1.7-litre diesel, available with or without a turbo. Valve stem seal and camshaft problems that used to afflict Vauxhalls were sorted out long ago; nowadays, blown head gaskets and a few oil and water leaks are more common faults to look out for. Otherwise, there are few particular weak areas but, as with any car, it's wise to listen for expensive-sounding noises, and check for a smoke screen from any high-miler's exhaust, hinting that a major rebuild is just around the corner.

Engine ancillaries and cooling system

Fuel injection and catalyser-equipped cars give fewer troubles, but remember that the "cat" system will be significantly more costly to replace than the standard one. Look out for faulty fuel pumps and assorted carburettor maladies on earlier cars; the main

problems to be aware of here, though, concern the cooling system, with both the water pump and the radiator showing higher-than-average failure rates.

Transmission

The Cavalier's gearshift has never been much to write home about, tending to feel notchy and reluctant to select the lower gears, even at the best of times. Clutches are reasonably durable, although the life expectancy will obviously depend on how well they've been looked after. The clutch cable sometimes needs replacing, while worn driveshaft joints and split or perished gaiters are also quite frequently encountered.

Suspension, steering and brakes

Faulty steering racks are one of the most common problems we've met in this area, so check this carefully because the bill for a new power steering rack is likely to be about £500. Check all the usual joints and bushes for wear or play, of course, remembering the front and rear wheel bearings, too, as these also give a few problems. Replacement front discs are quite often called for, but otherwise, Cavalier brakes don't give too much trouble.

Electrics and instruments

Faulty alternators are the Cavalier's *bête noire* here, although starter motors give their fair share of trouble, too. Defective speedometers and drive cables are quite common, as well, but apart from a few faulty wiper motors and the odd water temperature gauge or ignition problem, we haven't encountered many other weaknesses. Remember to check that the lights, switches, radio, and so on, all work, and make sure that the hazard warning lights operate – we've come across a number where the switch has given up the ghost.

Bodywork

The anti-rust warranty's small print is less stringent than many, but unless the car's been seriously neglected, panelwork deterioration should be only superficial. Nevertheless, many examples will have accumulated high mileages, so be vigilant for heavier-

than-usual stone chipping on the sills and across the leading edge of the bonnet. Elsewhere, inspect the door edges, along the flanks and around the fuel filler and door lock areas, while a tatty tailgate surround often betrays a heavily used "tool of the trade".

Costs and servicing

Favoured by ruthlessly careful fleet managers and private buyers alike, the Cavalier's modest fuel thirst, keen parts prices and moderate depreciation make it a sound secondhand purchase. Servicing needs are undemanding, calling for only around a 1½-hour visit every 9000 miles (or once a year) on petrol versions, although the diesel needs an oil change at the halfway mark. Insurance is reasonably affordable on cheaper versions, but the V6's group 16 rating, like its performance, is on an altogether higher plane.

So to sum up...

Exciting is hardly a word you would use to describe the Cavalier, but you'll be hard pushed to find a more sensible, value-for-money approach to family motoring. It's not as cosseting as a Peugeot over the bumps, but is competent in most other areas, with a blend of performance and economy that others in this class struggle to match. Tread wearily with sporty models or heavily used fleet favourites, and if you must have a diesel, make sure it's the one with a turbo.

We can't tell you which model to choose, but once you've found a car you like, we can provide reassurance by arranging a comprehensive check anywhere in the country by one of our Vehicle Inspection Engineers. Call 0345 500 610 for details of fees or to arrange an inspection. For longer term peace of mind we can also offer mechanical breakdown insurance. For further information, call AA Warranty Services on 0800 269 798.

