

Vauxhall Tigra

Featuring 1.6i 16v



VAUXHALL'S CHOP-TOP TIGRA IS, IN effect, a two-plus-two Corsa, but with head-turning looks to compensate for its truncated rear-end accommodation. There are two models to pick from, offering 1.4- and 1.6-litre versions of Vauxhall's new-for-'95 16-valve Ecotec engines, with an automatic gearbox available with the lower powered unit.

As ever, buying a coupé means paying more to get less – the 1.4 is a thousand pounds, or so, dearer than its equivalent five-door Corsa, for example – plus, of course, you'll pay quite a bit more to insure it, too. Beauty, however, is in the eye of the beholder, so you'll have to make your own mind up how the Tigra's extrovert image but more re-stricted accommodation square-up with its higher price tag.

The new engines – needed to satisfy tighter emission regulations – add exhaust gas recirculation and secondary air injection to twin overhead camshaft, 16-valve technology. The 1.4 delivers a respectable

90bhp together with 92 lb ft of torque, whereas the 1.6 version we've tested raises these figures to a more muscular 106bhp and 109 lb ft, respectively. Both units feel less "peaky" than their 4000rpm peak torque points might suggest, though.

This translates into reasonably lively get-up-and-go from the 1.6, with sub-10sec 30–70mph sprinting acceleration, along with a 120mph-plus top speed. In-gear acceleration feels similarly brisk, aided by the sporty, close-ratio gearing, though the gearshift itself is fairly typically Vauxhall – workmanlike, but a little sticky and imprecise around the slots.

Both engines are smoother and sweeter than the previous eight-valve units. Unsurprisingly, the 1.4 feels less eager than the 1.6, but neither match the turbine-smooth, free-revving nature of a Honda or Rover K-Series, and the 1.6 can be quite raucous at times, never entirely losing its raspy, intrusive engine note. It sounds a bit like a vacuum cleaner after a cold start, too, as the air injection pump does its stuff to reduce emissions.

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PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		1.5	3.5	6.2	9.5
IN 5TH GEAR		5.7	10.9	16.7	22.7
IN 4TH GEAR		3.9	7.8	11.7	15.6

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		11.7/8.4		11.0/7.8	
			10.9/7.8		11.8/7.8

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	mph
		6250*		6250*	6180	
						30 79 123
						52 100

*for best acceleration

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Worst/best mpg	31/48
Typical mpg overall	38½
Realistic tank range*	46 litres/390 miles
*based on fuel gauge, warning lamp and filling station experience	

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type transverse four cylinder; iron block/alloy head

Size 79.0mm x 81.5mm =1598cc

Power 106bhp at 6000rpm

Torque 109 lb ft at 4000rpm

Valves twin overhead cam (belt-driven); four valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel/ignition sequential multi-point injection; distributorless ignition. 46-litre tank with low-level warning lamp

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual; front-wheel drive

Mph per 1000rpm 20.1 in 5th, 15.9 in 4th

CHASSIS

Suspension front: coil spring/damper struts, L-shaped lower arms and an anti-roll bar. Rear: torsion beam axle, trailing arms, coil springs and an anti-roll bar

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion with 2.8 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 10.4m between kerbs, with 14.2m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 6J alloy with 185/55R15 81V tyres (Michelin Pilot on test car)

Brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear with vacuum servo ABS standard on 1.6i, option on 1.4i models

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

Assessed on their effectiveness and convenience (the more black blobs the better)

Seatbelts

front ●●○○○ rear ●●○○○

Head restraints

front ●●●○○ rear [X]

Interior

safety padding ●●●○○

driver's airbag? [✓]

other airbags? [✓] (1)

side impact protection ●●●○○

Fuel anti-spillage

●●●○○

Door locking

central locking? [✓]

remote control? [X]

auto window closure? [X]

deadlocks? [✓]

Luggage

secure from interior/hidden

from view ●●○○○

Alarm

engine immobilised? [✓]

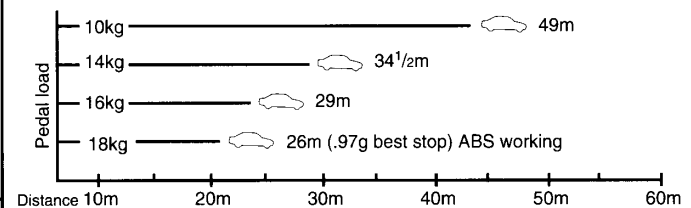
[✓] standard on test car [O] factory fitted option [X] not available

BRAKES

Pedal feel ●○○○○ Behaviour in an emergency ●●●○○ Handbrake ●●●○○

Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with standard ABS)

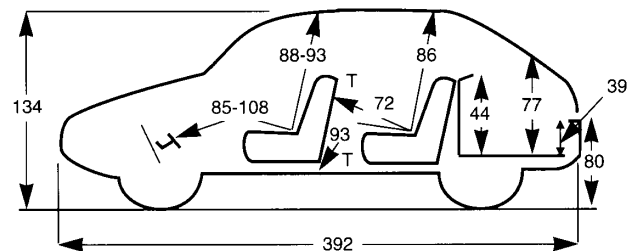
(A good-to-average best stop is about 28m at 20-30kg pedal load)



