

Latest Vauxhall Astra ('Mark 8') – First Impressions

Published: June 10, 2022

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Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/latest-vauxhall-astra-mark-8-first-impressions/>



First Impressions of Vauxhall's 'Mark 8' Astra, by George Loveridge (Driving Around)...

Vauxhalls are virtually a right of passage in the motoring world. They really are one of those brands where most people can say they've had, been in, passed their test in, or even may still own one. I can almost guarantee that if you walk down your street, you'll be able to find one. Just in 2021, there were 40,914 new registrations of the Corsa in the UK. With their 8th generation Astra having gone on sale back in November, will the Stellantis owned hatchback be able to match the precedent set by its predecessors?



Vauxhall's new design language is based around a Compass which creates new sharp and taut lines across their range. This Astra benefits from a smart front visor over a standard radiator grille. Having 'smart' in the title does what it says on the tin, it has functionality. As well as allowing fresh air into the radiator it also houses a front camera, along with the additional front parking sensors. Just lower down, the new front diffuser houses the radar for adaptive cruise control and lane keep assistance. The Griffin badge on the front of the car matches the front visor in a very serious shade of gloss black and meets the harsh peak of the centre of the bonnet. The 'Electric Yellow' premium paintwork really made this styling feature stand out, however in 'Carbon Black' or 'Vulcan Grey' it is lost somewhat. In this specification, Ultimate trim, there are IntelliLux Pixel Headlights, which feature multiple bulbs and motors to allow for the high beam assist and adaptive headlights. This is an upgrade on the LED lights that come with the two lower specification models. Speaking of which, Vauxhall themselves insist that the new Astra range is simplified over those that came before - and they're right. Three specifications: Design, GS Line and Ultimate.





The rear profile is most appealing, with those sharp lines from the front end being carried across. If there are any F1 fans in the room, you'll be able to spot a vertically mounted fog-light above the rear window. This is in-line with the shark fin aerial and is also along the same straight line that concludes with the aforementioned bonnet peak and front Griffin emblem. Since 2004, Vauxhall have given a nod to their heritage with shark-based design, as back in the late 1800s they used to make tools that were claimed to be as sharp as a shark's tooth. Therefore, each Vauxhall produced since 2004 has a hidden shark somewhere about the car, in this new Astra, it is located under the centre cup holders. I digress. On the petrol and diesel cars, the filler flap is on the driver's side of the car and is operated electronically from the inside, and on the hybrid variant of the Astra, the cap for charging is located on the accompanying side.



As standard, all Astra models feature a wraparound multimedia system that includes a 10-inch colour touchscreen which is angled towards the driver, and a 10-inch digital instrument cluster, along with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. The driver's display has been



well considered, as it displays a very thin vertical bar to show engine speed, a large set of white numbers displaying vehicle speed, and a separate segment to also show the Tom Tom navigation display. Likewise on the infotainment screen, it is functional without leaving you feeling short changed. Working in unison are physical buttons as well as touch screen controls for both the radio and HVAC controls. These buttons include the heated seat and steering wheel controls. Thanks to new legislation however, you cannot utilise most features within the multimedia system while on the move. This is where 'Hey Vauxhall' comes into use, as when an occupant of the car says this phrase, they will be able to control parts of the car via a voice command. Now, Mercedes (for example) have had this amenity in their cars since 2019, but that has been in models nearly twice the price of the Astra.



The Astra comes with either a 5-speed manual, or an 8-speed automatic gearbox. Note - the manual is only available with the petrol variants, whereas the diesel and hybrid variants utilise the automatic box. In terms of practicality, the manual takes up a storage area in the centre console underneath the HVAC controls, and the automatic setup reduces the centre



arm rest storage by half.



Seating arrangements are thoroughly enjoyable, having been specially designed by 'AGR'. (AGR have a Campaign for Healthier Backs. Opel's ergonomic seats are designed to provide long-distance travel seating and back comfort.) I am happy to report that they're very supportive; covered in either all cloth, leather, or Alcantara and leather combinations. In the photograph, you can just about see, underneath the proudly displayed AGR logo, three buttons marked 'M' '2' & '1' which refer to the memory seats that are equipped in the Ultimate model. Memory seats in this price bracket?! Rear leg room is agreeable, helped by the increased wheelbase. Rear passengers can also enjoy twin air vents and USB-C charging ports along with rear privacy glass - also standard across all models.



A family car should have a decent boot, and that it does. At 795 mm (2.61 ft) long and 599 mm (1.97 ft) high, the Astra can accommodate 442 litres (15.61 cu.ft) of storage with the rear seats up - ideal for those quick family getaways. Annoyingly, it does not come with a spare wheel as standard, unsurprisingly it has a puncture repair kit. For the respectable sum of £20 you can opt for a spare wheel to live under the false floor, although this can only be achieved if the car has not yet been built. Therefore, if you yourself 'build' an Astra with a spare wheel, you can have one - otherwise they are not standard. Furthermore, the Hybrid variant does not allow for a spare wheel at all. The false floor will be useful however for additional storage as it is deep enough for said spare wheel.

VERDICT

This Mk 8 Astra really feels to be punching above its weight in terms of price brackets, and Vauxhall's ranking against other manufacturers. It feels as though it is trying to steal the crown from the Mercedes A Class in terms of toys, practicality, and performance; in terms



of value, it certainly does. At the launch I attended, I was only able to drive the car for a brief time, but I am happy to report that the drive was rewarding. Very little intrusion from the engine, which delivered plenty of mid-range torque. The automatic gearbox was appropriate for this application. A flat-based steering wheel, accompanied with electronically adjustable steering made for a sporty feel even at sedate road speeds.



Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief: (As tested)

2022 Vauxhall Astra Ultimate Turbo Auto

Body style: Five door hatchback

Fuel Type: Petrol



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Price: £31,825

Insurance Group: 21P

Engine: 1199 cc direct injection three-cylinder petrol with single turbocharger

Transmission: Eight speed automatic, Front Wheel Drive

Max power & torque: 128.7 BHP, 230 Nm (170 lb.ft)

Fuel Consumption: 52.3 mpg combined.

Performance: 0 - 62 mph: 9.7 secs/ top speed: 130 mph

Dimensions: Height: 1432 mm (4.70 ft) - Length: 4374 mm (14.35 ft) - Width (including mirrors): 2062 mm (6.77 ft)