

**TEST
EXTRA**

Vauxhall Vectra GSi



What's different?

Motorsport-derived GSi with 192bhp and near-150mph performance heads up a new range of sporty production Vectras.

WORTHY AND COMPETENT THOUGH the Vectra has proved to be, its mainstream versions aren't exactly what you would call soul-stirring or a magnet to the enthusiast. But that's about to change, with the introduction of a prestigious new range-topping GSi, together with revised versions of the two existing SRi models, plus a new, more-affordable 1.8-litre to swell the ranks. All are offered in saloon, hatch and estate car form.

The GSi is really a more civilised version of the flamboyant and hard-riding Vectra SuperTouring 200 that itself was based on the Vectra V6 Challenge race cars prepared by Motor Sport Developments. MSD plays a big part in the GSi, too.

What happens is that it takes SRi 2.5 V6s over to Milton Keynes and kits them out with front and rear spoilers, together with side and rear skirts supplied by Irmischer. It then gets to work on the engines, replacing the original camshafts with those from the Omega MV6 and also fits a revised ECU. This increases to power from a lively 167bhp to a whopping 192bhp, while a revised exhaust system

provides an appropriately sporty sound from its sexy twin tailpipes.

In fact, it's an extrovert yowl that accompanies the exhilarating performance, with 0-60mph ripped off in just 7½sec and a maximum speed of 148mph, according to Vauxhall – we believe it, this is one swift sporting saloon. Not surprisingly, though, the engine loves to rev and is at its most aggressive with the tacho needle way round the dial beyond 5000rpm. Conversely, it's one of the most tame and flexible of engines if you simply want to swan around suburbia, while the highish gearing makes for relaxed motorway cruising. The GSi doesn't share the four-cylinder SRis' close-ratio gear box, however.

It does have the same 20mm-lower suspension, though, together with seven per cent-stiffer springs and dampers; but whereas the SRi has 16in alloy wheels, the GSi has 17in rims with brand new ultra low profile 215/45 ZR Yokohama tyres.

The harsh, jarring ride we were expecting (the SuperTouring is really thumpy, after all) just doesn't materialise. It's decidedly taut and has a firm reaction to ridges and potholes, but for the most part it's remarkably compliant and well suited to the car's character. It certainly pays off as far as the handling is concerned; body roll is well controlled and the big tyres have excellent grip and help to make the steering feel sharper and really communicative.

The standard sized disc brakes are equipped with uprated Mintex "fast road" pads for greater consistency under hard use, and Vauxhall claims that there's no increase in pedal loads. Bigger, competition brakes are available at extra cost. ABS is standard and electronic traction control makes for undramatic fast take-offs when its switched on.

Inside, there are no major changes, but the GSi continues the sporting theme with a gunmetal grey centre console and instrument panel with orange-needled dials. There's also a leather steering wheel and, most significantly, body-hugging Recaro seats with electric height and rake adjustments, extendable thigh-support cushions and inflatable lumbar support. Rearward vision on the hatchback is hindered by the bootlid spoiler, rear wiper and head restraints, and the door mirrors could do with being a little bigger. It's easy to settle in comfortably behind the height-adjustable wheel and well placed pedals, but oh dear, you still catch your elbow on that central storage box when you change gear.

Air conditioning is standard, as are a radio/cassette player and CD autochanger (with steering wheel-mounted controls), a TrafficMaster system and a seven-function trip computer.

VERDICT

Despite being considerably reworked in the engine and chassis departments, the GSi is fast without being uncouth, it rides and handles with maturity not harshness and emerges as a thoroughly well sorted and entertaining sports model.

It's all set to give the Volvo S and V40 T4 and the Mondeo ST24 a hard time, because, while it's practical and versatile, it also looks (and sounds) the business and is rewarding to drive with gusto.

FACTS AND FIGURES

ENGINE

Type and size transverse V6, 2498cc. Four valves per cylinder, twin overhead camshafts per bank. Multi-point fuel injection

Power 192bhp at 6000rpm

Torque 184 lb ft at 5000rpm

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual (no automatic option), front-wheel drive. Electronic traction control

Mph per 1000rpm 23.5 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension lowered 20mm all round. Front: MacPherson struts with uprated coil springs and gas-filled dampers. Rear: multi-link system with uprated coil springs and gas-filled dampers. Anti-roll bars front and rear

Steering rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance; 3.0 turns between full locks

Wheels 7½J alloy with 215/45 ZR17 Yokohama S1-Z tyres

Brakes discs all round with competition pads; ABS standard