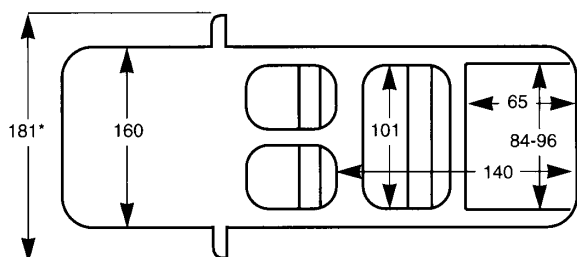
Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop: 13kg at start of test, 14kg at end of test. (Ideal brakes show no change)

MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants



*mirrors don't fold easily

Given that people expect the Tigra to *feel* sporty, Vauxhall has been able to fine-tune the Corsa's rather harsh suspension to better effect in the Tigra. The result is still a firmly sprung car, but it feels better glued to the road, with the 1.6's squat, ultra-low profile tyres and sharper, more responsive power steering contributing to the go-kart-like feel at the wheel.

On the negative side, there's a fairly harsh, fidgety feel over poor surfaces around town, while despite the steering's nippy responses, it lacks that ultimate "knife-through-butter" precision and feel. It's a similar story with the brakes, too. ABS is standard on the 1.6. No complaints with the actual stopping power, either in normal use or in a panic, but the pedal has a long, spongy feel which makes them feel less reassuring than they really are.

Up front, there are nice, sportily-shaped seats, but the driving position isn't perfect, with the accelerator pedal feeling too close, yet the clutch at full stretch, while the full-size driver's airbag dictates a high, fixed steering wheel position. The driver's seat-height adjuster helps to some extent; the passenger gets one, too, on the 1.6, along with a passenger's-side airbag, but the gaudy, multi-coloured Deco seat trim may not be everyone's cup of tea.

Good headlights, front and rear wash/wipe (each with an intermittent setting) and fair-sized door mirrors provide a reasonable view out of the Tigra, though the thick, curvy B-pillars, descending coupé roofline and fashionably wide front pillars remind that the Tigra is a low-slung, pint-sized coupé. It's also very noticeable how close the "cab-forward" driving position places the front seat occupants to the top of the windscreen, making the 1.6's dual standard airbags feel even more reassuring.

Oddments stowages are a bit variable. Door or side pockets, for example, are notable by their absence, whereas there's a fair-sized, illuminated glovebox, a rattle-free cassette-tapes holder between the front seats, while the Tigra is one of those rare cars still able to accommodate a full-sized hardback road atlas beneath the fascia. The Tigra's under-facia parcel shelf might not be quite such good news in a collision, but it's a handy storage facility all too frequently lacking in modern cars.

Apart from its low stance, getting in and out of the Tigra is not too difficult, though the front seatbelts can be fiddly to fit or to negotiate when getting in and out of the rear. The back seat itself is a fairly rudimentary affair – a couple of thin, bottom-shaped cushions velcroed onto the carpet, plus a thinly-upholstered slab of plastic for the backrest – though you do get two proper lap-and-diagonal seatbelts. Once installed, leg- and knee-room aren't as cramped as a quick showroom glance might suggest, but there isn't sufficient headroom for adults to contemplate longer journeys. It's fine for a quick whizz round the block, though.

The handbook, to be fair, does stipulate a maximum height for rear passengers – wise in view of the proximity of the tailgate glass – but despite the restricted view out, kids seem to love the "tinted goldfish bowl" experience. Round at the back, the Tigra's big, glass tailgate reveals a fairly roomy boot, but despite a reasonably low sill, it still seems quite a stretch to get to it. The flimsy load cover isn't as convenient as a cord-suspended variety, either.

The Tigra scores well on safety, with "body-lock", height-adjustable front seatbelts, stout head restraints, anti-submarine ramps and side-impact bars accompanying the 1.6's "his-and-her" airbags. Security isn't forgotten, either, with a coded, separate-display radio, a transponder-type engine immobiliser, and locking wheelnuts for the 1.6's smart-looking alloy wheels. Only the 1.6 gets a comprehensive, factory-fitted alarm, as standard, though.

The Tigra, then, comes with cheeky, adventurous looks, and roomy, Corsa-based packaging but with a nippier, more responsive chassis. The more-powerful 1.6 adds more generous equipment and livelier performance, though it's still capable of delivering approaching 40mpg economy. Somehow, though, it doesn't manage to feel quite as rewarding as its cheeky, dynamic looks might lead you to expect, though there's little to touch it for sheer extrovert appeal.

Remember, though, coupés nearly always cost more than the sensible, family-sized versions they're derived from. So, consider an equivalent model clothed in Corsa bodywork before succumbing to the Tigra's mouth-watering looks.

Likes . . . and gripes

Roomy Corsa-based packaging . . .	"kids-only" in the back, though
High priority safety and security . . .	but front seatbelts tight and cumbersome
ABS standard on 1.6i . . .	but long, spongy pedal feel
Grippy, roller skate handling . . .	but a hard fidgety ride
Quick, nicely weighted steering . . .	yet lacks "nailed-to-the-road" precision and feel